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On the Nature of Controversy as Pedagogy

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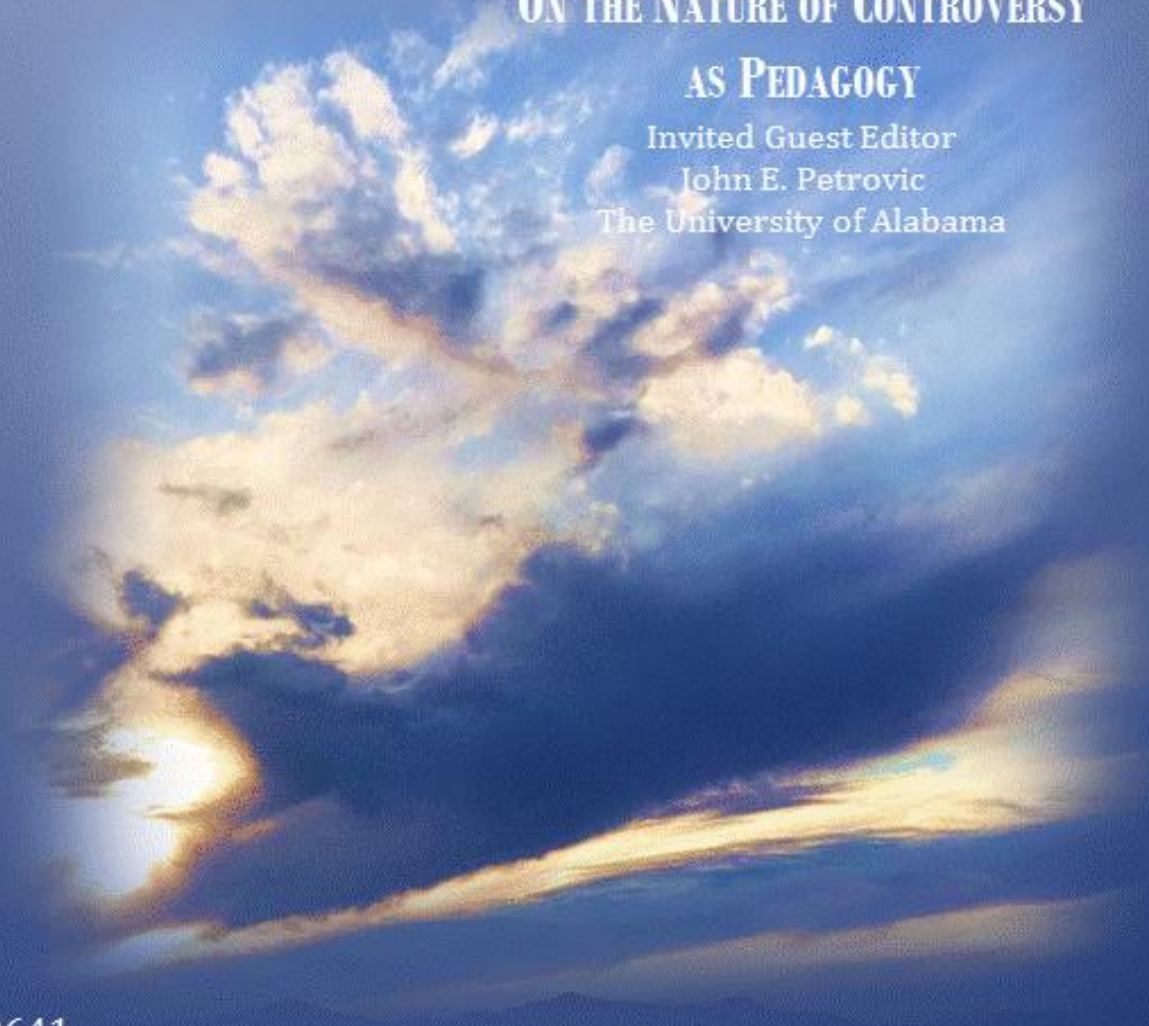

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On the Nature of Controversy as Pedagogy

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On the Nature of Controversy as Pedagogy: Introduction

John E. Petrovic

Abstract

Oftentimes, controversial issues are employed by teachers to either enhance pedagogy or as a form of pedagogy in and of themselves. We must consider what such teaching must or must not entail. In order to provide an answer to that question, we must first consider the nature of controversy: How and by what criterion should a topic be deemed "controversial?" It seems far too facile to say that an issue is controversial merely because disagreement attaches to it. Therefore, other criteria—namely a political and an epistemic criterion –have been introduced along with implications for pedagogy.

Keywords: *controversial issues, reason, pedagogy, directive and nondirective teaching*

On the Nature of Controversy

It might be useful, first, to say that this special issue is *not* about debating a range of issues that people disagree upon in education. It is not, for example, about the pros and cons of charter schools or any other issue in that sense. What is of concern is the nature of controversy and the use of controversial topics as pedagogy in schools. It is much easier to carve out a discrete discussion of the former. However, the latter is sequentially related in that the nature of controversy must be considered first given the inherent practical implications.

The "nature of controversy" refers to the question of how and by what criterion a topic is deemed to be "controversial." What does it mean to say something is controversial? It seems far too facile to say that an issue is controversial merely because disagreement attaches to it. Such a determination suggests a criterion of numerosity or what others have referred to as a behavioral criterion.[1] How much disagreement must there be or, put differently, how many people must disagree? Must the disagreement be reasonable? By this criterion, the historical fact of the holocaust becomes controversial because some small number of people deny that it occurred. While we might defend the right of such people to make their claims in the name freedom of speech, we would certainly conclude that any such claims are unreasonable.[2]

The question of reasonableness introduces a different criterion for determining that an issue is controversial: the epistemic criterion. By the epistemic criterion, an issue cannot be held to be controversial if argument on one side or the other is contrary to reason. Michael Hand, for example,

1. For a thorough overview, see Michael Hand, "What should we teach as controversial? A defense of the epistemic criterion," *Educational Theory,* 58(2) (2008): 213-228.

2. More strongly, we should probably conclude that to fathom the issue as even debatable would be immoral, as Noam Chomsky has suggested even as he defended the holocaust denier, Robert Faurisson (Mark Achbar & Peter Wintonick. *Manufacturing Consent: Noam Chomsky and the Media*. Zeitgeist Films, 1992.)

argues that there are no reasonable arguments against homosexuality and it is, therefore, a non-controversial issue.[3] Defending the epistemic criterion, Hand dismisses the behavioral criterion. However, he also dismisses a third criterion that a number of people, myself included, have tried to defend, namely the political criterion.[4] By the political criterion a controversy obtains when no answer to an issue is entailed in the public values of the liberal democratic state. By both the epistemic and political criteria the issue of homosexuality becomes non-controversial, although it remains unclear how other issues might fare.

In this issue, the first two articles make important contributions to the discussion on the nature of controversy, while also providing a more thorough review of the debates outlined above. While sympathetic to the epistemic criterion, Brett Bertucio, in the opening article, draws on the work of Alasdair MacIntyre to argue that contemporary moral discourse lacks the coherent body of public knowledge required for the epistemic criterion to stand. Bertucio provocatively asserts that the epistemic criterion "collapse[s] under the influence of power dynamics and mirror[s] the behavioral criterion." Helpfully, Bertucio points to some practical implications, suggesting a need for increased study in intellectual history and, drawing on Luigi Giussani, learning to compare ideas and proposals with "the elementary experience" of a need for justice and the classic transcendentals.

In the second article, Paul Anders and Nicholas Shudak, note that both the behavioral and epistemic criteria (to which they also add a "social criterion") "express necessary conditions [for identifying controversial issues], though none is individually sufficient." As other critiques, they argue specifically that the epistemic criterion entails an overly modernist account of reason and rationality. In response, Anders and Shudak present a "theoretic criterion," arguing that an epistemic criterion must include an appeal to authority based on expertise and that an issue must be "prevalent in the social context of the students' lives."

I note that both of these contributions challenge the epistemic criterion of controversy, and, to my mind, they do so quite "reasonably." Thus, it may be the case that the epistemic criterion is fatally flawed to the extent that it collapses under its own weight, making the nature of controversy quite controversial. Nevertheless, this discussion is more than mere intellectual exercise. For whether there is an agreed upon criterion or a hybrid or some other approach, understanding such nuance in the nature of controversy informs pedagogy in important ways and, of course, reason is always already involved.

In this vein, the third article in this collection presents an interesting segue between the first two articles and the final four. Richard Hartsell and Susan Harden consider several controversial policy issues that demonstrate the shifting nature of controversy. Through these policy examples — specifically ability grouping and the resegregation of schools — and how schools of education have dealt with the policies, Hartsell and Harden demonstrate "the problematic nature of associating the diminishment of a controversy, what Hegel called sublation, with progress." Indeed, the seeming absence of controversy on these policy issues demonstrates regress, not progress. Pedagogically, teacher educators must channel Kierkegaard to make teachers' lives more difficult.

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3. Michael Hand, "Should we teach homosexuality as a controversial issue?," *Theory and Research in Education, 5*(1) (2007): 69-85.

4. John E. Petrovic, "Reason, liberalism, and democratic education: A Deweyan approach to teaching about homosexuality," *Educational Theory*, 63(5) (2013): 525-541. I should note that while Hand rightly casts my earlier work as following a political criterion, this 2013 response presents a hybrid approach.

Controversy as Pedagogy and Re-reasoning

The next four essays identify a particular controversial issue that informs how we should reason or re-reason through the issues at hand. In this vein, Adam Greteman uses perversion to prod queerness. Noting changing attitudes toward homosexuality, Greteman, as Hartsell and Harden before, recognizes the shifting nature of controversy to the extent that it is spatially and historically bounded. While Greteman invokes, implicitly at least, the behavioral criterion to understand perversion as controversial, his goal is similar to the way that Hartsell and Harden seek to rekindle controversy as a pedagogical tool to drive existential angst. Toward this end, Greteman engages a reparative reading of "perversion" to open up space to re-imagine queer education in the face of both hetero- and homonormativity. Spurring queerness with perversion, Greteman turns to the Marquis de Sade as a perverse philosopher of education who refutes reproduction in favor of perverse pedagogy.

While Greteman's primary audience is other queer theorists, the primary audience for the final three essays is teachers and teacher educators. Too often teachers consider the introduction of a controversial issue (however they determine it to be so) as a method in and of itself under the assumption that it will engender not only discussion but also thoughtful discussion. This begs a number of pedagogical concerns: how should controversial issues be introduced in schools? What practices might best serve our purpose in dealing with controversy in the first place? Is simple debate among students enough? Are there guiding principles of such debate that should be taught first and what are those? What should the role of the teacher be? Should she seek to lead students to certain understandings? If she holds that an issue about which there is disagreement betrays the epistemic criterion or the political criterion, *shouldn't* the pedagogy be leading? Such questions speak to whether or not teaching should be directive or nondirective[5] or even softly directive.[6] These essays open such pedagogical questions.

In her contribution, Mychelle Hadley Smith observes that book-banning is an indicator of what society deems to be controversial. In the case of book-banning, Hadley Smith notes that the controversial issues are largely sexual content and profanity. While I doubt that either issue would be controversial by the epistemic or political criterion (at least in the context of reading and studying literary works), they are so, implies Hadley Smith, by the behavioral criterion. But the importance of this piece lies in considering the use of controversy as a pedagogical tool (or not) and, more specifically, a particular pedagogy of controversy. On these points, Hadley Smith argues, "The existence of controversial topics must move beyond merely existing as debate and essay topics." Here she reviews several components of handling controversial issues and presents philosophical hermeneutics as a "soft-directive" pedagogy of controversy.

Alternatively, in tackling the perennial curricular controversy surrounding religion, science, and the origin of life, Ronald Lee Zigler seems to endorse a form of non-directive teaching. This is so even though there may not be a scientific debate here (following the lines of the epistemic criterion, it would seem to be "settled"). Zigler notes there are certainly philosophical and public policy debates. So, he asks, how can we engage this issue in a way that optimizes its peda-

5. Michael Hand, response to Bryan Warnick and D. Spencer Smith in "Afterwords," *Educational Theory* 64(4) (2014): 425.

6. Bryan R. Warnick and D. Spencer Smith, "The Controversy Over Controversies: A Plea for Flexibility and for 'Soft-Directive' Teaching," *Educational Theory* 64(3) (2014): 227–244.

gogical value for democratic society, without violating the establishment clause or appearing insensitive to peoples' religious convictions? Drawing adroitly on John Dewey, Zigler identifies two important obstacles to this pursuit, including the effect of emotion on reason. The issue, he concludes, must be treated "not as a scientific controversy with a clear epistemic foundation but as a metaphysical controversy." Treating a controversial issue in this way requires that students examine the underlying metaphysical assumptions to their beliefs, while gaining epistemic humility.

In the final contribution, Kelly McFaden and Sheri C. Hardee argue for a pedagogy of controversy that draws on sociological imagination and the use of autobiography. I chose to end the volume with this piece for a couple of reasons. First, the opening discussion reminds nicely of the nature of controversy presented in the first two contributions. Second, the discussion shifts us from controversy as pedagogy and back to a pedagogy of controversy. McFaden and Hardee speak specifically to the education of teachers—predominantly middle-class, white and female—around issues of race. These students often view the existence of racism and, therefore, discussion of anti-racism as controversial or, in fact, as indoctrination. McFaden and Hardee point out how this is a "false controversy" and should not be treated as a controversy (e.g., through non-directive teaching). Here the authors build on the epistemic criterion as a starting point to get students to "acknowledge their privilege and power" and to uncover their own "raced" positions. McFaden and Hardee's pedagogy of controversy begins with reflection and dialogue (rather than debate) to get students to "understand the limited relativism of their perspective."

Each of the essays in this collection challenges or at least limits to a starting point, either implicitly or explicitly, the epistemic criterion of controversy. Nevertheless, as the Holocaust example demonstrates, it is important to think through the nature of controversy. On the one hand, it is certainly both irrational and unreasonable to teach the history of the holocaust as a real controversy (i.e., non-directively) as would be directed by the behavioral criterion. On the other hand, the epistemic criterion seems to assume either that there is something like pure, objective reason or that there exist public standards of reason against which all arguments should be assessed. Perhaps this is found in the theoretic criterion. This still seems to beg the shifting, historical, and unbounded nature of controversy and, therefore, the reason (expert or not) underlying it. Hand dismisses such arguments as unpersuasive relativism.[7] But, then, he owes us some proposal on the origin of such standards and an argument as to why they are or should be universal and timeless. In the meantime, we owe it to students to wade through the muddy waters of the nature of controversy in order to make the best pedagogic decisions possible for our time. This requires providing, as Hand would certainly agree, students the skills of reason to understand the assumptions they bring with them to issues, the difference between good and bad arguments, and the epistemic humility to know that we might all just be wrong.

7. Michael Hand, "Framing classroom discussion of same-sex marriage," *Educational Theory* 63(5) (2014): 497-510. See footnote #13, for example.

Alasdair MacIntyre and Contemporary Capacity for the Epistemic Criterion

Brett Bertucio

Abstract

In this essay, Brett Bertucio evaluates the feasibility of employing what various theorists have termed the "epistemic criterion" in identifying controversies to be taught in the classroom. While sympathetic to the epistemic criterion, Bertucio argues that at present its application does not help delineate whether more than one reasonable view regarding an issue is plausible. Drawing on the thought of Alasdair MacIntyre, he contends that the decline of moral philosophy has reduced contemporary moral utterance to the mere restatement of incommensurable ideologies. The author concludes by proposing two possible remedies. First, the introduction of intellectual history into secondary social studies curricula may help students and their teachers become aware of the contours of contemporary moral debate and examine their own epistemic assumptions. Second, the thought of the late Italian educator Luigi Giussani may provide a foundation to approach controversial issues based not on incommensurate conceptions of rationality but on existential desires.

Keywords*: moral philosophy, controversial questions, intellectual history, social studies education*

Practitioners often report that introducing controversial issues into the curriculum will inevitably raise tensions among colleagues, parents, and the wider community.[1] It will come as no surprise then that the identification of an issue as controversial is itself a site of controversy. In many cases, to declare an issue controversial will validate minority opinions that many consider reprehensible. As a crude example, we might ask whether the present existence of neo-Nazism or the historical existence of moral arguments supporting Jim Crow mean that the morality of racial supremacy should be taught as an open question. Some educators have extended the resounding "No" proper to this query to contemporary issues. In their study of high school social studies teachers, Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy observed that several participants contended that the validity of same-sex marriage should be taught as a closed question, portraying opposition as morally equivalent to racism.[2] Of course, for opponents of this legal and cultural turn, declaring the question closed is merely another sortie in an open conflict.

1. Diana Hess, "Controversies about Controversial Issues in Democratic Education," *Political Science and Politics,* 37(3) (2004): 257-261, 260.

2. Diana E. Hess and Paula McAvoy, *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 168.

Educational theorists have attempted to clarify criteria for discerning whether an issue should be taught as controversial. Charles Bailey advanced a "behavioral criterion" which identified an issue as controversial if there exist a number of people in disagreement. Controversies should be determined by the "social fact" of dispute and can occur "in any area of knowledge or experience."[3] Seemingly straightforward in its application, this criterion raises problems regarding empirical issues and cannot exclude objectionable questions. Under Bailey's standard, the historical occurrence of the Holocaust[4] and the previously mentioned question of racial supremacy would be fair game for classroom debate. Robert Dearden proposed an "epistemic criterion" of discernment. An issue could be taught as controversial if "contrary views can be held on it without those views being contrary to reason."[5] While Hess and McAvoy endorse a "politically authentic criterion," arguing that students should be prepared for consequential debates even if these involve irrational positions,[6] Dearden's criterion has found wide support among educational theorists. Terence McLaughlin, Michael Hand, and others have cited its correspondence with the *rational* project of moral education and its avoidance of the ethical conundrums courted by the behavioral criterion as reasons for endorsement.[7]

Generally, I find arguments for the epistemic criteria convincing. Taken *in vacuo*, it seems an ideal model. In theory, Dearden's criterion avoids the dangers of relativizing morality and capitulating ethics to the whims of popular opinion or to a morally arbitrary political consensus. However, articulations of this approach unwittingly raise serious questions about the contemporary capacity for its implementation. Dearden and others inevitably appeal to a current "body of public knowledge, criteria of truth, critical standards and verification procedures."[8] Unfortunately, contemporary moral discourse lacks a coherent "body of public knowledge." As Alasdair MacIntyre has observed, moral debate is marked by a multiplicity of incommensurable assumptions and the assertive use of moral utterance to close conversation rather than enter into it.[9] In the absence of a consensus epistemological framework, declarations of epistemic invalidity are simply the proclamations of one's own preferences. Pronouncing an issue closed merely reflects the conclusions of a partial—and often partisan—amalgam of epistemic assumptions. Such a conclusion is not a universally valid curricular guide, but rather simply one competing position among many. As a result, Dearden's epistemic criterion is collapsed into Bailey's behavioral criterion. Contrary to the intentions of Dearden, McLaughlin, and Hand, the opinion of the majority of educators (or of the loudest) will determine which issues qualify as controversial.

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3. Charles Bailey, "Rationality, Democracy and the Neutral Teacher," *Cambridge Journal of Education,* 1(2) (1971): 68-76, 69.

4. Hess and McAvoy cite a 2014 case in which California 8th graders were asked to examine whether the Holocaust actually occurred or whether it was manufactured as propaganda for political and financial gain (*The Political Classroom*, 163-4). Bailey's behavioral criterion would permit this assignment because of the empirical fact of Holocaust deniers.

5. Robert Dearden, "Controversial Issues in the Curriculum," *Journal of Curriculum Studies,* 13(1) (1981): 37-44. This article was later reproduced as a chapter in Robert Dearden, *Theory and Practice in Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984). Subsequent references will be from *Theory and Practice in Education*.

6. Hess and McAvoy, *The Political Classroom*, 168-169.

7. Terence H. McLaughlin, "Teaching Controversial Issues in Citizenship Education," in A. Lockyer, B. Crick and J. Annette (eds.) *Education for Democratic Citizenship: Issues of Theory and Practice* (Aldershot, UK: Avebury, 2003): 1419–60.; Michael Hand, "What Should We Teach as Controversial? A Defense of the Epistemic Criterion," *Educational Theory,* 58(2) (2008): 213–228.

8. Dearden, *Controversial Issues*, 86.

9. Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981), 3-34.

This essay seeks to draw attention to the spurious feasibility of the epistemic criterion for contemporary pedagogical practice. Drawing on MacIntyre's work, it briefly traces the now imperceptible impoverishment of moral utterance through an intellectual history reaching back to the Reformation period. I hope to show that predominant defenses of the epistemic criterion, most notably Hand's, fail to take into account questions of epistemic foundations and the character of moral discourse in our current historical moment. To be sure, my aim is not to dismiss the epistemic criterion in favor of the political or the behavioral but to recover or rehabilitate the possibility of its use. After delineating the consequences of this inherited history for teaching controversial questions, I propose two remedies. The first calls for secondary social studies and teacher-preparation curricula to engage intellectual history on a more serious level so as to provide students and teachers with an awareness of the peculiar conditions of contemporary discourse. The second draws on the thought of the late Italian educator Luigi Giussani, who proposed an "ascetical" education both to liberate students from reactive assertions of preference and to unveil a potential basis for consensus through reflection on human desires.

Accounts of Reason in Defenses of the Epistemic Criterion

Dearden frames his proposal of the epistemic criterion as a response to the application of Ayers' logical positivism to curriculum design. Under a positivist model, political education, moral education, the arts, and literature would all be discarded. The inclusion of controversial issues, which seem to offer no *certain* knowledge, would likewise disappear. Dearden argues that the social fact of disagreement should not be taken to mean that controversial topics are "an epistemological disaster area into which the responsible curriculum constructor should not care to go."[10] In fact, they can be the site of deep epistemic engagement. Where opposing opinions on an issue are not "contrary to reason," a classroom discussion can commence under rational parameters.

The definition of "reason" Dearden offers is important to note:

> By "reason" here is not meant something timeless and unhistorical but the body of public knowledge, criteria of truth, critical standards and verification procedures which at any given time has been so far developed. It follows that what at one time is controversial may later be definitely settled, as with many opinions about the nature of the surface of the moon and the character of the side that faces away from the earth. At one time these were matters of legitimate dispute in a way which at least some of them no longer are.[11]

In the realm of scientific or empirical questions, this attitude might be comparatively unproblematic. As experimental design and technological capability advance, open questions become relatively settled. This view might correspond to a scientific education that presents scientific reasoning not as ascertaining incontrovertible truth, but as producing yet-unproven and (hopefully) increasingly more accurate theories. When applied to moral questions, which many controversial issues are, this vision presents problems. By defining reason as historically constituted and socially constructed, Dearden precludes the possibility of an age or body public in which prevailing moral reasoning is poorer than in others. We do not have to dig deep into the 20th century to find

10. Dearden, *Controversial Issues*, 84-85.
11. Ibid., 86.

relevant examples. By defining "reason" as the dominant strands of thinking of a particular historical society, Dearden's frame risks engendering the very relativism he wished to avoid in discarding Bailey's behavioral criterion. If the narrow bounds of place and time are removed, the epistemic criterion will be indistinguishable from the behavioral.

Michael Hand provides additional support for the epistemic criterion. Many of his arguments center around a vision of moral education that is decidedly rationalistic and thus primarily concerned with reason-giving. If educators select controversial issues on a political or behavioral basis, this "cannot do other than convey to students the message that epistemic considerations are not decisive. The plain implication of teacher neutrality on all matters on which people are observed to disagree is that consensus, rather than evidence or argument, is the proper warrant for belief."[12] By subtly eroding the rational basis for moral and political life, the political and behavioral criteria are—in Hand's view—decidedly miseducative.

Unfortunately, Hand is remarkably silent on the nature of reason, preferring to defer to Dearden's definition. He even expresses mystification when the possibility of differing, incommensurable rationalities arises. Hand grapples with the position of David Archard, who argues against the use of the epistemic criterion because "the determination of whether reasons are good or bad is itself a matter for rational discussion, and open, in principle, to irresolvable disagreement between sincere, conscientious reasoners."[13] Archard intuits the problem I intend to explicate here and helpfully advocates moving debate to the level of competing epistemic frameworks. Hand however, by his own admission, fails to see Archard's point and dismisses the concern by appealing to a vague confidence in reasonableness writ large. In a statement which seems even empirically suspect, Hand asserts that "in the world we actually inhabit conscientious reasoners are not normally confused or mistaken and have managed to reach rational agreement on important questions in most areas of life, including questions about the goodness or badness of moral reasons."[14] A perusal of national discourse regarding those questions which are most frequently considered controversial—abortion and euthanasia, the validity of same-sex marriage, the morality of military actions or torture practices—are fraught with disagreement precisely about the quality of different moral reasons.

John Petrovic seeks to marry Hand and Dearden's conception of the epistemic criterion with the political criterion by appealing to Dewey's understanding of reason as socially situated and habituated. He helpfully points out that Hand's work is "mistaken in conflating the natural capacity for reason with the practice of reason, which is always already contained by our social and historical relations and contingencies."[15] It is exactly the contemporary practice of reason (and the constraints on natural capacity imposed by our particular intellectual milieu) which I wish to examine here. Petrovic's critique echoes Peter Gardner's earlier criticism of Dearden. In short, the diversity of epistemic assumptions and indeterminacy of debate will lead students to conclude that reason has no purchase in controversial issues.[16] As an alternative, Petrovic presents Dewey's notion of pragmatic reason inextricable from social action. This creative philosophical move effects a dissolution of the distinction between the epistemic and the political criteria. For Dewey,

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12. Hand, "What Should We Teach as Controversial?," 218.

13. Archard David Archard, ''How Should We Teach Sex?,'' *Journal of Philosophy of Education,* 32(3) (1998): 437–449, 440, cited in Hand, "What Should We Teach as Controversial?," 225.

14. Hand, "What Should We Teach as Controversial?," 226.

15. John E. Petrovic, "Reason, Liberalism, and Democratic Education: A Deweyan Approach to Teaching About Homosexuality." *Educational Theory,* 63(5) (2013): 525–41, 527.

16. Peter Gardner, ''Another Look at Controversial Issues and the Curriculum,'' *Journal of Curriculum Studies,* 16(4) (1984): 379–385, cited in Petrovic, "Reason, Liberalism, and Democratic Education," 527.

what is reasonable is what provides solutions in the common or political life of society. In the issue of same-sex marriage, Petrovic hopes that social interaction with those of differing views (and lifestyles) will rehabituate opponents' "heterosexism."

To supplement any rational weakness or prevarication in students, Petrovic endorses the adoption of Rawlsian liberalism as a privileged epistemic model. While his proposal may be persuasive as a model for identifying controversy in the official educational institutions of a committed modern liberal state,[17] it is unclear whether such a criterion of discernment should be labeled "epistemic" in Dearden's sense. As a considerable body of scholars have argued—MacIntyre among them—the tenets of modern liberalism are not self-evident or necessarily worthy of the sort of epistemic privilege granted by Petrovic.[18] As such, liberalism should be treated as simply one competing set of assumptions among others. In any case, Dewey's socially constituted definition of reason again collapses into the behavioral criterion—what is controversial will be defined by what a particular society deems controversial. We are left at the same impasse presented by Dearden's conception of reason.

Interestingly, it is Dearden himself who points out the problem of indeterminacy in controversy. He describes a category of controversial issues in which opponents' entire frameworks of understanding differ. In this case, the optimism for consensus expressed by Hand and criticized by Petrovic will be unfounded. Dearden's sober assessment highlights the difficulties of enacting the epistemic criterion in contemporary practice:

> I have assumed throughout this discussion that there will be a concurrence of judgment, at least amongst serious inquirers if not amongst the ignorant or merely assertive, as to what *is* controversial. But suppose that that assumption is false…The point here is that serious and mature people can be in disagreement precisely over what is controversial, in the epistemic sense. One party regards the matter as definitively known while the other regards it as controversial. Can there be a rational solution in such cases? Does it just depend on who is finally in a position to enforce his view? Should it, or more pertinently could it, be settled by some such democratic procedure as voting? Should the step be taken of calling in 'experts' to pronounce, in which case what would be the character of their expertise? Perhaps it is fortunate that concerning much that is controversial, it is at least uncontroversial that it *is* controversial.[19]

Dearden's glib conclusion offers little in the way of solutions but accurately presents many dangers. In debates where opponents' notional foundations differ, conflict can be resolved by the

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17. Hand depicts conceptions similar to Petrovic's as variations of a political criterion. He argues that inculcation of liberal values may be a popular model of moral education but inevitably violates student autonomy. Such a criterion is therefore not based on reason, but on (politically legitimate) coercion. To be sure, Petrovic's notion of reason as politically constituted would downplay this distinction. See Hand, "What Should We Teach as Controversial?"

18. Notable works include the 17th chapter of Alasdair McIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1988); John Safranek, *The Myth of Liberalism* (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 2015); Peter Berkowitz, *Virtue and the Making of Modern Liberalism* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); John Kekes, *Against Liberalism* (Ithica, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997); and, Patrick Deneen, "Unsustainable Liberalism," *First Things* (May, 2012). Berkowitz's argument—that liberalism is practically feasible only with the practice of positive virtue and the communal pursuit of goods can be taken to indicate that liberalism is incomplete as a framework and needs decidedly non-liberal elements to be enacted. Deneen's larger criticism of the contradictory tenets of liberalism is forthcoming from Yale University Press under the title *Why Liberalism Failed.*

19. Dearden, "Controversial Issues," 92-93.

enforced pronouncement of the powerful or by capitulation to "the merely assertive." Educators could abandon the epistemic criterion altogether and hold a vote, thereby enacting the behavioral criterion on a smaller scale. The point is that appeals to Dearden's "body of public knowledge" in an age lacking a consensus moral discourse are inevitably either appeals to majoritarian determinations or coercive prescription. Contrary to the intentions of Dearden and Hand, in our present state, the opinion of the majority of educators (or of the loudest) will determine which issues qualify as controversial.

Alasdair MacIntyre's Diagnosis of Contemporary Moral Discourse

MacIntyre begins his classic *After Virtue* with a vision of a post-apocalyptic future following some catastrophic destruction of the natural sciences. Perhaps a wave of anti-scientific sentiment might follow a global conflict.[20] Popular movements would burn laboratories, execute scientists, and erase the entire edifice of scientific knowledge. MacIntyre imagines that years later, a new generation might seek to revive science from scattered fragments. A crop of new "scientists" would use scientific terminology, often in internally coherent ways, but would be ignorant of the notional presuppositions underlying their proper use. Rival members of the new generation would use the same terms, giving the appearance of a consensus ground for debate. But lacking a comprehension of the conceptual schemes that constitute these terms, the choice of their use would be ultimately arbitrary and disagreements would have no rational solution.[21] MacIntyre sets out to argue that the status of moral language and reasoning in our contemporary world mirrors this imagined catastrophe.

The indeterminacy of contemporary moral discourse provides a point of departure for this diagnosis. As MacIntyre puts it,

> The most striking feature of contemporary moral utterance is that so much of it is used to express disagreements; and the most striking feature of the debates in which these disagreements are expressed is their interminable character. I do not mean by this just that such debates go on and on and on—although they do—but also that they apparently can find no terminus. There seems to be no rational way of securing moral agreement in our culture.[22]

This indeterminacy follows from what MacIntyre terms "the conceptual incommensurability of rival arguments."[23] Each position adopts distinct premises and normative claims which yield *internally* coherent accounts but which allow for no rational comparison *between* accounts. Lacking any universal criteria with which to distinguish between competing narratives, citizens seem to select positions at least in part through non-rational, subjective criteria. Ironically, arguments linguistically appeal to impersonal, objective standards. While moral arguments increasingly become

20. Interestingly, entrepreneur Elon Musk has recently expressed fears of this sort, insisting in an interview with *GQ* that Mars must be colonized before the outbreak of a third World War wreaks havoc on popular support for technological advances. See Chris Heath, "Elon Musk Is Ready to Conquer Mars," GQ, accessed January 7, 2016. http://www.gq.com/story/elon-musk-mars-spacex-tesla-interview.

21. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 1-2.

22. Ibid., 6.

23. Ibid., 5.

the shrill profession of preference, the impersonal, objective language of discourse serves as a masque either of a forgotten history or of aspirations toward rational moral debate.[24] Finally, MacIntyre would agree to an extent with a merely empirical affirmation of Dearden's historical conception of rationalities; it is true that conceptions of moral reasoning differ between historical periods. The problem is that the contemporary plurality of incommensurate narratives draws from a vast array of historical ideas, nearly all of which are now divorced from the contextual realm in which they were formulated. Searching for rational resolution in today's discourse is not unlike trying to complete a single picture using the pieces from several puzzle boxes.

The majority of *After Virtue* is an attempt to construct an intellectual history of the origins of this predicament. After a brief summary here, I point out several consequences for the use of the epistemic criterion. The coherent framework analogous to natural science in MacIntyre's doomsday scenario is the moral scheme represented by Aristotelian virtue ethics and instantiated most notably in medieval Europe. Iterations and variations of this frame all included a teleological conception of the person. There was a clear distinction between "man-as-he-happens-to-be and man-as-he-could-be-if-he-realized-his-essential-nature."[25] This meant that in moral debate, all parties could agree on what sorts of goods a person was to pursue and what would be the proper hierarchy between these goods. Ethics was then the practical science guiding the transition from "untutored man" toward his rational *telos*.

Of course, even apart from its scholastic reception, Aristotle's metaphysics implied a final, teleological cause, which was necessarily divine. We must remember that for the medievals, the essence of the person and therefore a true system of ethical precepts was at once divinely ordained and knowable by human reason. They lacked the univocal metaphysics and impoverishment of reason introduced by Protestant and Jansenist theology.[26] With the introduction of Luther, Calvin, and Jansen's pessimism regarding human knowledge of divine ends, the teleological conception of the person (which again was held by Aristotelianism to be knowable apart from theistic commitment) ceased to play a part in moral philosophy. Subsequent philosophers were left with two pieces of a three-piece puzzle. They retained, as a key principle of Reformation-era theology, a rather depressing view of "untutored-human-nature-as-it-is."[27] They also inherited a system of moral injunctions which referred to a vision of perfected nature that had been discarded. The moral project of the Enlightenment inevitably became an attempt to find a rational ground for these inherited principles. By MacIntyre's estimation, the project was doomed to fail.

Several attempts were made to reconstruct a coherent, consensus moral system absent a teleological anthropology, but all proved unsatisfactory. We see this failure in Mill's utilitarian system, which simplifies moral reasoning but raises a host of other problems. Hume's ethics placed the spring of morality in the dictates of the passions of a normal, reasonable person. MacIntyre is quick to point out not only the circularity of this account but also the fact that Hume's "normal" passions bear a striking resemblance to the prescriptions for behavior endorsed by the 17th century Scottish bourgeoisie.[28]

Kant attempted to ground the same inherited injunctions in abstracted reason. His categorical imperative does vindicate received moral principles, but as it is abstracted from human desire and experience, it also vindicates "many immoral and trivial non-moral maxims…So, 'Persecute

24. Ibid., 8-10.
25. Ibid., 50.
26. Ibid., 51. Also, see Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2012) for a historical account of the consequences of metaphysical univocity on modernity.
27. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 52.
28. Ibid., 46-48, 62-63.

all those who hold false religious beliefs' and 'Always eat mussels on Mondays in March' will all pass Kant's test, for all can be consistently universalized."[29] We can see Kierkegaard's moral thought as a reaction to Kant's failure to ground morality in reason. In the absence of an intellectually compelling case for ethical precepts, morality must be grounded in a radical choice. The individual can grant allegiance to the "aesthetic life" unbounded by moral principles or to the "ethical life," but this choice ultimately lies beyond reason. MacIntyre remarks that the separation between reason and morality is a distinctive mark of modernity.[30]

This trajectory eventually produced the modern emotivist self, who retains the moral language of Aristotelian ethics but lacks any ultimately satisfactory rational ground. This self may utter sophisticated and internally coherent moral sentences. It may defend its positions by mustering moral terminology and even moral philosophy. But, "whatever criteria or principles or evaluative allegiances the emotivist self may profess, they are to be construed as expressions of attitudes, preferences and choices which are themselves not governed by criterion, principle or value, since they underlie and are prior to all allegiance to criterion, principle or value."[31] In other words, in rejecting a teleological (and necessarily metaphysical) anthropology, the decision of allegiance is grounded not in any ultimate criteria, but in non-rational preference.

Consequences for the Teaching of Controversial Issues

Because the rational basis for ethics has been eroded and replaced by something akin to Kierkegaard's volitional basis, contemporary moral discourse takes on the dynamics of a Nietzschean scramble for power. As MacIntyre notes, "it was Nietzsche's historic achievement to understand more clearly than any other philosopher…that what purported to be appeals to objectivity were in fact expressions of subjective will."[32] It is important to note here that MacIntyre does not intend to adopt the post-modern or post-structuralist position that moral utterances are *necessarily* expressions of arbitrary choice. It is not that they have no objective ground, it is simply that this ground has been lost. But the consequences for our contemporary experience are the same.

Behind the mask of moral language, individuals and parties assert their own incommensurable visions in increasingly shrill and forceful ways. The success or survival of moral positions is based not on rational deliberation but on drumming up popular support and maneuvering ideological camps. For the individual caught in this moral malaise, one of the only resources for clarity is membership in a group professing a distinctive vision of rationality.[33] Of course, opponents will criticize the option for membership as arbitrary and irrational. But to be fair, these same opponents will have selected a camp in much the same way. As MacIntyre puts it, "Fideism has a large, not always articulate, body of adherents, and not only among the members of those Protestant churches and movements which openly proclaim it: there are plenty of secular fideists."[34] Absent any ultimately satisfying rational criterion, the individual will decide between camps based on emotivist reasons: uncritical sentimentality, unexamined repulsion, or a simple desire for group membership.

29. Ibid., 43-44.
30. Ibid., 36-41.
31. Ibid., 31.
32. Ibid., 107.
33. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*, 4-5.
34. Ibid., 5.

This last element has serious consequences for the use of the epistemic criterion. Ideological camping is often emotivist, having to do with belonging and personal identity. The election of moral positions are motivated in large part by a desire to be "someone who believes X" or to not be "someone who believes Y." Moral discourse may appear to involve assertions like "I disagree," but in fact is driven by assertions like "I'm not one of *those* people." We can see this dynamic in issues of sexual morality. In debates regarding abortion, participants *are* pro-choice or *are* pro-life. An ethical conclusion follows the adoption of a constitutive identity and often membership in a distinctive culture. Similarly, opponents of same-sex marriage are often labeled "bigots," and their counterparts depicted as "libertines" or "hedons."

We might put Michael Hand's insistence that same-sex marriage be taught as a closed issue in this context. Hand argues that there are no valid reasons to oppose the morality of state endorsement of same-sex relationships, therefore teachers should not present the topic as a controversial issue.[35] But if MacIntyre's diagnosis is correct, Hand's attempt to invalidate the reasonableness of the controversy on the basis of a universal epistemology is at present impossible. Hand's argument could be paraphrased to read, "The positions opposing the moral validity of same-sex marriage are rationally untenable." Instead, it should be read as, "These positions are incommensurate with my system of presuppositions." Indeed, I would suggest that it is ignorance of his own inherited intellectual assumptions that leads Hand to believe his position enjoys universal or objective authority. In particular, his undeclared Cartesian anthropology leads Hand to view procreative union as morally indistinguishable from emotional union and thus summarily dismiss a non-dualist natural law framework as unreasonable. As I will advocate later, understanding of the historical roots of our philosophical assumptions is key to unraveling the confusion of contemporary discourse.

The group-membership dynamics of moral debate may play a significant part in teachers' selection of controversial issues. As a profession, teaching is highly collaborative, especially at the secondary level. Further, the highly politicized nature of teachers' professional organizations[36] may indicate that the school house is fertile ground for ideological camping. In this case, educators who discern which issues are controversial using the epistemic criterion may simply be imposing the particular incommensurate framework of an ideological group.

Secondary students learning about controversial issues are even more vulnerable in this state of affairs. Their lives are marked by emotional intensity and the desire for belonging, making them particularly susceptible to tendencies toward sentimentalizing or reductive identity-formation. D.W. Dewhurst notes that in his own experience of teaching controversial issues, students were inclined toward emotivism and subjectivist relativism as defenses for their own fragile identities.[37] If all opinions are expressions of the self, relativism ensures that no one gets hurt. In a context where the vestiges of rationality have been wedded to self-identification and self-worth, students have a vested interest in mitigating controversy. While this may undermine the entire purpose of teaching controversial issues, from the perspective of a young person it is not an imprudent stance amidst a Nietzchean mêlée.

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35. Michael Hand, "Should We Teach Homosexuality as a Controversial Issue?," *Theory and Research in Education,* 5(1) (2007): 69-85.; Michael Hand, "Framing Classroom Discussion of Same-Sex Marriage," *Educational Theory,* 63(5) (2013): 497–510.

36. For example, a 2003 Harris poll found that the politicized nature of teacher unions is alienating to teachers with minority opinions. See Terry M. Moe, *Special Interest: Teachers Unions and America's Public Schools* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2011), 69.

37. D. W. Dewhurst, "The Teaching of Controversial Issues," *Journal of Philosophy of Education,* 26(2) (1992): 153–163, 154.

I hope the irony here is apparent. The epistemic criterion advocated by Dearden and Hand aims to insulate the selection of controversial issues from the discursive impasse created by individualist notions of rationality. However, by appealing to a universal rational foundation that presently does not exist, in practice the epistemic criterion falls into the same trap. Nevertheless, the concerns that bore the epistemic criterion are still valid and imperative. To avoid the relativizing consequences of the political or behavioral criterion, we need a solid foundation upon which to enact the epistemic criterion. This means either refurbishing contemporary moral discourse with supporting scaffolds or discovering a new foundation altogether. As regards the former solution, I offer what amounts to an academic or curricular proposition. With respect to the latter, what I propose is a relation of epistemic notions to existential (and even ontological) ones. The second suggestion may seem hopelessly romantic or woefully abstract. By my own assessment, my argument regarding the fragility of the epistemic criterion is much more persuasive than the potential remedies I am about to suggest. However, I merely hope by proffering possibilities to provoke further and more fruitful proposals.

Intellectual History as a Suggestion for Contemporary Practice

It would be naïve to propose a nostalgic fantasy as a solution to our moral malaise. We cannot return to Athens or to medieval Europe. In our current climate, calls to retrieve a teleological ground for ethical discourse will likely be taken as part and parcel of some religious proselytization campaign. With that said, I would like to propose two suggestions for teaching practice that may point a way to a partial rehabilitation of our capacity for the epistemic criterion. The first involves considering space for the teaching of intellectual history in secondary schools and teacher-preparation programs. This is necessary not only to understand the inherited presuppositions we bring to moral discourse, but to raise the level of discourse to the level of its divergence. MacIntyre argues that the "catastrophe" of moral utterance was made invisible in part because it occurred before the advent of academic history. The modern historian will lack the evaluative criteria to identify moral disorder and will simply observe a marginal change in avowed moralities.[38] Further, the populous in general is blind to this past in part because history has been relegated to the domain of the specialist or hobbyist. It is increasingly constrained to the realms of pub trivia, AP exams, History Channel documentaries, and eccentric academics. Historical consciousness is divorced from everyday life, and most students and educators unconsciously adopt the Enlightenment assumption that their modes of thought are a-historical and timeless. While MacIntyre advocates the revival of narrative art in popular life,[39] for the question at hand a curricular change may be more appropriate.

Helping students and educators to identify their unexamined philosophical assumptions will aid awareness of the causes of indeterminacy in moral debate. Although participants use the same moral language, because terms carry different meanings in different comprehensive frames, confusion and disagreement abound. By teaching intellectual history in secondary schools and in universities, students and future teachers can begin to identify the sources of their inherited frames and thus the sources of their disagreement. This has the second effect of raising the level of debate to the level of contention—that of philosophical foundations. I suggest that students cannot answer questions like "Should homosexual acts be affirmed as morally permissible or good?" before answering questions like "What is human happiness?," "What is the human person?," or "What is

38. MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 4.
39. Ibid., 210-212.

the *good*?" Many contemporary social controversies are framed in the language of "rights" and "equality." What MacIntyre has shown is that these are but the linguistic vestiges of a bygone era and contain no obvious or univocal meaning. Before employing these concepts, more foundational questions—whose answers may give rise to coherent accounts of rights-language—must be answered. MacIntyre laments the lack of an official public space in which to deliberate these foundational questions. I suggest that our educational institutions should seek to create this space.[40]

In the conclusion of a series of university lectures, MacIntyre encouraged academics to recognize "that the lecturer speaks not with the voice of a single acknowledged authoritative reason, but as one committed to some particular partisan standpoint."[41] His call is a demand that academics identify their epistemic assumptions as a part of introducing themselves.[42] This might also help teachers and secondary students to avoid talking at cross-purposes. It may also help students to better clarify their own thinking. As MacIntyre has observed, our actual presuppositions are most often not drawn from a single coherent intellectual tradition. Much of our internal confusion comes from the amalgam of potentially contradictory principles we have uncritically inherited.[43] The burden of having to introduce oneself may offer an opportunity for conscious self-examination. One may object that the answers to these foundational questions may themselves fail to provide a groundwork for consensus. In fact, we might wonder whether incommensurability will continue ad infinitum regardless of how basic our questioning becomes. First, I do not think this will be the case. Sooner or later, discussion will arrive at the level of first principles.[44] At this point, interlocutors will simply agree or disagree. Secondly, even if incommensurability persists, at least students will understand the *source* of their disagreements, rather than remaining bewildered at their simultaneous appeal to identical terms and their vehement opposition. At the very least, instruction in intellectual history will make students aware that they operate in the dysfunctional discursive environment MacIntyre describes.

Of course, the feasibility of introducing any substantively new area of study into the secondary or teacher-preparatory curriculum is doubtful. Space in already crowded courses of study is hard to come by and subject to political struggles of the highest order. However, it should at least be said that students' capacity for this sort of study should not be considered an obstacle. Michael Hand himself has argued that the intricacies of philosophical thought are not beyond the grasp of secondary students.[45] Many researchers have attempted philosophy programs for students of all ages with considerable success.[46] We can expect that young people would be more than capable of engaging in questions of intellectual history as a precursor to ethical debate.

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40. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*, 2.

41 Alasdair MacIntyre, *Three Rival Versions of Moral Inquiry: Encyclopedia, Genealogy, and Tradition* (Notre Dame, I.N.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1990), 232.

42. Ewa Thompson, "Can We Communicate?: On Epistemological Incompatibilities in Contemporary Academic Discourse" *Colleqium*, 2(1) (2010): 205-211.

43. MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Whose Rationality?*, 397.

44. By "first principles," I am referring to the grounds of philosophical thought, which is to say, metaphysics. Of course, the Cartesian turn placed epistemology at the site of first principles. We might then say that the foundational question is whether *being* or *knowing* is the proper point of departure for all thinking.

45. Michael Hand, "Can Children be Taught Philosophy?," in M. Hand & C. Winstanley (eds.), *Philosophy in Schools* (London: Continuum, 2008).

46. See for example, P. Cam, *Thinking Together: Philosophical Inquiry for the Classroom* (Sydney: Hale and Iremonger/PETA, 1995); M. Lipman, *Philosophy Goes to School* (Philadelphia PA: Temple University Press, 1988); M. Lipman, *Thinking in Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and, C. C. McCall, *Transforming Thinking: Philosophical inquiry in the primary and secondary classroom* (London: Routledge, 2009), cited in Michael

An example might help to illustrate how this might play out in the classroom. Let us take the issue of same-sex marriage which forms the backdrop for both Hand and Petrovic's interventions. Before students discuss the issue itself, a teacher might present the historical frameworks corresponding to opposing bodies of thought—either via didactic methods or through discovery activities. Students would be made aware that many arguments in opposition to same-sex marriage reside within an Aristotelian-Thomistic natural law framework. Within this tradition, a "moral" action is wrapped up in an objective or transcendent structure of the human person, which is constituted by a unity of body and its "form" (the soul). Further, what is "moral" is corporal in the sense that every action of the individual person is thought to impact the communal body of persons. Similarly, many arguments in support of same-sex marriage are only conceivable within either classical liberal and post-ontological frameworks in which "moral" decisions are discerned largely in terms of freedoms of action granted, protected, or violated. In contrast to the decidedly corporal conception of the person native to the natural law framework, these traditions preserve individual autonomy as a primary good. Students would be helped to understand on a rudimentary level how historical movements—the Reformation, the Enlightenment, etc.—effected changes in dominant currents of thought. During the subsequent discussion of the issue itself, students would be able to identify opposing uses of "morality" and "rights" not as irrational or reprehensible, but as originating in different comprehensive frameworks. Again, this may seem a burdensome addition to the curriculum, but I think it only necessary if students and teachers are asked to characterize issues as controversial using rational criteria.

Luigi Giussani's "Elementary Experience" as a Potential Universal Foundation

Finally, I would like to propose the pedagogical thought of Luigi Giussani as a possible corrective in our contemporary situation. Giussani writes that education should be "ascetical;" it should assist young people in a process of *ascesis*. This process concerns liberation from two forces. The first is the "crust" of the inherited mentality toward life—and in this case toward intellectual life—common to the modern individual. Not only our forms of life but also the erosion of rationality constrain our capability to see what is true and what makes for human happiness. In Giussani's estimation, as in MacIntyre's, the dominant forms of culture and thought have been—from at least the 19th century—products of power.[47]

The second element of constraint consists of our own preconceptions. Giussani speaks of a "morality of knowing" guiding our consideration of ideas and objects. He observes that "we are inclined to remain bound to the opinions we already have about the meaning of things and to attempt to justify our attachment to them."[48] The Enlightenment project and its heir, the modern emotivist self, inevitably selects moral principles on a non-rational basis and then attempts to rationally justify them. Giussani's explanation of what the "morality of knowing" requires in this situation is both humorous and instructive:

> When a young man has fallen in love with a young woman, if his mother, trying to be objective and sincere, draws his attention to some of her faults, the young man tends not to pay attention to her viewpoint, throwing at her this or that argument that will reinforce his

Hand and Ralph Levinson, "Discussing Controversial Issues in the Classroom*," Educational Philosophy and Theory,* 44(6) (2012): 614–29.

47. Luigi Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, trans. John Zucchi (Montreal: McGill-Queens Univ. Press, 1997), 10-31.

48. Ibid., 31.

> own opinion about the young woman. Applying this to the field of knowledge, this is the moral rule: *Love the truth of an object more than your attachment to the opinions you have already formed about it.* More concisely, one could say, "love the truth more than yourself."[49]

Amid the indeterminacy and power dynamics of contemporary moral discourse, Giussani's epistemic morality calls us to at least consider sacrificing our attachment to watertight but incommensurate narratives and our constitutive group identities.

How does one undertake this acesis? Giusanni insists that education must begin from awareness of essential desires, a set of needs which he terms "the elementary experience." While this concept is in some senses identical to the Aristotelian desire for the transcendentals, Giussani observes that "these needs can be given many names. They can be summarized with different expressions (for example, the need for happiness, the need for truth, for justice, etc)."[50] It is important to note that although this criterion may appear egocentric and thus given to emotivism, insofar as the "elementary experience" is unavoidable and universal, it is experienced phenomenologically as *given* and is therefore not generated by the subject or dependent on emotion or sentiment. For these reasons, Giussani concludes that "the fundamental criterion for facing things is an objective one."[51] Of course, this *givenness* depends on a certain faith. At minimum, it requires faith in the universality of human nature. In Giussani's case, this took the form of religious belief, but this is not a necessary condition for asserting an objective human structure. To be sure, such an ontological and therefore teleological frame may be considered objectionable, but MacIntyre has shown that this is necessary for a coherent moral scheme.

An authentic education then involves learning to compare ideas and proposals with the elementary experience. Both students and educators must learn to evaluate comprehensive narratives, what Giussani terms "hypotheses of total meaning," on the basis of their constitutive desires. If they do not, and evaluate using an external criterion, they "will be like fragile leaves separated from the tree…They will be victims of the strongest wind and its ever-changing shape, a public opinion shaped by the elites who hold real power."[52] Again, in attempting to discern whether an issue is controversial without a satisfactory conception of reason, the epistemic criterion will collapse under the influence of power dynamics and mirror the behavioral criterion.

Giussani's thought is helpful in navigating the issue at hand in several ways. First, its foundation is essentially ontological; constitutive desires point to aspects of *being*. This model of education and reasoning therefore avoids the errors of Kant's moral theory, which sought to justify principles through reason abstracted from an account of human nature and from desire. Second, a focus on universal human desires leads toward the articulation of an objective good, which is the "home environment" of Aristotelian virtue ethics. A concrete account of human goods provides coherent reasons for moral injunctions. Under a clear awareness of desires and therefore a conception of the good, the ethical project again becomes a science of attaining an already defined vision of the human ideal. It ceases to be an attempt to rationalize injunctions after the fact. Finally, Giussani's pedagogy relies primarily on an existential process. It thus avoids the fideism of

49. Ibid., 31, emphasis in original.
50. Ibid., 7.
51. Ibid., 10.
52. Luigi Giussani, *The Risk of Education*, trans. Rosanna Giammanco Frongia (New York: Crossroad, 1995), 8-11.

many incommensurate narratives. Because the language of desires and of experience has not been coopted in the same way as moral language, it may provide a potential ground for consensus.

How might Giussani's proposal be enacted in practice? How might it help educators discern whether an issue should be treated as controversial or as a closed question? Again, what we require for the rehabilitation of the epistemic criterion is a universal foundation for moral utterance. Let us take as an example the issue of undocumented or illegal immigration and for the sake of simplicity, let us consider a rather absurd "hypothesis of meaning." A legal positivist approach—which under Dearden's definition is entirely rational and even makes some claim to being akin to "the body of public knowledge, criteria of truth, critical standards" within a narrow domain—would inevitably lead to the conclusion that the issue is uncontroversial. Laws are created for the good ordering of society, and transgressing these laws subverts that order. Giussani's pedagogy would ask educators to examine whether the hypothesis of meaning presented by legal positivism corresponds to their innate desire for justice, for goodness, or for happiness. Only in testing the hypothesis against their own experience could teachers discern whether this framework helps to illuminate life. If it does, then accepting the corollary for the issue at hand—the position that immigration should be taught as a closed issue – would be considered rational. If the hypothesis does not help explain life (and we can imagine that legal positivism has little explanatory power for experience), then its corollary in this matter might also be provisionally rejected. In practice, an issue would only be considered controversial when teachers could imagine several coherent hypotheses of meaning (or in more popular parlance, "worldviews") which seem to correspond with constituent needs (the "elementary experience") and which would imply differing positions regarding the issue.

Admittedly, Giussani's method seems complicated on paper and difficult to enact in practice. It should be said that Giussani's pedagogy is intentionally experiential—it requires students and educators to mature in their capacity to compare proposals to the elementary experience. Simply put, it takes practice—it is more an art of living than a rationalist schema. For this reason, it is intimately suited for decidedly moral questions. Factual controversies, like the question of evolution or debates over global warming, do not need Giussani's intervention—nor Hand or Dearden's for that matter. Again, proposing inextricable desires as the foundation for consensus moral utterance may appear woefully abstract. It may also be likely to devolve into incommensurable discourse. Self-examination risks radical individualism and emotivism, and Giussani warned that both young people and adults are inevitably prone to reduce the elementary experience to mere aesthetic reactions or voluntarist self-assertion.[53] However, solipsism is always a risk in both moral discourse and in education, and Giussani's pedagogy—if nothing else—provides a platform for young people and their instructors to grow in discernment of fundamental questions which addresses their fundamental desires as persons and respects their freedom. In doing so, Giussani's method avoids the potentially coercive effects of the wholesale adoption of a privileged epistemic framework, such as positive liberalism.[54]

Conclusion: Recovering the Capacity for the Epistemic Criterion

In my own view, arguments for the epistemic criterion are fairly convincing. Education should be a preparation for civic life, even a civic life fraught with irrationality. But education

53. Giussani, *The Religious Sense*, 59-76.

54. See note 17 above.

cannot but be concerned with reason and with truth-seeking. Attempts to move away from rationality when classifying issues as controversial can erode student confidence in rationality and can put educators in morally compromising positions. A behavioral or political criterion may require a teacher to give credence to radically immoral viewpoints. We can even imagine a future in which an immoral legislative policy precipitated the fizzling out of political debate. Teachers would inevitably teach the issue as settled, subtly transforming education into the morally arbitrary coercive arm of the state. Using the epistemic criterion to determine which issues should be considered controversial ensures that education remains a rational and ethical endeavor.

Unfortunately, just as proponents of the epistemic criterion downplay appeals to prepare students for the world-as-it-is, their position ignores the state of contemporary moral discourse. A variety of incommensurate narratives stemming from the cloudy legacy of Enlightenment moral philosophy creates a situation of indeterminable debate. It is difficult then to defend the epistemic criterion in an environment marked by a plurality of competing epistemologies. In this context, the declaration that a question should be considered settled is best treated as simply one moral conception among many. In order to recover the possibility of a universal ground for epistemic moral inquiry, we must both become aware of the historical roots of the contemporary dilemma and seek new frameworks that might generate a worthy universal consensus.

My aim here was not only to illuminate how the present intellectual climate may preclude utilizing the epistemic criterion but to provide some semblance of a way forward. In my own view, Alisdair MacIntyre's portrayal of contemporary moral discourse should convince educators that concerted remedies are needed in order to recover a semblance of rational discourse. What these remedies should look like seems less clear. I have offered two suggestions here. One, the addition of instruction in intellectual history as a precursor to discussion of controversial issues seeks simply to make students aware that they will enter a discursive space which lacks a consensus foundation. The other proposal furthers Luigi Giussani's conception of the "elementary experience" as a potential foundation. While these suggestions may hold debatable appeal, my hope is that this small intervention will convict educators and educational theorists of the need for creative solutions in our present climate and inspire further and more fruitful propositions.

Criteria for Controversy: A Theoretic Approach

Paul Anders & Nicholas Shudak

Abstract

What constitutes a controversial issue as appropriate for pedagogical use is a foundational question for teachers and educators to countenance. In what follows we develop and argue for a framework that helps teachers and educators think through criteria for identifying what makes a subject, issue, or curriculum controversial. The criteria on which we focus are: behavioral, political, epistemic, social and theoretic. We discuss the necessity and sufficiency of each criterion in identifying issues as controversies suitable for educational purposes. We find each of the first four criteria to be necessary but not sufficient, and argue for a theoretic criterion. According to this criterion, an object of dispute is considered controversial if the authoritative experts studying in the relevant fields cannot agree.

Keywords: *authority, epistemic criteria, epistemic authority, resonance*

Introduction

One of the goals of education through systematic schooling is to develop in the student the ability to think clearly, the capacity for autonomous, rational decision making that is intellectually rigorous and morally sound. An increasingly common method in the pursuit of this goal employs the nondirective presentation of controversial issues.[1] And so what constitutes a controversial issue as appropriate for pedagogical use is a foundational question for achieving this goal, and is the central topic of this article.

Our American system of public education has a checkered past with controversial issues, especially when science and religion are involved. Most famously is the 1925 Scopes Trial in which a substitute science teacher was fired after the accusation was levied that he used a science textbook inclusive of evolution, and thus in violation of Tennessee law banning the teaching of evolution. Though that trial was more of a charade and publicity stunt than anything else, the law referenced—the Butler Act—was real. And though the Supreme Court overturned the Butler Act in 1968—Epperson v. Arkansas[2]—the battle between creationism and evolution hit a fever pitch

1. There is a distinction between directive teaching which seeks to lead the student to a particular predetermined and testable conclusion and nondirective teaching in which the teacher does not take any particular position on the topics/issues being taught, but lets the student come to her own conclusion through various facilitation and questioning strategies. Gerald Graff in his *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts can Revitalize American Education* (New York, NY: W.W. Norton and Company, 1993) begins a nice lineage of scholarly work in this regard.

2. https://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/393/97.

in 2014 during the Bill Nye and Ken Ham debates.[3] Similarly, the Jerome Bruner inspired curriculum—Man: A Course of Study (MACOS), funded by the National Science Foundation in the late 1960s[4]—was designed to combine the sciences and the humanities to help students gain greater insight into human behavior and morality. This truly unique curriculum was roundly criticized by Congress for its perceived skepticism of religion and scrapped soon after implementation in select schools.

Though the battle between science and religion has captured much of the history of curricular controversy in our public schools, in recent years, the controversy seemingly revolves around religious plurality (Christianity and Islam) and around issues of sexual orientation and gender. In regards to the former, a recent world religions homework assignment at Riverheads High School in Staunton, VA, which required students to copy an Islamic statement of faith, seemingly for the "artistic complexity" of the handwriting, closed all schools in that county due to parental outrage that the teacher was trying to convert Christian students to Islam.[5] In regards to sexual orientation and gender, the landmark children's book, *Heather Has Two Mommies*[6] first published in 1989, and which has had a regular place on the American Library Association's "challenge" and "banned" book lists for the past 25 years, has just experienced its second edition at a time when same-sex marriage has become constitutionally protected.

This most recent turn of events begs the question, if something is constitutionally protected like same-sex marriage, bearing arms, or abortion, can it be controversial. It also brings us back to the foundational question guiding this article, and that is: What constitutes a controversial issue? In other words, are there criteria that are necessary and sufficient for something to be considered controversial? On our view, this is an essential question for teachers and educators to countenance. It is our belief that thinking can be challenged, insight deepened, outlook expanded, and classroom culture enlivened through the appropriate pedagogical use of controversy when rightly considered. Inspired by Jerome Bruner's profound hypothesis "that any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development,"[7] we develop and argue for a framework that helps teachers and educators think through the criteria for identifying what makes a subject, issue, or curriculum controversial.[8]

To do this, we present five criteria that must be taken into consideration when evaluating whether an issue is controversial. The criteria are: behavioral, political, epistemic, social and theoretic. The first three criteria—behavioral, political, and epistemic—we develop through and in response to the works of Robert Dearden and Michael Hand.[9] The behavioral criterion suggests that controversy exists simply when a dispute occurs that leads to divergent behaviors in relation to the issue disputed. The political criterion suggests that an issue is controversial if no agreed

3. See the Wikipedia page devoted to this: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bill_Nye%E2%80%93Ken_Ham_debate.

4. Education Development Center, *Man: A Course of Study* (Cambridge, MA: Education Development Center, 1969).

5. See the report on cnn.com by Ben Brumfield, http://www.cnn.com/2015/12/18/us/virginia-school-shut-islam-homework/.

6. Leslea Newman, *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press, 2015, 2nd ed.).

7. Jerome Bruner, *The Process of Education* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960), 33.

8. Our focus is on controversial issues that have pedagogical value, promoting the chief goals of education. We will use as interchangeable the terms "controversial," "appropriately controversial," "suitably controversial," and the like in our discussions of criteria for identifying such issues.

9. Robert Dearden, "Controversial Issues and the Curriculum," *Journal of Curriculum Studies,*13(1) (1981): 37-44. Michael Hand, "What Should We Teach as Controversial? A Defense of the Epistemic Criterion," *Educational Theory,* 58(1) (2008): 213-228.

upon position within the public value system can be found in relation to the object of dispute. Though these criteria seem necessary, they still are not enough to answer the question pertaining to whether the claims concerning the object of dispute are justified and true. Thus, the need for an epistemic criterion that requires evidence to warrant the behaviors, or public positions, taken in relation to the object of dispute is also necessary. The social criterion suggests that the issue in question must relate to and have implications for the existential social lives of the students in and out of school. In other words, is the issue existentially pervasive throughout their multiple social spheres? Lastly, we put forth the notion of a theoretic criterion. According to this criterion, an object of dispute is considered controversial if the authoritative experts studying in the relevant fields cannot agree. Along the way we discuss the necessity and sufficiency of the criteria in identifying issue as controversies suitable for educational purposes.

The Behavioral Criterion

Dearden raises and rejects a behavioral criterion for identifying controversial issues for nondirective teaching. According to Dearden, the behavioral criterion stipulates that an issue should be taught as controversial whenever there is found to be an actual dispute among "numbers of people" over the truth claims associated with that issue.

Dearden argues against this criterion offering two objections. Dearden's first objection rests on the common occurrence of dispute among a particular group of individuals even though there is a clear, non-controversial answer to the dispute outside that particular context. For example, "children will raise questions concerning the capital cities of countries, spelling of words, authors of books and explanations of well-understood natural phenomena," to which there are already clear and well-established answers.[10] Dearden also rejects the behavioral criterion on the grounds that it promotes relativism. If any issue upon which there is disagreement must be taught nondirectively, then the notion is supported that all disputed issues are up for grabs, encouraging, "the thought that what is true should be collapsed into what some group regards as true, with epidemic relativism, and a sociological carnival as the result."[11]

Hand rejects Dearden's first objection to the behavioral criterion on the grounds it confuses the normative question about teaching controversy with a linguistic question about how we use the word, "controversial." Dearden claims the childish dispute over capital cities is not controversial at all, but as Hand points out, this is a controversial issue for the children engaged in the dispute. As Hand argues, clearly not all disputed claims are controversial in the sense relevant to the question of nondirective teaching, "many actual disputes in society at large are about questions to which there are entirely satisfactory and well-established answers…[and] many questions to which different answers are possible and which it would be bizarre to teach as settled…are too remote from people's practical or theoretical concerns to occasion much in the way of dispute."[12] Clearly, for an issue to be controversial there must be some actual dispute concerning the object under consideration, and so the behavioral criterion is necessary; however, as Hand argues, this criterion is not sufficient. That a dispute exists cannot alone bring the issue under dispute into the realm of appropriate pedagogical use as a controversy.[13]

10. Dearden, "Controversial Issues," 38.

11. Ibid., 38.

12. Hand, "What Should We Teach," 214

13. By appropriate pedagogy we again refer to the nondirective teaching of controversial issues as a means toward furthering the goals of education. For informative discussions see for example: Michael Hand and Ralph Levinson,

The Political Criterion

Hand considers and rejects a political criterion by which controversial issues are separated from noncontroversial ones according to public and private morality. On this criterion, an issue should be taught as controversial only if it falls outside the domain of public morality—only if the issue involves a dispute not necessarily relevant to the goals and values of a democratic state. As Hand concludes, "According to the political criterion, then, a moral question should be taught as controversial when no answer to it is entailed by the public values of the liberal democratic state…the class of moral principles teachers should refrain from endorsing is coextensive with the class of moral principles the state should refrain from enforcing."[14] On this view, if on some moral issue there is no clear position supported by public values and morality, then that issue should be taught nondirectively. Furthermore, according to the political criterion, if public values and morality entail a single position on some moral issue, then that issue should not be considered controversial and that position should be taught directively in public schools.

However, as Hand argues, the role of public schools is not to instill uncritical support for the "public values and morality of the democratic state," but to supply students with the knowledge, and equip them with the skills, necessary to evaluate these issues and positions for themselves. Hand sees the misapplication of the political criterion as grounded in a misunderstanding concerning the goals of directive teaching. According to Hand,

> Directive moral education is an exercise in the giving of advice and the promulgating of information, not an exercise in the issuing and enforcing of commands. Yet the purpose of the distinction between public and private values is precisely to delimit the legitimate scope of *authoritative* interventions by the state. The distinction is therefore strictly irrelevant to the task of determining the proper context of directive moral education.[15]

Hand goes on to briefly question an underlying assumption of the political criterion pointing out that, "the idea that we ought to promote whatever moral perspective society currently privileges is scarcely philosophically respectable."[16] That the current public values and morality of a democratic state entail some position on a moral issue should not necessarily remove that issue from controversy. Likewise, that the democratic state has no settled position on an issue does not entail that there is not a single best, most rationally defensible, position to be taken on that issue.

Therefore, the political criterion is neither necessary nor sufficient for identifying controversial issues appropriate for pedagogical employment. For example, the morality of divorce provides a historical example of Hand's point. In the recent past, divorce was seen as unethical because it was thought to undermine family structure and stability both of which were important for the continuance of a liberal democratic state, making the issue of divorce noncontroversial based on the political criterion—divorce was clearly unethical given public values and morality. With changing public values and morality, attitudes concerning divorce loosen and divorce became a

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"Discussing Controversial Issues in the Classroom," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 44(6) (2012): 614- 629; Michael Hand, "Framing Classroom Discussion of Same Sex Marriage," *Educational Theory,* 63(5) (2013): 497-510; Maughn Rollins Gregory, "The Procedurally Directive Approach to Teaching Controversial Issues," *Educational Theory,* 64(6) (2014): 627-648.

14. Ibid., 221.
15. Ibid., 224.
16. Ibid., 227.

truly controversial issue. In contemporary society, divorce is no longer seen as detrimental to family structure and stability, and/or family structure and stability is no longer seen as crucial for the continuance of a liberal democratic state, making divorce again noncontroversial based on the political criterion—divorce is now clearly ethical given public values and morality because it falls within the free actions of consenting adults. The political criterion, then, is essentially a litmus test helping determine the perspective taken on an issue by the general public, but that perspective can change considerably, even reverse, and so the political criterion has no traction on our question concerning controversial issues.[17]

The Epistemic Criterion

Developing Dearden's relativism objection to the behavioral criterion, Hand finds a positive argument for the epistemic criterion he defends. Hand critiques Dearden's relativism objection first on the grounds it does not adequately establish a causal connection between adopting the behavioral criterion and the rise of relativism, and second because Dearden gives no normative principle against which he could explicate the evils of relativism. By offering such a principle, Hand adds a needed normative premise to Dearden's argument and thereby both clarifies the dangers of relativism and supports the adoption of Dearden's proposed epistemic criterion. Hand argues, "The central aim of education is to equip students with a capacity for, and inclination to, rational thought and action." Therefore, teachers must promote rationality by, "presenting students with the evidence adduced in support of a claim, helping them to evaluate it, and encouraging them to accept the claim if, and only if, the evidence is epistemically adequate."[18] This conclusion, Hand argues, leads directly to Dearden's epistemic criterion, "the issues we ought to teach as controversial are precisely those on which, 'contrary views can be held without those views being contrary to reason'."[19]

The epistemic criterion is certainly an improvement over the behavioral and political criterion. Developing rationality is a necessary task of educators and so the epistemic criterion presents a necessary condition for identifying controversial issues. For example, and returning to our constitutionally protected rights to abortion, bearing arms, and same-sex marriage, the epistemic criterion would suggest that, even though constitutionally protected, those issues are indeed controversial in that contrary positions are held as a result of reasoned and rational thought. The various court decisions over the years, and the evidence used in making those decisions, are indicative of those issues meeting this criterion. But does the epistemic criterion express a sufficient condition? To see why we answer negatively we must move on to consider our last two criteria.

17. John E. Petrovic, "Reason, Liberalism, and Democratic Education: A Deweyan Approach to Teaching about Homosexuality," *Educational Theory,* 63(5) (2013): 525-541, argues for the importance of the political criterion for successful teaching as Hand describes and rejects it in his own project. However, Petrovic emphasizes "values of the liberal democratic state," while we are looking to the more general notions of morality expressed by a democratic state, which have often worked at cross purposes with democratic values. We agree with the thrust of Petrovic's argument that liberal principles (equality, autonomy, freedom, e.g.) should guide the epistemic criterion; however, that guidance is better captured, we think, by the theoretic criterion we present in what follows.

18. Ibid., 218

19. Ibid., 219

The Social Criterion

For an issue to be considered appropriately controversial, the issue must have relevant import in the students' lives whether they are in or out of the school building. There must be a case to be made about the social prevalence of the issue in the students' lives as well as beyond in the larger social spheres. In other words, for this criteria to be met, it must be nearly impossible for students to hide or escape from the issue at hand. This might differ from one social context to another. For example, in rural states where up to 50% of households own guns, and where guns are regularly carried and displayed in vehicles at certain times of the year, gun control as an issue might play out differently than in urban areas marred by gun violence.

This social criterion of controversy taps into a rich intellectual tradition in American educational thought that argues for the intimate connection between the school as a social institution and the life of the students as social beings. According to this tradition, one of the key functions of the school is to help students think clearly about their existential social situations using the prescribed curriculum. On this point, Dewey informs by giving the example, one of many, that the "ultimate significance of lake, river, mountain, and plain is not physical, but social…[as it] relates to human intercourse and intercommunication as affected by natural forms and properties."[20] The geographic principles being studied only make sense when put into a human social context. Dewey refers to this focus on social context as the "moral trinity" of the school. According to Dewey, it is the school's function to engender "social intelligence—the power of observing and comprehending social situations—and social power—trained capacities of control—at work in the service of social interest and aims."[21]

The importance of having a social criterion for controversy, and following the intellectual tradition from Dewey above, is that it places the social context and interests of the students in close proximity with larger contexts and social interests. For something to be appropriately controversial, it must at least be of interest to both the students and to the wider society. One of the key social interests and aims affecting students and society is the protection of individual freedom and dignity.

Arguably, our American Western democratic tradition has three signature features. The first is the belief that each individual person is bestowed with dignity. Secondly, that each individual person is in many regards free and equal to all others. And thirdly, the establishment of a system of free, public, and equal education predicated on bringing each successive generation into contact with arguments that lead to the defense of features one and two. The goals of education in the Western democratic tradition, though they might be many, revolve around a central and moral principle: clear thinking about individual dignity, freedom, and equality. The clearness of an individual's thinking matters simply because the individual matters, and, thinking is perhaps the best and most dignified way for people to protect themselves and secure their freedoms. Horace Mann, that giant figure who helped pave the way for our ongoing experiment in systematic, free, public, and equal education commented that "Universal education is our substitute for [standing] armies…School-houses are the republican line of fortifications."[22]

In his 1922 piece for *The New Republic*, Dewey argues that the chief advantage of an education is the role it plays in preventing people from becoming "dupes," preventing people from

20. John Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1975), 35.
21. Ibid., 43.
22. Horace Mann, *Thoughts: Selected from the Writings of Horace Mann* (Boston, MA: Lee and Shepard Publishers, 1872), 208.

becoming a means to another's ends—i.e. slowly becoming un-free. At a time in our country when education was becoming more about task efficiency and workforce preparation, at a time when cheap and available print led to the proliferation of political pamphlets and dailies aiding in the ethnic balkanization of a new and ever expanding populace, Dewey was vigilant in reminding people that clear thinking is key to education, and education is key to securing a free and equal people.

Again for Dewey, there was an intimate moral connection between school and society, school is the place where we learn and think about society for the purposes of acting within society; that the two are inseparably bound is a simple matter of fact. On Dewey's terms, the "tendency to discuss the morals of the school as if the school were an institution by itself is highly unfortunate."[23] He continues to state that the "moral responsibility of the school, and of those who conduct it, is to society. The school is fundamentally an institution erected by society to do a certain specific work."[24]

Dewey's fear, though, was that the two were functionally separate and would remain separate. Thinking of schools as typical embryonic and democratic communities did not catch on as he was wont to think. Then, and arguably now, "The school itself must be a vital social institution to a much greater extent than obtains at the present,"[25] which is why controversy should be included as a pedagogical consideration using the social criterion as a guide. If this criterion is met, it means that the issue at hand transcends and permeates the boundaries between school and society, that the protection of individual freedoms are of concern, and ultimately means that the school can take steps toward being that vital social institution.

Though the contexts might be completely different, the prevalence of an issue such as gun control in the social context of the students' lives might be high enough to make a case that this criterion is met. That an issue is socially prevalent is necessary for it to be appropriately controversial, but it is hardly sufficient. The issue must also meet the epistemic criterion. However, the necessity of the social criterion shows the epistemic criterion to be insufficient – for an issue to be controversial in a way suitable for educational purposes, the issue must consider not only rationality but existential social import.

Building toward the Theoretic Criterion

What we've seen so far are four criteria for determining whether an issue is controversial. So far it seems that the behavioral, epistemic and social criteria all express necessary conditions, though none is individually sufficient. As we build toward a case for the *theoretic criterion,* we do so by building from the cases for epistemic and social criteria introducing the key piece for the theoretic criterion, the role of authority. While we agree with Hand that an epistemic criterion must be employed, the epistemic criterion as Hand presents it is inadequate for predominantly social reasons.[26] Hand's astute observation concerning the relation between political enforcement and pedagogical endorsement opens a window into this conceptual space through which we can begin

23. Dewey, *Moral Principles in Education,* 7.

24. Ibid.

25. Ibid., 13.

26. Trevor Cooling, "What is a Controversial Issue? Implications for the Treatment of Religious Beliefs in Education," *Journal of Beliefs and Values,* 33(2) (2012): 169-181, questions Hand's epistemic criterion for failing to embody principles of fairness and diversity, and offers a diversity criterion. This criticism is a sample of the kind of general problem at the foundation of our objection in what follows based on Hand's failure to recognize important considerations in social epistemology.

to see more clearly the relationships between the behavioral, political, epistemic and social criteria. These relationships can be better understood by considering recent work in political science and social epistemology.

In her influential book, *Epistemic Authority*, Linda Zagzebski argues for the rationality and even necessity of accepting truth claims on the basis of authoritative testimony.[27] As Zagzebski argues, modern treatments of epistemological concepts—rationality, evidence, knowledge, and the like—are grounded in two methodological considerations, egalitarianism and autonomy. Egalitarianism assumes that all rational subjects are fundamentally equal in their epistemological position with differences attributable to context and situation, therefore any knower can arbitrarily represent the set of all knowers. Egalitarianism fails to acknowledge the fundamentally subjective element in epistemic considerations. Autonomy is closely related to the modern call for a strong epistemic self-reliance—any rational agent should accept a belief only after she has done the necessary epistemic work to justify that belief for herself. Such prioritizing of self-reliance fails to recognize the social element in knowledge, evidence and rationality. Zagzebski details the problems with these modern assumptions not only in the tension between them but also in the practical impossibility of holding to such ideals.

These assumptions seem represented in Dearden's and Hand's epistemic criterion, for example, when Hand argues, "So if we are serious about promoting rationality, we must also be serious about teaching students to judge candidates for belief against the evidence or arguments in their support.[28] On his epistemic criterion Dearden comments, "By 'reason' here is not meant something timeless and unhistorical but the body of public knowledge, criteria of truth, critical standards and verification procedures which at any given time has been so far developed."[29] Yet, he still seems to treat this historical development as a socially monolithic movement from the unknown to the known, the nebulous to the clear, the controversial to the settled. A student need only be positioned within the historical flow of human understanding on an issue for the student to make an objective assessment of the relevant considerations. However, knowledge and rationality are not wholly objective even at any given time; they are obtained within a web of social interrelations between rational agents.

To understand how identifying controversial issues should reflect a more social epistemology, one must consider the role of authority in our typical belief formation. There are typically three ways the authority relation is analyzed.[30] A person can have authority in the sense of having permission to act on another's behalf. For example, my work study student has the authority to retrieve mail from my faculty mailbox. The authority relation is between me and my work study student. Her authority is limited to the actions I have permitted her to perform on my behalf. This example illustrates another type of authority: the authority to grant permission to another. I am in a position of authority with respect to granting my work study permission to retrieve my mail. The third analysis of the authority relation concerns information or a body of knowledge in general. Theoretical authority, or expertise, involves giving an authoritative opinion on the accuracy, reliability or credibility of a statement or claim. Expertise affords a statement credibility based on the source of the statement. If one does not have the requisite experience and/or background

27. Linda Trinkaus Zagzebski, *Epistemic Authority: A Theory of Trust, Authority, and Autonomy in Belief* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

28. Hand, "What Should We Teach," 218.

29. Dearden, "Controversial Issues," 38.

30. For an excellent introduction to the concept of authority see, Joseph Raz, "Introduction," in *Authority*, edited by Joseph Raz, (New York: New York University Press, 1990).

knowledge to judge the inherent credibility of a claim, the decision to accept that claim as accurate or reliable can be made justifiably based solely on the credibility of its source. Expert support of a claim, when the expert is not unduly biased or self-interested, supports the justifiable acceptance of, or belief in, the claim as true.

Political philosophers have seen a close relationship between a right to rule and expertise. Political authority can be understood as a kind of permission granting. However, a political authority must also have the power to require and even coerce acceptance of both permissions granted and permissions withheld. Expert advice grants the novice permission justifiably to accept a claim presumably because the expert has an access to evidentially relevant information that the novice does not enjoy. The novice, by definition, lacks information and/or access to information. The novice can accept a claim because, based on the advice of the expert, she can justifiably believe there is evidentially relevant information that itself, independent of the expert's advice, supports the claim. In the same way expert advice to reject a claim justifies the novice in rejecting that claim.

Much of the contemporary literature on legitimate political authority has arisen in response to Robert Wolff's substantial treatment of the anarchist challenge to the possibility of any legitimate political authority.[31] Wolff argues that the problem of political authority lies in one's duty to obey the dictates of an authority. A duty of obedience vacates one's rational autonomy. The requirement of obedience to political authority eliminates one's responsibility and authority over oneself. Furthermore, if one is to accept a political authority then one must accept the directives of that authority whether or not one agrees with that directive.

A common problem underlying attempts to answer the anarchist challenge arises because of a fundamental disanalogy between political and theoretical authority. Theoretical authority does not grant the expert any power to coerce the novice to obedience. In Robert Ladenson's reply to the anarchist challenge, he attempts to dissolve the challenge arguing one's being under the political authority of another does not bring with it a requirement of obedience.[32] For Ladenson, political authority is just the permission to use coercion, there is nothing in legitimate political authority that requires a duty of obedience. While this response may be problematic with respect to political authority, it accurately represents theoretical authority. An expert does not have the power to coerce obedience or acceptance. Expert authority is unlike political authority in this fundamental regard, it functions not within a political context where obedience can be required, but within a social context where obedience is not obligatory.

The Theoretic Criterion

Within the social context of education, the student is a novice under the theoretical, but not political, authority of multiple experts. If teaching controversial issues is to have a positive impact on students, it must, at least in part, be focused on developing in the student the knowledge and skills required to navigate the social context of divergent expert testimony on socially prevalent issues. Within this context controversial issues should be identified using a *theoretic* criterion—an issue is appropriately controversial if, and only if, the issue is prevalent in the social context of the students' lives and there is observed an actual dispute *among experts* on that issue. The theoretic criterion is based on the understanding that epistemic concepts such as knowledge, evidence,

31. Robert Paul Wolff, *In Defense of Anarchy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

32. R. Ladenson, "In Defense of a Hobbesian Conception of Law," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 9(2) (1980): 134-159.

fact, reason and rationality, are all theory laden and so socially contextualized. This criterion clearly embodies Dearden's rejected behavioral criterion but focuses the criterion on particular contexts of disputation that entail the requirements of Dearden's and Hand's epistemic criterion while also applying the epistemic criterion along the lines of considerations expressed in the social criterion, since expertise, as theoretical authority, is itself both an epistemic and social category.

To support the theoretic criterion we want to consider more closely Dearden's objections to the behavioral criterion and Hand's treatment of those objections. Dearden rejects the behavioral criterion first because it would identify as controversial issues that are disputed within some group even though, "there exists a clear decision-procedure and typically there is also a publicly known and available answer," concluding that, "These matters are not controversial at all."[33] However, Hand points out, the issues in Dearden's examples are in fact controversial for the groups having the disputes. What seems relevant in such cases then is the make-up of the group. Dearden focuses on instances of "simple ignorance" or overly assertive individuals; however, there have certainly been instances in which a small group has disputed an issue that had a clear decision-procedure, and publically "known" and available answer. Such instances arose with the Copernican revolution in astronomy, the gradual acceptance of plate tectonics in geology, and the abolitionist movement in social ethics. We can conclude, then, when identifying controversial issues, dispute by experts should be given priority even over public knowledge and rationality.

It may be argued that the theoretic criterion still promotes the kind of relativism with which Dearden is concerned regarding the behavioral criterion. Dearden grounds his relativism objection to the behavioral criterion in the inevitable discontinuity between controversy and objective fact; "If all that is needed is for a number of people to assert a counter-opinion for the matter to become controversial, regardless of that counter-assertion's ungroundedness, inconsistency, invalidity or mere expressiveness of a vested interest, then even the shape of the Earth becomes at once controversial," which Dearden concludes would encourage, "the thought that what is true should be collapsed into what some group regards as true."[34] Since any expert will invariably be positioned within some conceptual framework, it seems identifying controversial issues based on disputes among experts will exacerbate rather than ameliorate the problem of relativism.

Returning to our political model, this concern can be adequately addressed. S. Lukes argues persuasively, "that every way of identifying authority is relative to one or more perspectives and is, indeed, inherently perspectival, and that there is no objective, in the sense of perspective-neutral, way of doing so."[35] For example an authority will not only use their specialized knowledge to evaluate the relevant evidence supporting a position on an issue, the expert will also decide what evidence is relevant for adjudicating the issue. This certainly sounds like relativism. This seems deeply problematic with respect to political authority. However, theoretical authority does not entail a necessary commitment to obedience. Even when an expert can be found from within one's chosen perspective, identifying controversial issues in the disputes between experts strongly suggests that no expert has the final word on a controversial issue. This consideration militates against relativism.

33. Dearden, "Controversial Issues," 38.

34. Ibid., 38.

35. S. Lukes, "Perspectives on Authority," in *Authority*, edited by Joseph Raz, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 203-217, 204.

Applying the theoretic criterion raises Alvin Goldman's question, "Which experts should we trust?" [36] This question speaks to the prevalence and import of an issue within the social context of a student's life. A novice would be more likely to accept authoritative pronouncements if the expert and novice hold a similar worldview. Goldman includes among the requirements of knowledge and reputation, the absence of bias as one characteristic of a legitimate theoretical authority. In light of Lukes' contention that authority attribution is inherently perspectival, lack of authoritative bias may be impossible. A better characteristic for legitimate theoretical authority regarding a particular issue may be lack of ad hoc reasoning. Reasoning becomes ad hoc when assumptions or presuppositions are used only to achieve a desired conclusion, those assumptions and presuppositions having no coherent or interconnected relationship to the overall worldview from which the expert is approaching the issue. Following the epistemic and social elements of the theoretic criterion, a novice, or student, is encouraged to evaluate the arguments and evidence presented by various experts *including those representing their own perspective* focused on how facts and evidence are being used in support of each expert's position.

Conclusion

We have sought to develop and argue for a framework that helps teachers and educators think through the criteria for identifying what makes a subject, issue, or curriculum suitably controversial. We presented five criteria that have been offered for consideration when evaluating whether an issue is controversial—behavioral, political, epistemic, social and theoretic. The behavioral, epistemic, and social criteria all express necessary conditions for identifying controversial issues, while the political criterion focuses on conditions unrelated to this task. We have argued that only the theoretic criterion expresses both necessary and sufficient conditions for identifying controversies suitable for educational purposes. Education has many goals but among them must be to promote the knowledge and skills necessary for social awareness of, and rational engagement with, the prevalent issues facing any citizen of a modern democracy. Using controversial issues to instill an ability to evaluate divergent expert testimony on a prevalent issue will continue to be a significant pedagogical tool. What controversial issues to incorporate into a particular classroom or curriculum must ultimately depend on the theoretical authority of the teacher engaging that particular group of students in that particular educational context.

After discussing the behavioral and epistemic criteria, Dearden distinguishes four different kinds of controversial issues: first, cases in which there is insufficient evidence to settle a dispute; second, cases where the dispute is over the weighting of relevant considerations on an issue; third, cases in which there is dispute regarding what considerations should even be considered relevant; and fourth, cases in which differing conceptual frameworks or worldviews are brought to the issue. Dearden suggests these kinds of controversies are of increasing intractability, but argues that controversies at all these levels should be included in educational curriculum. Clearly, learning to evaluate a controversial issue of prevalent social import from within a particular perspective is a crucial feature of promoting rational autonomy. In closing, Dearden asks, "Should the step be taken of calling in 'experts' to pronounce, in which case what would be the character of their expertise?"[37] We hope to have begun answering these question.

36. Alvin I. Goldman, "Experts: Which One's should You Trust," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 63(1) (2001): 85-110.

37. Dearden, "Controversial Issues," 44.

Controversy's Graveyard: The School of Education Classroom and Educational Policy Debate

Richard Hartsell & Susan B. Harden

Abstract

What is the role of teacher education classrooms in mediating educational controversy? In this paper, the authors argue schools of education approach educational controversies such as ability grouping and resegregation from a perspective that equates sublimation of controversy with progress. Although schools of education serve as conduits for educational policy, the pre-service teacher education curriculum often overlooks controversy and focuses exclusively on the technical and methodological aspects of teaching. Consequently, students rarely reflect on the existential consequences of educational policies and the role teachers play in both defining and helping students achieve a better life. The authors conclude teacher education classrooms should follow a more Kierkegaardian model towards controversy in which reflection and criticism of the dominant educational ideology are emphasized.

Keywords: *controversy; educational policy; schools of education*

In the political arena, a controversial bill is a piece of proposed legislation that elicits strong disagreement over the adoption of various courses of action. Regardless of the relative merits of these various courses of action, it is generally understood that a good way to kill the bill is to send it to a sub-committee. The implication is that the bureaucracy favors the status quo and that the best intentions of all sides of a controversy are limited by the inertia of social structures. Those who resist change know that institutions, rather than individuals, are often the mediators of policy and the primary actors in any controversy that surrounds a particular policy. While the general public appears keenly aware of the "do-nothing" nature of political bodies surrounding controversial issues in the current political climate, even practicing educators tend not to understand the role that schools of education play in mediating educational controversies. How do schools of education approach conflicting ideas within educational policy? In what ways do schools of education accept educational policies which are broadly enacted within society, even when those educational policies are defined as controversial or contested? And what does this institutional response imply about teacher education programs and corresponding teacher practices?

As social and cultural institutions, schools of education mediate contested educational policies through their policies, curriculum, and research -- consciously or unconsciously, willingly or unwillingly. With the current emphasis in education on technique and methodology for both pedagogy and lines of inquiry, it seems fair to question the degree to which schools of education mediate the educational equivalent of political controversy in the face of strong disagreement over the adoption of various educational policies and pedagogical practices.

Controversy and Progress

As with other cultural phenomena, controversy and the contested ideas it represents illuminate both the expressed and tacit values swirling within a culture.[1] What a particular culture at any given time deems controversial, as well as how it defines controversy shines a hard light into even the most hidden and least discussed corners of cultural values and mores. For example, controversial definitions of marriage have varied across generations contested around attributes of race and gender underscoring both changing racial and sexual mores within American society as well as a continuing evolution of the definition of equality.

Such positive examples of controversy reflecting a culture broadening of its definitions of diversity and equality nevertheless can give rise to the modern temptation of viewing the unfolding of history, including the evolution of all controversial issues, as moving toward a greater good. As Christopher Lasch notes, 18th century originators of modern liberal political and economic theory (such as Smith and Locke) defined notions of progress that went beyond the purely material or political to include intellectual and moral development as well. The modern belief in progress was conceived as being culturally all encompassing.[2] Controversy within such a framework tends to be viewed as promoting ever more refined and enlightened beliefs and courses of action within a culture. The trajectory of history and its accompanying controversies is always assumed to be upward with any deviance from this ascension assumed to be temporal or of no existential consequence.[3] Much of this positive connotation of controversy is reflected in Hegel's notion of opposing ideas being synthesized into higher, more complete expression of truths in an ever rising spiral toward greater understanding. [4] Viewed from the cultural perspective, such a belief implies a culture that is constantly moving, with the assistance of controversies, toward greater levels of rationality as well as more enlightened expressions of values.

This modern notion of the conflict of opposing ideas, controversy, as a part of an inexorable progression toward a higher, more enlightened level of cultural existence, however, can be misguided. The premise ignores the very real possibility that changes in what a culture considers controversial might indicate a *regression from* rather than a *progression towards* a higher level of cultural being. The quieting of a controversy does not necessarily imply a more rational or more just state of cultural existence despite the modern liberal tendency to view change, including the apparent resolution of controversies, as part of an overall progression toward higher material, political, and existential levels of being.

Recent changes in what American culture considers controversial in regard to educational policy provide some of the more illuminating examples of the problematic nature of associating the diminishment of a controversy, what Hegel called sublation, with progress. Nowhere is this phenomenon more apparent than in how schools of education and their pre-service teacher training

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1. Michael W. Apple and Landon E. Beyer. "Social Evaluation of Curriculum," *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis,* 4 (1984): 425-34.

2. Christopher Lasch, *The True and Only Heaven: Progress and Its Critics* (New York: Norton, 1991).

3. Clayton M. Christensen, *The Innovator's Dilemma: When New Technologies Cause Great Firms to Fail* (Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press, 1997). Susan B. Harden and Richard Hartsell, R., "Transitional Disruption or End Times: Community Engagement 2.0 and the Apocalyptic Possibilities of MOOCs in Higher Education," in Scott Crabill & Dan Butin (eds.), *Civic Engagement 2.0? Provocations and Dialogues on the Future of the Civic in the Disrupted University* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2014): 73-81.

4. Frederick C. Beiser, *The Cambridge Companion to Hegel* (Cambridge [England]: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

programs have come to deal with controversial, philosophically-rooted pedagogical issues such as ability grouping and resegregation.

Kierkegaard and the Philosopher's Task

Soren Kierkegaard, once wrote that he saw his life's work, the work of a philosopher, as an attempt to make life more difficult for his readers.[5] In an emerging modern and rational world dedicated to making individuals' lives easier (more convenient, more efficient, more comfortable), Kierkegaard viewed his purpose, and by extension the purpose of philosophy, as making life a bit more difficult for the individual. Particularly, Kierkegaard sought to instill in his readers a type of reflection which focused on the existential consequences of the choices we make—the ways in which our choices affect our lives and by extension the lives of others and society in general. Importantly, this desire to create existential angst in his readers was not merely a reaction against the unexamined life; it was also a reaction to the ideology, what Kierkegaard would label the "idolatry," of modernity of which the concept of progress is an integral aspect.

As conceptualized by Kierkegaard, modernity was an ideology which singularly elevates materialism, convenience, efficiency, and other typical measures of progress to a godlike status that demands powerful rejoinders. Kierkegaard saw his role as providing such counterpoint. By asking individuals to focus their reflection on the existential consequences of their choices rather than on typical yardsticks of progress such as efficiency, convenience, and even rationality, Kierkegaard sought to interject individual human life, with all its accompanying existential contradictions and complications, back into the discussion of truth and meaning. As his famous critique of Hegel suggests, Kierkegaard believed that Hegel accounted for everything in his philosophical system except what it means to be a human being who lives and dies.[6] It was Kierkegaard's desire to stimulate a particular type of reflection that privileges the immediate, the human, the specific, and the affective consequences of the choices made by individuals and by extension by communities and societies. If controversy is seen as one means to stimulate such reflection, then Kierkegaard's definition of controversy could be projected to privilege those public disputes which have immediate and obvious existential impacts on individuals.

From Kierkegaard's perspective of the philosopher as someone who complicates life, who makes it more difficult, the role of educational philosophy in teacher education programs can be viewed in sharp contrast to the majority of the teacher education curriculum which emphasizes the technical and methodological aspects of teaching. Rather than seeking to make teachers' lives easier by schooling them in the various the techniques, methods, and policies they will be required to follow, the teacher education curriculum, at least as Kierkegaard might conceive it, should focus on making teachers' professional lives more difficult: more difficult to give grades, to rank students, to teach a highly prescribed curriculum, to view good teaching as entirely quantifiable, or to create learning goals devoid of subjectivity. In short, one role of teacher education in general, and the educational philosophy aspect of teacher education in particular, should be to make it harder for pre-service teachers to perform without reflection many of the tasks they will be asked to perform in the modern public school classroom. To follow the lines of Kierkegaard's model for philosophy, educational philosophy in teacher education programs should attempt to create a sense

5. Howard V. Hong & Edna H. Hong, *The Essential Kierkegaard* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000).

6. Ibid.

of *dis ease* within teachers to the dominant educational ideology and its basis in liberal economic and political theory.

In order to fulfill this role, educational foundations courses taught from a critical pedagogy perspective for pre-service teachers have often focused on the philosophical, social, and cultural implications embedded in various sides of pedagogical controversies. In such courses, controversy provides the fertile ground out of which pre-service teachers can develop the ability to reflect both broadly and critically on an educational practice or policy. Thoughtful examination of educational controversies allows for reflection on the philosophical and moral as well as the pedagogical implications of adopting one practice over another. The role of controversy in the teacher education curriculum can assist in helping pre-service teachers shift the basis of their reflections from typical practitioner concerns such as how to deliver content more efficiently or produce higher measurable outcomes to concerns that focus on the affective existential consequences of teacher actions or pedagogical policies on the students in the classroom. Following Kierkegaard's model, the focus of reflection for pre-service teachers, particularly reflection stimulated by educational controversies, should be on how students are to be treated and taught in order to achieve more meaningful school experiences for students and by extension a more just society for all. That such reflection could call forth in pre-service teachers profoundly unsettling insights that explore the idea the classroom can be an unjust place in itself would only reinforce in Kierkegaard's eyes the necessity for a focus on educational controversies in teacher education curricula.

The assumption made by prescribing such a role for educational controversies in pre-service teacher education is that differing courses of action called for by different sides of an educational controversy not only have pedagogical consequences but also existential and societal consequences. Adopting one of the particular courses of action offered by an educational controversy has repercussions that go beyond purely pedagogical consequences such as what content is taught or how it is organized and presented. Rather, the consequences directly extend to quality of students' and teachers' individual lives as well as to the type of society schools aspire to create. Pull on the thread of controversy, in this view, and that thread should not only unravel the stitches directly connected to it but also every other stitch in the garment.

Defining Controversy Down

Admittedly, this is a high bar for the notion of educational controversy. For example, what is at present one of the most hotly debated topics in education—the acceptance or rejection of Common Core in favor of state produced curricula and standardized testing -- would not fully meet the criteria for a controversy that promotes Kierkegaard-inspired reflection because the differing policy alternatives lack any meaningful distinction as it relates to the existential concerns of the students in the classroom. Admittedly the issue of whether to accept or reject Common Core has numerous social and pedagogical implications such as local control of schools, specific curriculum content, and the normative basis for assessment. Nevertheless, although there would be differing social and pedagogical consequences for adopting or rejecting Common Core, those consequences would probably not be immediately and specifically reflected in the existential lives of students, or teachers, in the classroom. The quality of the inner life of students, the meaningfulness of the school experience for individuals, or the values reflected by the institution of education are largely unaffected by which argument prevails in the Common Core dispute. Whether curriculum standards, and the ensuing testing regimen, are created at the state or national level has little effect on the lived experiences of students and teachers in schools and does not substantively change the

type of society envisioned as the ultimate goal of schooling. In essence, the Common Core controversy does not have enough existential meat on its bones to promote the type of reflection in which pre-service teachers experience the angst, the *dis ease*, Kierkegaard held forth as the goal of philosophy in a modern world convinced of the inevitability of progress. The debate between proponents and opponents of Common Core is thus not so much a controversy in education out of which multiple veins of philosophical and ethical implications can be mined so much as it is an argument over which Caesar, the local or the national, shall be rendered unto. As such, it is an unlikely means to help pre-service teachers develop the critical insight and moral awareness necessary to question the modern liberal world's present incarnation of education with its belief in progress through increasing effective and efficient testing regimes.

If a Kierkegaardian notion of a controversy in education centers on the extent to which pedagogical debates have implications that extend beyond curriculum content or methodological practices, then the repository for controversy in teacher education programs has historically been educational foundations classes, specifically to the extent these classes confront the social, cultural, and ethical implications of specific pedagogical practices. Only in classes that deal with such consequential implications for pedagogical choices can students achieve Kierkegaard's goal of having their professional lives made more difficult for them. However, as the influence of educational philosophy has waned in teacher education programs, crowded out logistically by yet another course on methodology or management and ideologically by school districts clamoring for teachers subservient to the neoliberal approach to educational reform, the opportunities for pre-service teachers to delve into the social, cultural, and political consequences of educational policies have declined. The obvious irony of this process is that far from being progenitors of ongoing pedagogical debate created by educational controversies, schools of education serve primarily as conduits of existing educational policies whose origins in controversy have long since faded into the haze of the dominant ideology's policy mandates. Rather than deconstructing educational policies and the pedagogical philosophies out of which they arrive, including the effects these policies may have on the existential lives of individuals or on the social consequences for a culture, schools of education are far more likely to reify existing educational policies. Consequently, any debate or speculation on an educational policy or practice that goes beyond the practical pedagogical merits to the philosophical underpinnings or the existential consequences of the policy or practice [anything that might create Kierkegaardian ethical doubt] is thwarted by the assumption that any controversy which may be implicit within the policy has long since been settled. The discussion that follows outlines two controversies in education with both pedagogical and societal implications which schools of education presently tend to treat as non-controversies (ability grouping and resegregation). Yet these two controversies overflow with precisely the type of existential consequences for students that could promote the reflection Kierkegaard viewed as the purpose of philosophy. It would appear then that at least for these two issues schools of education have abandoned the notion of making at least part of their pre-service students' professional lives more difficult and have created at least the de facto assumption that the controversies surrounding ability grouping and resegregation have been overcome.

The Ability Grouping Controversy

One such historical educational controversy that appears on the surface at least to have been laid to rest within pre-service teacher professional programs is the debate over the pedagog-

ical practice of ability grouping; variations of which are alternatively known as tracking or streaming. The historical antecedents of the poles in the debate over this practice are approximately one hundred years old and can be found in two statements of practice released by the fledgling National Education Association barely twenty-five years apart. In 1893, the NEA stated that every subject should not only be taught to all students but also taught in similar ways. However, by 1918 the NEA suggested that different academic tracks, with different courses and methods, be offered in secondary schools. Originally, there were two lines of argument supporting such a policy about-face, both of which were rooted in Progressivism. First, following Progressivism's emphasis on the life-adjustment function of schooling, it was argued that three different tracks (academic, vocational, and general) corresponding to students' differing post-secondary aptitudes and plans (for example: college, carpentry, or secretarial work) would create a schooling experience that was more relevant to students' lives and more efficient of societal resources in the face of an exponentially growing number of students. The second argument suggested students learn better, as well as become more socially comfortable, in settings where they are surrounded by classmates of similar abilities. Although this second argument obviously intersected the argument for schools creating different tracks for different expected life experiences, the second argument was originally thought to be less of a reason for schools to adopt the homogenous grouping of students as accepted pedagogical policy.[7]

Homogenous grouping of secondary school students was readily accepted by early 20th century educators because of the historical convergence of three factors: the rising tide of immigration; the corresponding growth in the size of schools; and the introduction of scientific intelligence testing. Increasing numbers of first generation students, as well as expanding immigration patterns that included poorer Mediterranean and eastern European countries, meant that educators needed an efficient and convenient way to organize instruction to large numbers of students with highly diverse backgrounds and ability levels.[8] Tracking provided the most obvious effective answer to such an organizational problem, and the widespread acceptance within the psychological academic community of the emerging field of individual intelligence testing resolved the issue of how to place students appropriately and fairly into the various tracks.[9] The pragmatism of social efficiency co-mingled with the empiricism of science to form an argument for tracking that was largely unchallenged for most of the first half of the twentieth century. Tracking, in short, was a relatively non-controversial pedagogical practice for the first four decades of its existence. What debate there was centered on its instructional efficacy—whether it enhanced learning among the various tracked groups—and not upon a more holistic examination of its existential or societal consequences.

Interestingly, however, by mid-century the two basic arguments for tracking had switched positions of importance with the belief tracking enhanced all students' possibilities for learning becoming dominant and the rationale of tracking for post-secondary expectations receding into the background. Such a switch corresponded with a move in the 1950s toward a more generalized academic curriculum for all students, as opposed to differentiated curricula based on students'

7. James A. Nicholson, *What Research Says about Ability Grouping and Academic Achievement* (1998). Available at http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED426129.

8. Samuel Lucus, *Tracking Inequality: Stratification and Mobility in American High Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1999).

9. Sarah Mondale and Sarah B. Patton, eds., *School: The Story of American Public Education* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002).

vocational expectations.[10] Students' perceived abilities became the overt rationale for placing students in homogenous groups. In essence, students were grouped into stratified but similar classes *because* of their academic abilities rather than their varying abilities and curricula merely being thought of as corresponding to their differing vocational destinations.

Despite this reversal of the primary rationale for tracking or ability grouping, as it tended to be labeled after the change in rationale, the evidence for the efficiency of ability grouping as a basic instructional practice was at best inconclusive. In a meta-analysis of the effects on students during the first half century of tracking, Findley and Bryan[11] concluded that ability grouping showed in a narrow majority of studies a slight improvement in student achievement for students at the very top of the academic ability hierarchy; however, for students tracked into groups of average or below average academic ability levels, a majority of studies demonstrated unfavorable effects on student learning with the most unfavorable effects tending to occur within the lowest ability level groups. The inconclusive evidence for the overall effectiveness of tracking and the more conclusive evidence regarding the detrimental effect of tracking on lower level students intersected with the push to desegregate schools brought about by Brown to lay the foundation for the pedagogical debate over ability grouping to morph into a full-blown educational controversy with obvious individual and societal ramifications. Opponents of tracking began to argue in the 1960s that despite inconclusive evidence for its impact on learning, the reliance on ability grouping as an instructional practice was being doubled down on by many school districts in an attempt to keep schools segregated, albeit from inside with highly segregated classes as opposed to completely segregated schools. Braddock,[12] for example, found high levels of racial and ethnic disparity in ability groups with white and Asian students being highly overrepresented in high ability classes and African-American and Latino students being even more overrepresented in low ability level classes. Additionally, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds are significantly more likely to be placed in lower ability level tracks reflecting the complex interplay between race and economic status reflected in American culture at large. Most troubling of all is the data which suggests that once placed in a track students are far more likely than not to remain in the same track for the entirety of their secondary schooling experience.[13] At least part of the explanation for such rigidity is the well-documented tendency for students in lower tracks to receive poorer quality classroom experiences in at least two respects. First, better teachers (or at least teachers with higher degrees and more experience) tend to gravitate toward higher track classes. Second, class activities in lower ranked tracks focus on drill and rote memorization[14] while students in higher tracks are asked to perform more higher-order thinking activities such as critical analysis and class discussion. Racial discrepancies combined with lower quality instruction and little mobility between tracks have led prominent educators such as Kozol[15] to suggest that tracking is simply the latest

10. Lucas, *Tracking Inequality*.

11. Warren Findley & Mirian Bryan, *Ability grouping: 1970, Status, Impact, and Alternatives* (Athens, Ga.: University of Georgia Press, 1971).

12. Henry J. Braddock, "Tracking: Implications for Student Race-ethnic Subgroups," Report No. 1 (Baltimore, MD: Center for Research on Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students. ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED325600, 1990).

13. Jeannie Oakes, "Two cities' Tracking and Within-school Segregation," *Teachers College Record*, 96 (1995): 681-690.

14. Cynthia Evans, "Access, Equality, and Intelligence: Another Look at Tracking," *English Journal*, 84(8) (1995): 63-65.

15. Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequities: Children in America's Schools* (New York: Crown, 1991).

and most effective legal means to racially segregate students and insure a continuing underclass of poor Americans that is disproportionately comprised of people of color.

The changing contours of the debate over tracking—from a focus primarily on the effects on student learning to a concern for the social justice and individual rights implications of tracking—suggest dramatically raised stakes for the outcome of the debate and the decision to continue or reduce the practice of tracking. The implications spill out of the classroom-oriented questions centered on tracking's effectiveness as a tool for increasing achievement and into society at large with possible consequences that stab at the heart of some of American culture's most deeply processed values such as individual equality and opportunity. This rising awareness of such possible consequences for individual rights and societal values because of ability grouping spawned a "detracking" movement that appeared in the literature during the late 1980s. As its name suggests, this movement sought to return most classrooms to a heterogeneous mixture of student abilities. Importantly, the vast majority of authors who advocated detracking did not seek to reinstate the 1893 NEA directive that all students should be taught the same curriculum in a similar manner.[16] Rather, detracking sought to restore a mixture of academic ability levels to all classrooms even if curricula were tailored somewhat to students' post-secondary expectations. In particular, detracking advocates sought to reverse the downward creep ability grouping had made from secondary schools into middle schools and even lower where no appeal to the post-secondary needs of students could be made.[17] At least judged by its appearances in educational literature, the detracking movement gained prominence during the 1990s and then tended to peak in the early 2000s with fewer than half the number of academic journal articles appearing between 2010 and 2015 than appeared between 2000 and 2005.

Regardless of the present state in the ebb and flow of the detracking debate, the consideration of specific consequences for society and individuals the debate can bring to ability grouping makes the choice to track students one where pre-service teachers can and should feel the existential weight of the choice. From the perspective of Kierkegaard's charge to the philosopher to make life more difficult, the practice of ability grouping offers great possibilities for pre-service teachers to expand their consciousness regarding the magnitude of consequences pedagogical practices can have. Regardless of whether these students have any choice as in-service teachers regarding the extent to which they are required to participate in widespread ability grouping, it is imperative they are confronted with the possible consequences tracking can have on society and individuals. Only then, to paraphrase Kierkegaard, will they be able to develop the moral conscience that will make their lives as teachers at once both more difficult and more authentic.

The evolution of the debate over tracking and ability grouping from a methodological debate over the efficacy of a specific pedagogical practice to a moral debate over the existential consequences of the practice raises the issue to the level of educational controversy, even when considered against the high bar of a Kierkegaard-inspired definition of educational controversy. Implicit in this definition of controversy is the notion that the choices presented by the controversy can create the guilt and anguish Kierkegaard suggests is always present in an engaged moral life. If pre-service teachers are presented with the full range of the consequences to the widespread use of ability grouping, it is far more unlikely they will be able to participate in the practice, even if required to do so, without a twinge of conscience over the relative cost and benefit of tracking.

16. James Mallery & Janet Mallery, "The American Legacy of Ability Grouping: Tracking Reconsidered," *Multicultural Education*, 7(1) (1999): 13-15.

17. Alan Graubard, "Progressive Education and the Tracking Debate," *Radical Teacher*, 70 (2004): 32-39.

Whether or not pre-service teachers develop such a conscience largely depends on the extent to which they are exposed by their teacher education programs to the full measure of the ability grouping controversy. The extent to which widespread ability grouping is presented to pre-service teacher education students as having specific existential and societal ramifications (i.e. as an educational controversy instead of as debate over instructional methodology), is precisely the extent to which these students are likely to develop what could be called a pedagogical conscience: a full appreciation for the effect choices made by states, districts, and classroom teachers can have on the lives of individuals and on the nature of society.

There is little evidence to suggest, however, that pre-service teachers are presently developing such a pedagogical conscience through an examination of the controversy surrounding ability grouping and tracking as part of their teacher education programs. What evidence exists tends to be anecdotal or circumstantial, for the academic literature is sparse regarding connections between teacher preparation programs and the ability grouping controversy. Of the approximately seventy-five articles in the EBSCO education database that in any way link ability grouping and teacher education, the vast majority deal with ability grouping as it relates to special education or to programs for the gifted and talented. Only three articles[18] deal specifically with widespread ability grouping as a topic undertaken in teacher education programs. Moreover, only one of these three[19] deals with the full range of individual and societal consequences that define ability grouping as an educational controversy, and this article focuses on tracking in the Australian national school system and teacher education programs in Australia. The evidence for pre-service teachers being confronted with the ability grouping controversy is similarly thin in regard to textbook publication. A quick survey of five of the most-widely used textbooks in "Introduction to Education" or "Educational Foundations" courses—the courses in which discussions of the widespread use of tracking are most likely to be found in teacher education programs—finds fewer than a dozen pages devoted to ability grouping and tracking[20]. And once again, the vast majority of the limited material focuses on the instructional consequences of tracking and ignores the existential consequences. In short, textbooks for pre-service teachers as well as the academic literature related to the content of teacher education programs seem to suggest that ability grouping, to the extent that it is even discussed within pre-service programs, is dealt with as a methodological concern and not as an educational controversy.

The Resegregation Controversy

The resegregation of many public schools during the last decade is another issue that rises to the level of an educational controversy, even when educational controversy is narrowly defined

18. Rachel Lotan, "Teaching Teachers to Build Equitable Classrooms," *Theory Into Practice*, 45(1) (2006): 32-39; Maika Watanabe, "Lessons from a Teacher Inquiry Group about Tracking: Perceived Student Choice in Course-taking and its Implication for Detracking Reform," *Teachers College Record,* 109(9) (2007): 2136-2170; Tasha Riley, "Deciding Factors: Do Factors Beyond Achievement Influence Teachers' Student Placement Decisions?" *Journal of Education for Teaching,* 40(1) (2014): 94-96.

19. Riley, "Deciding Factors," 94-96.

20. Allan C. Ornstein, Daniel U. Levine, & Gerry Gutek, *Foundations of Education, 11th Edition* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, Cengage Learning, 2010); James A. Johnson, Diann L. Musial, Gene E. Hall, & Donna M. Gollnick, *Foundations of American Education: Becoming Effective Teachers in Challenging Times, 16th Edition* (Boston, MA: Pearson, 2013); Richard Arends, *Learning to Teach* (Dubuque, IA: McGraw Hill Education, 2014); Don Kauchak & Paul Eggen, *Introduction to Teaching: Becoming a Professional, 5th Edition* (Upper Saddle River: Pearson, 2013); L. Dean Webb, Arlene Metha, & K. Forbis Jordan, *Foundations of American Education, 7th Edition* (Boston, MA: Pear-son, 2010).

as an issue whose consequences directly spill over into the lives of individuals and the values of society. As education controversies are measured, the debate regarding the education of non-white children and the corresponding policy of how segregation or integration is mediated in public schools might be considered the pinnacle controversy in American educational policy. The controversy dominated the social consciousness of the nation in the 20th century and race was the primary identifier for how American society organized schools. The 1954 *Brown v Board of Education* Supreme Court ruling is widely considered one of the most transformational educational and societal decisions in American history and brought with it massive policy changes. But as we entered the 21st century, the controversy quieted and the national focus shifted from integration to accountability. Correspondingly, teacher education programs seemed to be complicit, intentionally or unintentionally, in the cultural decision to put aside integration as a national priority. Segregation may be the starkest of examples of how schools of education are institutions where controversies go to die.

For the first sixty years of the 20th century, the controversy surrounding segregation was commonly discussed through the devastating legal claim of "separate but equal." The Supreme Court's landmark 1954 ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education* that outlawed school segregation, the 1964 *Civil Rights Act*, and 1968 Supreme Court ruling in *Green v. County Board of New Kent County* dramatically and rightly shifted the dominant argument to "separate is inherently unequal." In the sixty years since the *Brown* decision, the controversy of school integration and the benefits of policy have been closely studied by education researchers and the findings in terms of demographics and outcomes are significant.

Prior to 1954 in seventeen states, largely located in the south, there were virtually no racially integrated schools. With help of the 1964 *Civil Rights Act* and Supreme Court rulings supporting desegregation in 1968 and 1973, most schools were integrated to some degree by the early 1970's. Since forced integration, forty years of educational research has shown that desegregation dramatically improved long-run outcomes for black students specifically in educational and occupational attainment [high school graduation rates, higher wages, job status, annual family income, lower incidence of poverty], college quality, reduced probability of incarceration, and improved health. Desegregation policies narrowed black-white gaps in per-pupil spending and led to smaller class sizes for black students.[21]

However in the last decade, racial isolation has been exacerbated by demographic shifts, judicial rulings, and accountability policies. Since 1968, the country has experienced profound demographic shifts in public school student populations: white enrollment has declined 28%, black enrollment has increased 19%, and Latino enrollment has grown by almost 500%. These phenomena mirror national population trends. In absolute terms, whites comprised 80% of all public school students in 1968 but barely hold a majority in 2011. Currently, Latinos make up the second largest demographic category of public school students nationwide and largest category in the Western region[22]. While white populations still control the vast majority of power and wealth, demograph-ically the country is becoming browner and it is projected that whites will hold minority status by mid-century. Consequently, the parameters regarding the controver-

21. Rucker C. Johnson, "Long-run Impacts of School Desegregation and School Quality on Adult Attainment," working paper, *National Bureau of Economic Research*, 2010, *http://www.nber.org/papers/w16664.*

22. Gary Orfield, Erica Frankenberg, Jongyeon Ee, & John Kuscera, "Brown at 60: Great Progress, a Long Retreat and an Uncertain Future," *The Civil Rights Project*, May 15, 2014, http://civilrightsproject.ucla.edu/research/k-12-education/integration-and-diversity/brown-at-60-great-progress-a-long-retreat-and-an-uncertain-future.

sy of integration have developed beyond the bi-racial definitions of segregation in the Civil Rights Era to include a multicultural reality led by the high growth of Latino populations.

The momentum driving progress slowed as the Supreme Court put forward a string of decisions ending desegregation plans in the years from 1991-2007. Under court ordered desegregation after *Brown*, the percent of black students in majority white schools peaked at 43.5% in 1988. As a result of the court-ordered deregulation, the southern region has experienced a regression toward more segregation as school assignment plans could no longer assign students based on race. While the demographics of our communities are more diverse than in 1968, persistent racism and classism in neighborhood housing patterns created a return to highly homogenous neighborhood schools. In 2011, the percentage of black students in majority white schools was 23.2% which approximated the level of integration in 1968. Currently, more than one in three black students attends hyper-segregated [91-100%] minority schools in the South.[23]

The timing of the waves of immigration in the 1990's and the rapid growth in Latino birthrates have led to an 495% increase in Latino students between 1968 and 2011, compared to a 28% decline in white enrollment and a 19% increase in black enrollment. Because of the changing judicial climate away from desegregation, the majority of Latino students have not experienced the dramatic benefits of integration when compared to black populations. As a result, Latino students currently experience the high levels in group isolation, second only to white students in the level of in-group isolation, and have the lowest exposure to white students nationally.[24]

The resegregation of our schools also has direct connections to the increase in income equality and the inequitable distribution of resources. This was the same argument put forward in the Civil Rights Era: separate is not equal. In hyper-segregated schools with 91-100% black and Latino students, half of this subset is low-income. In a country founded on white privilege which concentrates power and wealth in the hands of whites, there is a correlation of poverty and racial concentration. Since the advent of public schooling, majority white schools are extremely more likely to be middle-class or wealthy schools and integration did very little to change racist and classist neighborhood housing patterns underlying school assignment. What integration did do is to provide access to the educational benefits of the middle class including experienced teachers, rigorous and diverse courses, more educational materials, and enriched experiences.

Similar to the plight of Latino students and despite the overwhelming educational research showcasing the benefits, the integration and diversity achieved in the majority of public schools between 1968 and 2000 has not been mirrored in public teacher education programs which remain predominately white.[25] Blaming policies like salaries and racially biased admission tests needed to maintain teacher quality, teacher preparation programs have largely failed in their efforts to recruit and thereby diversify teacher education programs.[26] Appearing powerless to address racial isolation within their own programs, teacher preparation accrediting bodies have responded by turning away from the controversy and turning toward methods and accountability standards as strategies to deliver the diversity outcomes lost to resegregation. For example, *The*

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Richard H. Milner, "But Good Intentions Are Not Enough: Doing What's Necessary to Teach for Diversity," in *White Teachers/ Diverse Classrooms*, ed. Julie G. Landsman and Chance Lewis (Sterling, VA: Stylus, 2011): 56-77.

26. Rachel Ragland, "Advancing Diversity in the Teaching Workforce: Three Initiatives Working Toward Solutions," Webinar, American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, November 17, 2015, https://secure.aacte.org/apps/rl/resource.php?resid=570&ref=rl.

Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation standards for teacher preparation programs include practices mandating that "the teacher uses understanding of individual differences and diverse cultures and communities to ensure inclusive learning environments that enable each learner to meet high standards,"[27] even though neither the pre-service teachers themselves nor their future classrooms will be diverse places.

In adhering to such standards, teacher education programs are reflecting a broader national policy shift in addressing the controversial issue of how to educate non-white students from regulations mandating diverse schools to regulations mandating accountability and efficiency, ignoring the moral and cultural implications as well as the research. Beginning in the mid-1980's as the Supreme Court and policy makers began dismantling the legal framework supporting desegregation and waves of immigration began to take hold, racial isolation in schools returned and the corresponding progressive outcomes for non-white children stalled. Championing a neoliberal ideology utilizing market mechanisms like competition and accountability rather than desegregation became the dominant strategy to educate non-white children as enacted by the flagship legislation of *No Child Left Behind* in 2002. The effect of this ideological shift was to move the focus of the controversy away from the cultural factors that create racial isolation, like racism and the legacy of racism, and toward the performance of the school system. Practically, as this policy rippled its way into teacher preparation curricula, programs braced themselves for educating pre-service teachers for an impossible task of shouldering the consequences of resegregation. The focus became about teacher quality [raising admission standards, graduation and certification requirements] and improved methods. And the controversy about integration as the dominant strategy to educate non-white children died.

As with ability grouping, the absence of controversy within teacher education programs over the resegregation issue is evidenced by what tends to be missing from textbooks and research literature. Although the majority of the most used Introduction to Education texts discuss pre-Brown school segregation and post-Brown attempts at integration, only two provide even a cursory mention of the *de facto* resegregation of public schools that has occurred during the past decade. Moreover, although there is significant amount of research on the recent resegregation of public schools (85 articles in the EBSCO Education Database since 1995), none of this research pursues the ramifications resegregation has for pre-service teacher education.

Teaching without Controversy

Suggesting that the controversial nature of issues such as ability grouping and the resegregation of public schools is completely ignored within schools of education pre-service teacher training programs is perhaps an overstatement. Nevertheless, given the deeply consequential and existential nature of the choices presented by these controversies—for individuals, communities, and cultures—it remains reasonable to suggest that the present discussion within teacher training programs surrounding ability grouping and segregation is muted at best. That the controversial nature of these practices remains for the most part outside the curricular walls of pre-service teacher education presents questions both in terms of why this phenomenon occurs and what some of its professional practice implications for graduates of teacher education programs might be. Although outside the boundaries of this inquiry, it is reasonable to speculate that the absence of

27. The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation, "CAEP Standards," February 13, 2015, file:///C:/Users/Inspiration/Downloads/caep-2013-accreditation-standards.pdf.

controversy within teacher training programs is at least partially the result of public education's neoliberal inspired focus on quantifiable accountability as the primary means of driving school progress. As teachers, schools, and districts are increasingly faced with punitive consequences for not meeting narrowly-defined measurable objectives, concepts of teaching have unsurprisingly narrowed to focus on the specific metrics that serve to define teaching effectiveness.

Such changes inevitably manifest in pre-service teacher education programs as programs mold their curricula to state certification mandates and employer desires that privilege the technocratic, methodological aspects of teaching assumed to produce more effective and more efficient teaching (i.e. greater knowledge transfer at less cost). In this process, controversy tends to be left out in the cold. Within professional program curricula, classes that focus on methodology and quantifiable assessment supplant classes in educational foundations and philosophy, areas of study more conducive to discussions of pedagogical controversies. Despite mission statements to the contrary, the foci of emphasis in professional training programs become less concerned with the reverberation of pedagogical issues within the lives of students and the values of society and more concerned with the maximization of scores on quantifiable student assessments. Questions surrounding the intersection of schooling with the lives of individuals and the well-being of society are replaced with inside-baseball pseudo controversies such as common core or state standards, phonetics or whole language, and new math or math fundamentals. What is deemed controversial remains within the realm of technical questions of how to increase student performance and rarely ventures into questions surrounding the purpose of schooling or what the individual and societal consequences of various pedagogical choices are. Such a controversy free zone within teacher education programs may or may not produce practicing teachers who are able to maximize student performance, and by extension progress in education, as measured by quantifiable assessments. What it most assuredly does not help mold are teachers capable of critically reflecting on the existential consequences of the institution of education and the role teachers play in both defining and helping students achieve a better life.

Queer Educations: Pondering Perverse Pedagogy

Adam J. Greteman

Abstract

In the current essay, the author joins work on sexuality, queerness and education by focusing on thinking sex and sexuality through the concept of perversion. While perversion is often used in odious and un-critical ways, the author takes seriously the work of perversion as a social, ethical, and educational concept. The author does so thinking through the continued need for developing and engaging queer sexual ethics in the midst of various and arguably significant gains around gay rights and inclusion. Does perversion open up space to imagine queer education in the face of hetero-and-homonormativity? The author concludes by turning to the Marquis de Sade as a perverse philosopher of education who refutes reproduction in favor of perverse pedagogy.

Keywords: *Queer Pedagogy, Perversion, Marquis de Sade, Controversy, Sexuality*

> "The curriculum moves toward the polymorphously perverse...when the problem becomes the making of questions that can unsettle the docility of education."[1]

> "Whereas sexuality has been integrated, that which cannot be integrated, the actual spiciness of sex, continues to be detested by society."[2]

Introduction

Sexuality has a strange place within educational discourses and practices. It refers to ideas around "identity" (e.g., gay, lesbian, bisexual, straight) propelling debates about inclusion, diversity, and safety. And it refers to "acts" (e.g., abstinence, safe sex) sparking debates about the appropriateness of such a topic. One identifies with a particular sexuality and one's sexuality is presupposed to connect to particular forms of acts. Sex education has largely been the site where such debates have occurred.[3] And these debates have struggled with how the inclusion of sexuality, both in terms of acts (e.g., (non)reproductive sex) and identities (e.g., homosexuality) are addressed to students. Educational scholarship around sex education has encountered, explored, and exposed the challenges and contradictions when sexuality enters the curriculum. For Silin there was and

1. Deborah Britzman, *Lost Subjects Contested Objects: Toward a Psychoanalytic Inquiry in Education* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1998), 79.

2. Theodore Adorno, "Sexual Taboos and Law Today," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2005), 73.

3. Jonathan Zimmerman, *Too Hot to Handle: A Global History of Sex Education* (Princeton, NY: Princeton University Press, 2015).

still is a "passion for ignorance" around sex education.[4] And as Gilbert explored, sex education illustrates the anxieties children and adolescents create for adults thinking and teaching around and about issues related to "sexuality" in school.[5] The subject of sexuality in public education is, as Mayo argued, a disputed subject.[6] Historically, sex education has been "the site for working on the bodies of children, adolescents, and teachers" in order to produce subjects that fit within normative and reproductive social ideas.[7] Therefore, the anxieties and controversies about youth and sexuality have framed much of the thinking about sexuality in schools.

However, over the last several decades queer scholarship in education has sought to intervene in such anxieties and controversies in order to care for and do justice to the work of and lives of "queerness" beyond the sex education classroom. There has been a concerted effort to reframe the role of and necessity of sexuality in education; this without its own controversies since changing the conversation can upend expectations. "Can the conversation," Britzman asked, "begin with the educator's interest in the work of crafting a generous sociality that refuses to justify sexuality through the consolation of fixing a proper place?[8] Given that some versions of homosexuality have been given a proper place at the table, my conversation starts elsewhere – rather provisionally. Here I consider the word perversion and what work it might do to craft sociality that refuses to be justified or rationalized or made respectable by either hetero- or homonormative standards. My focus in this paper is to explore the challenges and possibilities of perversion in pedagogy to push educational scholarship beyond assimilationist strategies or arguments grounded in "identity." Perversion more often than not seems to get taken up in the pathological sense in educational work. It is a word thrown in to provoke a reader to see something (e.g., neoliberal reform; technology) as perverting education away from any number of presupposed aims.[9] Or it is used within homophobic logics to illustrate how attending to issues of sexuality could "pervert" children away from imagined heterosexual futures. Rarely, of course, in such arguments is perversion defined, rather its definition is assumed. Its rhetorical flair does the work of provoking a reader to understand the severity of the given issue. Reliance on perversion's odious history, however, neglects the reality that some find pleasure in the word; that perversion may have histories and aims of its own.

As such, I offer what Sedgwick might call a "reparative" reading of perversion. This is not, to be sure, to make perversion productive for education. It is to speculate about the need for further engagement with sexuality in the face of what seems to be particular forms of societal acceptance. The reality remains that homophobic violence continues to persist in various ways in different spaces, illustrating the precarity of acceptance. Sexuality and the perverse are ever evolving and changing. The task of speculation around perversions then is to resist the need for productive (or reproductive) scholarship that has "utility" in favor of engaging issues of sexuality and autonomy from the perspective of pleasure with aims that focus our attention elsewhere. After all, "Sexual

4. Jonathan Silin, *Sex, Death, and the Education of Children: Our Passion for Ignorance in the Age of AIDS* (New York, NY: Teachers College Press, 1998).

5. Jen Gilbert, *Sexuality in School: The Limits of Education* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

6. Cris Mayo, *Disputing the Subject of Sex: Sexuality and Public School Controversies* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004).

7. Britzman, *Lost Subjects*, 67.

8. Ibid., 78.

9. See for example: Joe Kincheloe, "Exposing the Technocratic Perversion of Education," in *Key Words in Critical Pedagogy*, eds. Kecia Hayes, Shirley Steinberg, & Kenneth Tobin (Rotterdam, Netherlands: Sense Publishers, 2011): 1-20; Dave Hill "Educational Perversions and Global Neoliberalism," in *Neoliberalism and Education Reform*, eds. E. Wayne Ross & Rich Gibson (Cresskill, NK: Hampton Press, 2006): 107-144.

autonomy requires more than freedom of choice, tolerance, and the liberalization of sex laws. It requires," as Warner argued, "access to pleasures and possibilities, since people commonly do not know their desires until they find them."[10] Education rarely assists in helping students find their desires – doing so encounters accusations of impropriety and recruitment. To do so may well provoke accusations of perverting the purpose(s) of education. Thus engaging perversion may challenge education in the midst of education's half-hearted embrace of GLBTQ concerns to do forsake respectable arguments in favor of those that upend the continued reproduction of various social and sexual norms.

Sexuality's Presence

The politics around sexuality are, of course, quickly changing, although for what ends is contestable. It is a topic present in everyday news and visual culture. Same-sex marriage became the law of the land in 2015 in the United States with the Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* and this in the midst of increased divorce rates for straight couples over the last several decades and attitudes becoming more lax toward sexual promiscuity. Such changes illustrate the reality that conservative gay desires for marriage and the queer critique of marriage have strangely both seen some success.[11] Same sex couples can marry at the same time interest in marriage, or at least staying married, is waning. Sexuality can be and still is controversial, but the former controversies around gay marriage are subsiding. Left in the wake of such change remains significant challenges that queer people face in the material world based on their sexuality (e.g., bodily harm, job and housing discrimination). While the homonormative dream of accessing marriage rights and becoming "respectable" couples is now a dream come true, there remains the need to address and sustain queer cultures that refuse to embrace such dreams. This is a challenge given the fears and anxieties that still surround queerness in education. The threat of homonormativity—what Lisa Duggan defined as "a politics that does not contest dominant heteronormative assumptions and institutions, but upholds and sustains them, while promising…a privatized, depoliticized gay culture anchored in domesticity and consumption" is serious and seriously in need of being challenged.[12]

It is with the need to sustain queer cultures—in the face of homonormativity—that my interest emerges in this speculative essay on perversion. There is a need, perhaps, to pervert queer theory and its aims as queer's presence changes in education. There still exist concerns and fears that sexuality may pervert the given social order, particularly within education. Sexuality's presence still provokes. This was notably seen during the 2009 mayoral race in Houston when Rick Scarborough circulated a letter regarding the "Homosexual Agenda" of then candidate Annise Parker. In the letter, Scarborough argued that one part of the homosexual agenda was to "Teach homosexuality to school children, starting in kindergarten, as an acceptable, alternative lifestyle...This enables homosexuals to recruit children to their lifestyle."[13] Fears of recruitment are, of course, nothing new in education. Yet, such fears illustrate that homophobia (and homophobes)

10. Michael Warner, *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 7.

11. See Andrew Sullivan, *Virtually Normal: An Argument about Homosexuality* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1996) and Warner, *The Trouble with Normal.*

12. Lisa Duggan, *The Twilight of Equality?: Neoliberalism, Cultural Politics, and the Attach on Democracy* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press 2003), 50.

13. Kyle Mantyla, "Scarborough Jumps into Mayoral Race with Anti-Gay E-mail," retrieved from http://www.rightwingwatch.org/content/scarborough-jumps-houston-mayoral-race-anti-gay-email.

fantastically believe homosexuality can, in fact, be taught. Teaching can make people gay and the vulnerable of society (e.g., students) need protections from such teachings. Pedagogy is central to such debates because it is what potentially perverts children from imagined heterosexual aims. "Teaching" about homosexuality in schools might, so it seems, cause one to become homosexual. Arguments against such fantastic homophobic logic have turned to science to assert that such logic is preposterous since, one is born gay. A turn to such logic however, as Rohy illustrated is still problematic. "One of the most pernicious effects of 'born gay,' then, is its implicit corollary, 'born straight,' which obscures all the ways in which heteronormative culture works systematically to interpellate individuals to their proper roles through influences, incentives, and threats."[14] Whether one is "born gay" or one "becomes gay" may not be something that can be finally determined. Instead, we might move to articulate the need to sustain "queerness" as something related to and intimately connected to social worlds and communities that seek to pervert norms.

Perversion, in the face of queer's normalization, disrupts the growing institutionalization of particular queer projects and identities. In order to develop this argument, I offer a reading of the Marquis de Sade. Sade, as a perverse philosopher of education, I argue, refuted reproduction in favor of perverse pedagogy. He offers, unlike more recognizable philosophers of education like Kant and Rousseau, a radical assessment of perverse pleasures in pedagogy. His work is queer, indeed, but also presents a queer form of sociality. While queerness and queers are from the vantage of moralists and respectable gay politics viewed as relativist and self-indulgent, Michael Warner articulated an "ethics of queer life." There is, in Warner's argument, a "special kind of sociability that holds queer culture together."[15] And this culture "begins with an acknowledgement of all that is most abject and least reputable in oneself."[16] Far from looking above to see how one should act according to the respectable crowd - keeping up with the Jones's - within queer circles "you stand to learn most from the people you think are beneath you" cutting "against every form of hierarchy you could bring into the room."[17] There is dignity in queerness, it is simply that dignity is reconfigured and refuses to be founded on the shaming of sex deemed perverse.

Shaming and/or avoiding sex are commonplace within engagements of sexuality in education. Mainstream arguments for the inclusion of sexual minorities rest on assumptions that sexual minorities are "normal" and "deserving of protections" as persons who identify in particular ways. They must be protected now as new norms of acceptability have been installed. They must not, however, be brought into existence through education. Education has in some regards assimilated particular understandings and representations of sexuality. However, as Todd Jennings argued, there is a need to move beyond assimilationist strategies for teaching about LGBTQ issues in teacher education.[18] While assimilationist strategies have been appealing for some time in education, they have largely failed at engaging the challenges of sexuality and sex to education. To teach transgressive representations, he argued, may be risky since, "Transgressive sexual and gender identities and expressions do have the potential to disrupt and make acceptance more difficult to

14. Valerie Rohy, *Lost Causes: Narrative, Etiology, and Queer Theory* (New York: NY: Oxford University Press, 2015), 20.

15. Warner, *The Trouble with Normal*, 35.

16. Ibid, 35.

17. Ibid, 35.

18. Todd Jennings, "Teaching Transgressive Representations of LGBTQ People in Educator Preparation: Is Conformity Required for Inclusion?" *The Educational Forum*, 79 (4) (2015): 451-458.

achieve because they challenge the notion that anyone could thrive outside narrow heteronormative and gender-normative scripts."[19] Transgressive sexual and gender identities — identities that pervert normative ideas — are risky and offer scripts that go off the straight-and-narrow path implicit within education's conservative and reproductive project.[20]

As such, the status of "queer" subjects in education is still contested and controversial. Mary Lou Rasmussen pointed out how the changing demands placed on education programs around certification and accountability have further narrowed the curriculum and the viability of engaging numerous topics, including issues of sexuality and gender.[21] This is true for Australia (Rasmussen's context), the United States, and other places grappling with neoliberal education reforms that have gone global. As education has been reformed in particular ways, particular pedagogical work becomes more and more unthinkable given that it fails to be productive and profitable. This, however, does not mean that issues around difference are no longer present. Alongside neoliberal reforms are still the continued demands for protections and inclusions of difference in schools. Despite being less able to be engaged in pre-service teacher education, the demands still exist.

GLBTQ students (in different ways) over the last several decades have become viewed as necessary to protect and teach. However, engaging topics of sexuality are still limited and narrow within K-12 schools and teacher education. GLBTQ students exist and should be protected, but engaging topics that challenge various norms, including sexual and gender norms, continue to be rather challenging. Queer topics are still, as Rasmussen and Allen argued operating in a "cul-de-sac" that tethers them to particular domains (e.g., sex education) and topics (e.g., gender and sexuality) making it a challenge to argue and illustrate the importance of sexuality to larger social, political, ethical, and pedagogical issues.[22] This may mean that queer itself needs to be perverted in order to re-articulate its political, ethical, social, and educational stances for the 21st century. Such a project, to be sure, is speculative and provisional as it resists common sense and ideas of the practical that dominate educational work, as Kumashiro has argued.[23]

On Controversy

Controversy is spatially and temporally bounded, emerging in and bound by a particular time and place. What is controversial "here" may not be "there." What is controversial "now" may not be controversial "then" and when controversy is seen from afar it often makes little sense. Controversy seems unreasonable; that was controversial, we ask? Recognizing the temporality and spatiality of controversy does not however dispute or disrupt the emotional, political, social, and pedagogical consequences when controversy erupts in a space and time. Or, when such a controversy is imagined to possibly erupt. It is an event that is engaged in its moment. Controversy speaks to the materiality of being in the world and the challenges of coming into that world. This challenge

19. Ibid, 457.

20. Pierre Bourdieu, *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

21. Louisa Allen & Mary Lou Rasmussen, "Queer Conversation in Straight Spaces: An interview with Mary Lou Rasmussen about Queer Theory in Higher Education," *Higher Education and Development,* 34(4) (2015): 696-687.

22. Mary Lou Rasmussen & Louisa Allen, "What can a Concept Do? Rethinking Education's Queer Assemblages," *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education,* 35(3) (2014): 433-443.

23. Kevin Kumashiro, *Against Common Sense: Teaching and Learning Toward Social Justice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2004).

is seen and experienced, particularly, when one is coming into that which is currently considered "controversial."

Sexuality, particularly homosexuality, has been deemed as controversial in various times and places over the last several decades because of fears that it (in the form of gay teachers or content) would pervert children through fantasized agendas and recruitment strategies. Gay teachers were controversial then, seen in the famous Anita Bryant "Save the Children" campaigns and sometimes become controversial "now" in the 21st century as religiously affiliated schools grapple with the growing rights of sexual minorities. The controversy around the "gay" teacher in such instances is different – from gay teachers being perverts incapable of teaching children to gay rights disputing the rights of religious organizations. Controversy is not totalizing, albeit who is subjected to such controversy has some staying power, particularly around sexuality. As a queer professor, such issues are things I think about, yet, I am unwilling to entirely allow such fears to dictate what and how I teach. I am not willing to only engage victim narratives of LGBTQ persons, nor am I interested in engaging safe representations of sexuality as I firmly believe, like sex, education without risk doesn't exist. If, as Eve Sedgwick articulated so poignantly as her first axiom that people are different from one another, then education that takes seriously such difference cannot eschew the potentially controversial as that which is controversial highlights the differences that make up individuals as complex and complicated subjects.[24]

The controversies that erupted in the 20th century around "gayness"[25] in education have subsided in many ways. The public largely does not disagree with one another to the same extent as before. One would be hard pressed to find the vitriolic and homophobic language present in the 1970s and 1980s in present day educational arguments and scholarship. Sexual minorities have protections and rights now, for better and for worse. Controversies "then" were taken on and challenged by scholars, activists, and students who defended the legitimacy and legibility of gayness. Sexual minorities are, so it goes, legitimate subjects deserving of rights and with this growing visibility became legible within the curriculum and its objects. Education can read the presence of gayness in the classroom. We can now see clearly the presence of gayness in various histories and projects. Such work was done to push against the normative structures of schools and allow for safe spaces to emerge. Safety is, of course, precarious. Who feels safe and when cannot be a static feeling and is dependent on all sorts of things being present. However, generally speaking, gayness through respectable means has become legitimate and legible in education, in limited ways.

Gayness can be flaunted in some regards, in some contexts, and this is important.[26] It illustrates changes and helps highlight how the work done "then" impacts how we "now" grapple with gayness. Gayness is not controversial. It may in some times and some places still provoke public disagreement and debate, but by and large is agreed to be a topic that is here to say. This is not to say controversy does not or will not return at the scene of sexuality in education, but that the controversies of yesteryear have largely subsided and provoke far less outcry. However, my hope is that sexuality will continue to provoke controversy in order to maintain the necessary debates around and within the process of becoming a subject in the 21st century. Noting gayness is not controversial is not meant to be a totalizing statement. Given controversy's temporal and spatial

24. Eve Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1990), 22.

25. Language is a challenge around sexuality. I utilize gayness to distinguish from queerness. Gayness broadly encapsulating that which has become acceptable and queerness operating as a stance against the status quo and acceptance. Such distinctions fall apart, but are utilized to tease apart distinctions and differences between sexual identities that are recognizable more now than others that are still hidden, for various reasons, from the pedagogical gaze.

26. Therese Quinn & Erica Meiners, *Flaunt It! Queers Organizing for Public Education and Justice* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2009).

contingency, controversy may very well erupt around gayness still in different spaces. Daily news highlights momentary blips where sexuality causes controversy, but in our hyper-paced world such controversy quickly subsides from view. Gayness, as such, has become broadly intelligible and therefore far less controversial as part of the educational landscape and something that, despite homophobia's best attempts, is part of education's socializing and qualification project. Within such intelligibility there remains a need to address sexuality beyond what now is accepted in educational discourse.

On a Polymorphously Perverse Curriculum

Foucault argued "there was a steady proliferation of discourses concerned with sex-specific discourses, different from one another both by their forms and by their object: a discursive ferment that gathered momentum from the eighteenth century onward."[27] This incitement to speak about sex occurred at various levels, importantly the institutional level. Education as a socializing institution was implicated in such a proliferation of discourses as the child's sexuality came under surveillance and various techniques emerged for disciplining and training the child through pedagogy. Others came under such institutional discourses with a growing concern that the future of society and its fortunes "were tied not only to the number and the uprightness of its citizens, to their marriage rules and family organization, but to the manner in which each individual made use of his sex."[28] Education took up the challenges of sexuality and for much of the time since the emergence of these modern discourses has continued to assert developmental understandings of sexuality. Those modes of sexuality that refuse reproduction — be it biological or economic — are ignored in education for such modes pervert the needs of society, as conceived within particular ideological frameworks. However, in being ignored such modes continue to resist and assert their presence. Queer is, as Sedgwick argued, "inextinguishable."[29]

For much of the twentieth-century schools actively resisted and sought to educate such non-normative sexualities out of students. And for much of the twentieth-century homosexuals in particular have challenged such educational imperatives. We see the minor successes where homosexuality has become a normal, contested, part of the educational landscape. GLBT students have become productive for society as they contribute to the economic wheels and, by seeking admission to marriage and the military, are part of reproducing the national ideas and dreams associated with "America." This is not new – "we" have been everywhere – but "we" are now out in ways that make our presence legible. It is therefore less and less controversial to teach about homosexuality within particular heteronormative and homonormative frameworks. Such acceptance and inclusion, however, has further disciplined ideas of sexuality and forgotten the multiplicitous sexualities that emerged in the incitement to discourse. While we may have queered education for some time, it may very well be time to pervert it.

Simon Watney (1991) reminded us that perversion helps "theorize all aspects of sexuality that do not have a reproductive aim."[30] And Bruce Fink argued, "The vast majority of human

27. Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York, NY: Vintage, 1990), 18.
28. Ibid., 26.
29. Eve Sedgwick, *Tendencies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), xxi.
30. Simon Watney, "Schools Out" in *Inside Out: Lesbian Theories, Gay Theories,* ed. Diane Fuss (New York, NY: Routledge, 1991), 396.

sexual behavior is perverse."[31] This because, in part, most sexual behavior does not lead to biological reproduction. Perversion's uses lie elsewhere in the excess of social relations that do something to the side of reproduction, including the reproduction of identity. Perversion is that which disrupts biological reproduction and is also that which constitutes human sexuality. We are born perverse and made into subjects of particular repute, if we follow Freud's arguments.[32] Conceptually, perversion does not seek to be reproducible. Perversions open up space—perhaps controversially—to move away from one form of sexual deviation—one focused on objects (e.g., same-sex object choice)—toward other forms of less identifiable deviations tied to corrupting pleasures. Perversions demand curiosity, are founded on curiosity, in order to create and sustain alternatives. They also possibly allow us to continue the move away from focusing on sexuality's politics towards sexuality's sociality. Perverts don't seek political rights and recognitions, but within the political structure provide outlets and practices for social relations that may or may not escape the gaze of the law.

Gay and lesbian subjects have been embraced, to some extent, within the reproductive logics of education and politics, overcoming their previous association with "perversion." Perversion, as such, moves toward "queer's" attention to disrupting what Lee Edelman called reproductive futurism. Reproductive futurism describes, he argued, "Terms that impose an ideological limit on political discourse as such, preserving in the process the absolute privilege of heteronormativity by rendering unthinkable, by casting outside the political domain, the possibility of a queer resistance to this organizing principle of communal relations."[33] The future is straight and that which challenges the future is deemed queer. Yet, queer has become something with a future itself. Challenges to the future are, more often than not, however, deemed perversions – relations that threaten the reproduction of the world in any number of ways, particularly in education.[34] While gay and lesbian subjects may very well now be part of the future with their new access to marriage, the military, and adoption, there still exists an outside to such forms of social relations. "*Queerness*," according to Edelman, "names the side of those *not* 'fighting for the children,' the side outside the consensus by which all politics confirms the absolute value of reproductive futurism."[35] Queerness, I argue, should be perverted, refusing the fraught game of politics and engaging the social world in ways that pervert norms for pleasurable, rather than reproductive, ends.

Education is a challenging context for such a topic given education's conservative nature and reproductive purposes. Education has consistently sought to police and discipline "perversion"—and perverts have historically struggled against the normative practices and claims of education. This makes sense. "This struggle," against and with homosexuality (a form of perversion), Simon Watney argued, "is waged with special ferocity in those areas of social life where sexual identity is most contested, of which education is perhaps the most significant."[36] Perversion immediately challenges education's foundation to reproduce with the hope that perhaps education can do something else. Yet, by challenging education's foundations, it is important to also recognize it is part of the foundation.

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31. Bruce Fink, "Perversion" in *Perversion and the Social Relation,* ed. Molly Anne Rothenberg and Dennis Foster (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003), 39.

32. See Sigmund Freud, *The Psychology of Love* (New York, NY: Penguin Classics, 2007).

33. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

34. Adam Greteman & Steve Wojcikiewicz, "The Problems with the Future: Educational Futurism and the Figural Child," *Journal of Philosophy and Education,* 48 no. 4 (2014).

35. Edelman, *No Future,* 3.

36. Watney, "Schools Out," 393.

Perversion is a threat in education while also operating as education's constitutive element. Controversies still erupt about the presence of queer students be they trying to go to prom with a same sex date or come out in a commencement speech or simply wear t-shirts that express support for gay friends. Straight or gay, expressing support or being seen to be "promoting" homosexuality is still scandalous. This may be less so than three decades ago, but it still exists. However, I am less interested in exploring or mapping the threats of perversion as they are seen in the lives of students, teachers, or curricular concerns. Arguments grounded in "health" or "safety" or "nature" or "God" used to articulate why perversions need to be held at bay from schools are important, but not my concern here. Rather, I want to turn here to a philosopher of perversion – the Marquis de Sade – who established philosophical arguments for education grounded in perversion. Sade was opposed to reproduction and instead interested in exploring the possibilities in and through sexuality. Sade articulated a rather perverse pedagogy.

Sade's Perverse Education

Camille Paglia insisted, "every road from Rousseau leads to Sade."[37] Yet, it would seem the road to Sade has yet to be arrived at in education. Erica McWilliams noted the work of Sade "…refuses, perversely, the modernist logic of an upward and forward movement of identity."[38] Sade is quite unreasonable and "Reasonable people" McWilliams argued, "as enlightened thinkers, seek to distance themselves from such perversity."[39] It seems apt to refuse such distancing and turn to Sade's perversity, remembering as Jonathan Dollimore pointed out, that "perversion" is an important but obsolete meaning of diversity. Distancing oneself from the perversity or refusing the road to Sade, may very well prove to be a distancing from the challenges and risks of diversity and education.[40]

Sade's utilizations of the figure of the pervert and his ideas of transgression compel his readers to question quite a lot. Antonio de Nicolás contended, "the Marquis de Sade should be compulsory reading for all those people who claim to be the owners of a liberal education and who claim to be free citizens" for "there is no better test to find out how deep our habits of mind are impressed in us through the education we have received."[41] Madame St. Ange, one of the teachers in *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, argued it is "to free public schools, and to charitable establishments that we owe the terrible disorder in which we presently live"[42] because such institutions subjugate students, particularly females to the constraints of society and the demands of parents on females to "suppress, wait, and while waiting, endure worse than hell's torments until it pleases her parents."[43] Mme. St. Ange continues "No, Eugénie...it is necessary that when once she reaches the age of reason the girl be detached from the paternal household, and after having received a public education, it is necessary that at the age of fifteen she be left her own mistress to become what she

37. Camille Paglia, *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertit to Emily Dickinson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 20.

38. Erica McWilliams, *Pedagogical Pleasures* (New York: Peter Lang), 176.

39. Ibid., 176.

40. Jonathan Dollimore, *Sexual Dissidence: Augustine to Wilde; Freud to Foucault* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

41. Antonio Nicolas, *Habits of Mind: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Education.* (New York: Paragon Press, 1989), 164.

42. Marquis de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Stories*, trans. Richard Seaver & Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Grove Press), 216.

43 Ibid., 219.

wishes."[44] Sade's education is one of undoing, transgressing the limits of parental and free public education in the attempt to allow students to become what a student wishes. Sade's education is one of perversion that negates the importance for reproduction, particularly for females.

Horkheimer and Adorno noted, "For Sade, enlightenment was not so much an intellectual as a social phenomenon…his work lays bare the mythological nature of the principle on which civilization was based after the demise of religion: those of the Decalogue, of paternal authority, of property."[45] "Sade humiliates reason with sensuous nature," Pierre Klossowski maintained "and humiliates the 'rational' sensuous nature with perverse reason."[46] Sade, of course, writes to challenge and refute the repressions of society — that which dare not be spoken (e.g. atheism, sodomy) in order to "produce the irregular individual" (p. 192). His is still reason, but reason steeped in perversion. The subject emerges, for Sade, through the senses. Sade's education seeks to produce irregularity, to pervert the subjects produced by the social norms espoused by the educational con- text of his age. His was an education rendered to do something else with the world. Sade's perverse thought illuminates the problems with norms and the assault norms have on pleasure and liberty with a relationship to the social that is grounded in pleasure. While Sade was institutionalized in prisons and asylums, spending much of his life in rather solitary spaces, such experiences also provided him pleasure, as his biography illustrated.

Sade is compelling in the 21st Century because he cannot be divorced from sex for sex was central to his project. While sexuality as identity has come to dominate how we engage matters of "sexuality" today, often divorced from sex, Sade focused on perverse acts and their education. He theorized his practices—his individual tastes—to create an ethic because "eroticism appeared to him to be the only possible fulfillment of his existence."[47] Sade's work is much more than sex, of course, but sex is central to his theorizing. He thinks through his time and life with sex, but this is sex unconfined by modern discourses of sexology, rather it is on the cusp between the old regime and the new. His use of cruelty and violence seeks to do something—to provoke—as it did reactions to his work. "Sade's libertinism" Judith Butler remarked "is not simple hedonism: he does not celebrate sexual sensation as such but rather offers a systematic approach to sexual gratification."[48] Butler continued, "Although his cruelty cannot be said to be ethically good, it becomes part of an ethic because a plethora of justifications arrive to support its practice."[49] His texts—at least the portion of them that survived—propound on this ethic in order to create space—as perversion—to examine the limits (ethical and political). Reading Sade then—particularly in education—for his perverse imagination illuminates a trenchant challenge to the Enlightenment and its reasonableness. There is, after all, a method to his madness, but it is a method that disrupts the status quo.

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44. Ibid., 219.

45. Theodore Adorno & Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2002), 90.

46. Pierre Klossowski, *Sade My Neighbor,* translated by Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Pres, 1991), 17.

47. Simone de Beauvoir, "Must We Burn Sade," in *120 Days of Sodom and Other Writings,* eds. Austryn Wainhouse & Richard Seaver (New York: Grove Press, 1966), 18.

48. Judith Butler, "Beauvoir on Sade: Making Sexuality into an Ethic," in *The Cambridge Companion to Simone de Beauvoir,* ed Claudia Card (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 174.

49. Ibid.

"Sade's text realizes," as Harari wrote, "the figure of the 'mad philosopher,' alienated in language, by investing his libertine characters with a 'limitless discourse'—a discourse that is perpetually transgressive by virtue of its attempts both to restore the truth function of desire and to reactivate the desiring function of truth."[50] Sade, more than other Enlightenment philosophers, goes to the dark places of humanity not to "provoke criminal behavior" but to "provoke instead the elaboration of phantasms that have long remained excluded from our—ascetic and incorrigibly ethical—occidental imaginary."[51] He goes there to teach and allow desires to be found. After all, as Jane Gallop noted, Sade's oeuvre is "a meditation on teaching" where what is "repeatedly represented is a confrontation between ignorance as innocence and knowledge as power—a confrontation constitutive of the classroom dialectic."[52] Sade via his libertine characters taught lessons. These lessons were complex—in part because of Sade's insistence of teaching through sexuality—both the ways sexuality forms libertine subjects but also how sexuality disrupts and is central to sociality. Sade through his libertine instructor Dolmancé instructs his pupil Eugénie to "do away with your constraints, your chastisements, your habits."[53] Sade's novelic imagination immediately asserts itself as attempting to disrupt habits, expose habits of thinking and doing and being in 18th Century France. It is, in part, Sade's educational thought that asks for undoing the habits instilled in us from a young age via parents, public education, and society. He perverts those habits that have become reproduced as necessary or educational. The education Sade proposes in *Philosophy in the Bedroom* is thus laid out in the form of a dialogue—drawing upon the Socratic form—in order to pervert the borders between reason and unreason.

Perversion becomes a mode of education, struggling for one's liberty and working against the stultifying aims of society—particularly society's ways of educating and parenting. Straddling the classical and the modern world, Sade theorized liberty—from parents, from God, from a corrupt society—through the sexed body—seeking to liberate sexuality and the body from the oppressive regimes of religion, revolution, and reproduction to create the possibility for pleasure and passion as sensibilities that trumped the growing focus on reason and rationality. Of course, one cannot read Sade without recognizing his hyper-rationality and intense focus on reasoned argumentation, but Sade does so in its extremity to push through reason while not forgoing reason to expose passion and pleasure. Satisfaction is the ultimate goal of Sade. He frustrates but always with his eyes on the prize of satisfaction—fleetingly glimpsed and sensed—before starting on the next lesson. Sade refused to be reasonable for reason restricted other ways of experiencing the world.

For Sade and his perversions he asked that we "never lose sight of the fact it is free men we wish to form, not the wretched worshippers of a god"[54] and in doing so,

> Give them many more examples than lessons, many more demonstrations than books, and you will make good citizens of them: you will turn them into fine warriors, fine fathers, fine husbands: you will fashion men that much more devoted to their country's liberty,

50. Josue V. Harari, *Scenarios of the Imaginary: Theorizing the French Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 192.

51. Harari, *Scenarios of the Imaginary,* 192.

52. Jane Gallop, "The Immoral Teachers," *Yale French Studies, 63,* (1982): 117.

53. Marquis de Sade, *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom and Other Stories,* 203.

54. Ibid., 304.

> whose minds will be forever immune to servility, forever hostile to servitude, whose genius will never be troubled by any religious terror.[55]

The libertine education does not rest on reading the books of the past, but on merging theory with practice, demonstrating the challenges it takes to be free, to think, and to live in a world of contested, contingent beings. This education is cruel, demanding of students and instructors to not do as they are told, but to question and question some more. The purpose of such an education is less to reproduce or maintain the social order. "No need to touch at greater length on what pertains to the dull business of population," Mme St. Ange noted, "from now on we shall address ourselves principally, nay, uniquely, to those libertine lecheries whose spirit is in no wise reproductive."[56] The pedagogical task of Sade's perverse teachers was to open up students to question and experience the world of pleasure without or perhaps through the refusal to reproduce what was already known, felt, or experienced. His perverse pedagogy sought to allow his pupil to sense the world anew.

Conclusion

Simon Watney argued in the early years of queer thinking, "Something else is needed—the active presence of a confident lesbian and gay culture that clothes homosexual desires in a stable, collective, *social* identity."[57] Then, in the early 1990s, such a presence was largely unimaginable, particularly in schools. Decades later after important struggles on the street, courtrooms, hallways, seminar rooms, and family rooms, a confident "lesbian and gay" culture (or more so cultures) can be seen. Such cultures—particularly those that are respectable—are catered to by corporations and have lobby groups to advocate for their "gay agenda." Such changes are, as with most things, both useful and problematic. Change can be seen in terms of who is seen as a viable subject. Particular gay authors, artists, and people have gained notoriety and a place on the school desk. Children's books like *Heather has Two Mommies* and *And Tango Makes Three* in some places provoke less controversy in elementary schools allowing family structures to include single-parent households, gay households, and lesbian households as viable for rearing children. This is good, to be sure. Queer work in education has had some success. Yet, there continues to exist, as seems obvious, those who do not fit within this more inclusive representation. There are still perverts among us. Inclusion is, as Bingham and Biesta (2009) have argued, in question.[58]

If inclusion is in question, that which raises questions is probably something that may very well be controversial—provoking public disagreement. As some are ushered into inclusive social institutions, the controversies of those still excluded come to represent a certain threat to one's newfound inclusion. Those less "respectable" or less "normal" may, it seems, threaten the new inclusion. Yet, such threats are part and parcel the work of perversion as it challenges the ever-changing reproduction of inclusive spaces and ideas. Perversion cannot be a stable thing that can be included, but must represent the excess, that which operates outside and exceeds the recognizable or intelligible. The excesses of perversions, are a challenge for schools and at its best will remain such a challenge—refusing domestication, normalization, and reproduction. Perversion

55. Ibid., 305.
56. Ibid., 201.
57. Ibid., 392.
58. Charles Bingham & Gert Biesta, *Jacques Ranciere: Education, Emancipation, Truth* (New York: Continuum 2009).

then—unlike gayness and the now accepted queerness—has not experienced the same level of approval and inclusion. Perversion has yet and refuses to be assimilated and reproduced in schools. GLBT subjects—both in terms of students and curriculum context—exist and have achieved some levels of hospitality in schools.[59] This essay has sought to provisionally engage contemporary issues around sexuality by attending to its inherent perversions. Such a provisional engagement was to open up space to recognize the inroads made around the formerly perverse (e.g., homosexuality) while articulating the possibilities of perversions yet "included." If inclusion is an open question, perversion raises questions about that which has now been included due to the varied queer projects that have been articulated over the course of decades. Perversion calls into question the commodified and reproducible ways in which queerness and queers have come to operate. Queerness, put simply, needed perverting.

59. Jen Gilbert, "'Let Us Say Yes to Who or What Turns Up': Education as Hospitality." *Journal for the Canadian Association of Curriculum Studies,* 4(1) (2006): 25-34.

Profanity as Pedagogy

Mychelle Hadley Smith

Abstract

Modern American curriculum is controlled by the standards created by legislative measures; many teachers and curriculum leaders are choosing to break free from the standardized chains to introduce socially-relevant content into the classroom. Pop culture, world issues, and controversial topics all fall into this category. Many controversial topics can be found in literature. One main area of contention is profanity. This article will explore how profanity, a controversial element in literature, can be used in classrooms as a level of literary analysis. The controversial nature of profanity becomes a pedagogical device used to help students make meaning of their current historical moment. I will argue that philosophical hermeneutics can be used by teachers as a method for relating students' experiences with their understanding of profanity. Through this method, the controversial material becomes relevant pedagogy.

Keywords: *Profanity, Curriculum, Hermeneutics, Controversy*

Modern American curriculum is controlled by the standards created by legislative measures; many teachers and curriculum leaders are choosing to break free from the standardized chains to introduce socially-relevant content into the classroom. Pop culture, world issues, and controversial topics all fall into this category. Many controversial topics can be found in literature. One main area of contention is profanity.

This article will explore how profanity, a controversial element in literature, can be used in classrooms as a level of literary analysis. The controversial nature of profanity becomes a pedagogical device used to help students make meaning of their current historical moment. I will argue that philosophical hermeneutics can be used by teachers as a method for relating students' experiences with their understanding of profanity. Through this method, the controversial material becomes relevant pedagogy. During the investigation of the role of profanity in classrooms, I will first discuss what causes a topic to be deemed controversial. Second, I will examine profanity's role in the classroom. Third, philosophical hermeneutics will be used as a lens to examine the controversy surrounding the place of profanity in school curriculum.

What is a controversial issue?

Abortion. Stem cell research. Immunization of children. Free Speech. Educational Standards. All these topics share the same label: controversial. What makes an issue controversial? Controversial topics are deemed contentious due to their effect on an individual's "values matrix" and

are controlled by national hegemony.[1] Controversial topics spark heated debates among the population due to the clear agree and disagree stances, which are usually controlled by political dichotomy in the United States. Burkstrand-Reid et al. supply four ways for a topic to be considered controversial in their article titled *Teaching Controversial Topics.*[2] A topic can become controversial if it is highly politicized, if people can relate personally to the issue, if a lack of diversity exists among the specified population, or because of idiosyncratic views of people within a group.[3] Topics in education, such as homosexuality, profanity, and violence, are deemed controversial due to their highly politicized nature, first or second person personalization by students, and lack of diversity in the classroom.[4] First person personalization occurs when a person has a lived experience involving the controversial issue at hand. For example, a person who was not immunized as a child may personalize the controversial topic of immunizing children in order to attend public school. Secondary personalization occurs when people who have not been directly affected by an issue personalize it regardless of their experience.[5]

Controversial topics: Within classroom walls

"The most daunting pedagogical task arises when a topic touches all three of the categories set forth: the topic that is simultaneously politicized, personalized, and draws out marginalized or radicalized students."[6] Education should be at the forefront of handling these topics; however, many educators renounce controversial topics due to the perceived danger in the classroom. "Because the public school curriculum is embedded in the ebb and flow of the ideological struggles of society at large, the degree to which an issue in the curriculum is considered controversial also ebbs and flows."[7] Much like the world of pop culture, the extent to which an issue is seen as controversial can change over time. Due to this fickle nature, students must be engaged with controversial issues in order to help shape the future of the issues. Unfortunately, mandated curriculum is not always current with the true needs of society. Curriculum is dictated in order to protect the public interest of the country, as well as the safety of our youth. Steven Camicia defines "public interest as those claims values, beliefs, and opinions that are believed to be in the common good of a public."[8] For most classrooms, controversial issues are deemed too provocative and not in the best public interest. Book-banning and general challenges to the curriculum are solid indicators of what society deems too controversial to be discussed or read within classroom walls. The top two reasons for banning books in the United States from 1980-2009 were 1) sexual content and 2) obscene language.[9] *Sexual content* includes characters engaging in sexual activity, whether it is by choice or not, as well as sexual orientation. The main worry of reading about sexual activity is that

1. Irving Hendricks, "Developing a Values Matrix for Assessing Curriculum Theory" (PhD Diss., University of California, Riverside, 1997).
2. Beth Burkstrand-Reid, "Teaching Controversial Topics," *Family Court Review,* 49 (2011):678.
3. Ibid., 679.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Steven P. Camicia, "Deciding What Is a Controversial Issue: A Case Study of Social Studies Curriculum Controversy," *Theory & Research in Social Education,* 36(4) (2008): 300.
8. Steven P. Camicia, "Deliberation of Controversial Public School Curriculum: Developing Processes and Outcomes that Increase Legitimacy and Social Justice," *Journal of Public Deliberation,* 6(2) (2010): 1.
9. American Library Association, *Challenges by Reason, Initiator & Institution for 1990- 99 and 2000-09* (2013), http://www.ala.org/bbooks/frequentlychallengedbooks/statistics.

this will trigger students' curiosity about the topic or be viewed as a guidebook. *Obscene language* includes the usual culprits—four letter words—along with blasphemies and any and all derivatives of both sub categories. Whether or not to use profanity is a choice usually made by parents when raising their children. Allowing teachers to overrule family values raises controversial debates in communities as well as school board meeting rooms.

Educators commonly tip-toe around classroom discussions and study of controversial topics; however, a subset of American college students are now moving towards erasing controversial topics from campuses across the United States. "A movement is arising, undirected and driven largely by students, to scrub campuses clean of words, ideas, and subjects that might cause discomfort or give offense."[10] This movement is mostly focused on transforming college campuses into safe zones "where students are shielded from words and ideas that make some uncomfortable," and anyone who interferes with the safety is punished, thus creating a vindictive protectiveness system.[11] Some students and faculty may find this to be a pleasant cleansing, but many educators are aware of the dangers this poses to education.

> Vindictive protectiveness teaches students to think in a very different way. It prepares them poorly for professional life, which often demands intellectual engagement with people and ideas one might find uncongenial or wrong. The harm may be more immediate, too. A campus culture devoted to policing speech and punishing speakers is likely to engender patterns of thought that are surprisingly similar to those long identified by cognitive behavioral therapists as causes of depression and anxiety. The new protectiveness may be teaching students to think pathologically.[12]

Hiding the issues does not solve the issues. Students cannot simply erase offensive content and words. Shielding high school and college students from opposing viewpoints also has a negative effect on American democracy: "When the ideas, values, and speech of the other side are seen not just as wrong but as willfully aggressive toward innocent victims, it is hard to imagine the kind of mutual respect, negotiation, and compromise that are needed to make politics a positive-sum game."[13] Part of the responsibility of public education is to properly educate future citizen-voters. Allowing students to exist with an intolerant mindset toward opposing viewpoints does not allow for proper growth and development, thus creating intolerant and closed-minded citizens. This was not the original goal of American education.

> Thomas Jefferson, upon founding the University of Virginia, said: This institution will be based on the illimitable freedom of the human mind. For here we are not afraid to follow truth wherever it may lead, nor to tolerate any error so long as reason is left free to combat it. We believe that this is still—and will always be—the best attitude for American universities.[14]

This way of educating should not be limited to universities. Secondary education institutions must adopt this orientation toward educating in order prepare students for success in college.

10. Greg Lukianoff & Jonathan Haidt, "The Coddling of the American Mind," *Atlantic*, 316(2) (2015): 42.
11. Ibid.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Lukianoff, & Haidt. "Coddling of the American Mind," 42.

The learning gap between high school and college increases when educators exclude thought-provoking curriculum, such as controversial topics, from their classrooms. This is evident by the state of American college students' thinking abilities and the way they approach education.

> Our students come to the university with many years of training in listening passively and answering brief questions from the teachers with correct answers. Teachers rarely ask students how they arrived at their answers […] School has not been a place where students and teachers come together to talk about important questions. School has been a place where students try to guess what the teacher wants them to say. [15]

Rather than focus on guesswork, "the pedagogical movement should be towards openness and more questions."[16] If education, by way of controversial topics, can focus on helping students navigate the fringes of their own experiences, then "students are, in large part, guided to find, accept or impose meaning upon their world." [17]

Classroom Methodology

The existence of controversial topics must move beyond merely existing as debate and essay topics. Students should engage with the topics in open discussion and examine the topics in case studies. "Discussion is peculiarly conducive to appreciative understanding of the different positions in a controversy and to empathy with those who hold them."[18] In a discussion, students will not be trying to convince the other side that they are right. In a true discussion, there is no *right* and *wrong*. Our current culture is not allowing students to grow and develop into open-minded members of society. Rather than promoting open discussion and critical thinking, our popular culture is fostering a cynical view of controversial topics. "By promoting knee-jerk individualism, fostering a hegemony that denies the reality of social inequality, and disseminating prejudice, mainstream culture may influence some individuals to treat issues […] with skepticism."[19] Deviating from mainstream ideas "at least in non-statistical terms, connotes something pejorative. Accordingly, students learn to categorize the 'other' in a negative light. The norm is preferable, right and good; the deviant should be avoided."[20]

Handling controversial topics within the classroom requires several components. First, an opportunity for students to redirect their focus surrounding the controversial topic is needed to foster discussion. Using controversial topics, such as the existence of profanity in literature, in case studies allows students to analyze the content as a third-party observer. "The use of the case study creates a safer environment for students to share their thoughts about controversial issues because

15. Robert B. Innes, "Dialogic Communication in Collaborative Problem Solving Groups," *International Journal for the Scholarship for Teaching and Learning,* 1(1) (2007): 14.
16. Larry Green & Kevin Gary, "Pedagogy for a Liquid Time," *Studies In Philosophy and Education*, 16 (2015): 60.
17. Ibid.
18. Michael Hand & Ralph Levinson, "Discussing Controversial Issues in the Classroom," *Educational Philosophy & Theory,* 44 (6) (2011): 616.
19. Mark Hedley & Linda Markowitz, "Avoiding Moral Dichotomies: Teaching Controversial Topics to Resistant Students," *Teaching Sociology*, 29(2) (2001): 195.
20. Ibid.

the focus is taken off their own beliefs and morals to the specifics of the case study."[21] This redirection of focus allows students to guide a discussion and navigate toward multiple conclusions. "Because well-constructed case studies have many potential outcomes instead of a definitive, right answer, the power differential between the instructor and students is noticeably less."[22] Discussion and case studies allow for critical thinking and critical engagement with issues.

The second component for handling controversial topics within the classroom is the use of directive teaching practices.

> Directive teaching involves both the existence of a favored position and some sort of guidance and encouragement of students toward that position. An endorsement can refer to a particular speech act where the teacher explicitly identifies the favored position to students, but this is not an essential feature. An endorsement may also be shown through particular pedagogical approaches.[23]

Micheal Hand, defending Robert Dearden's "epistemic criterion," disagrees that a controversial topic should be approached in this way.[24] When faced with a controversial issue within their curriculum or classroom discussions, for Hand, educators must suspend their own opinions in order to allow students to develop opinions and viewpoints of their own through non- directive teaching practices. Ultimately, my point is that philosophical hermeneutics provide a method of reaching what Warnick and Smith refer to as soft-directive teaching. Directive teaching occurs when teachers make the claim that one position on a controversial issue is considered correct.[25] Some guidance and direction may be necessary when initially investigating controversial issues. By incorporating hermeneutics, teachers and students are able to uncover a *right* position on a controversial issue. Even though a teacher may establish a side of the controversial issue as their own correct view, I encourage students to determine their own conclusions despite my initial direction to one side. As students mature, they will be able to use hermeneutical analysis to investigate any possible issue whether deemed controversial by reason or merely popular contention.

The third component of handling controversial topics is teacher planning and effort. Navigating the flow of opinions within a controversial discussion can be cumbersome for the facilitator. "On the one extreme, educators who penalize students for speaking their truths or censor what is deemed adequate knowledge, subsequently serve the dominant social order" if the popular belief is to silence the issue.[26] Students should be able to discuss multiple sides to issues facing their culture. Students must also make sense of the existence of multiple viewpoints. "On the other extreme, educators who simply ignore and excuse student mistakes and rationalize ignorance in an effort to be 'down,' likewise further disenfranchise students."[27] Educators must have the skills and knowledge to foster an environment for discussions of controversial topics, the use of profanity for purposes of this paper, without directly teaching students what is considered

21. Karen Mason & Lisa Briggs, "Myths and Moral Panics: An Active Learning Approach to Controversial Topics," *Transformative Dialogues: Teaching & Learning Journal,* 5(1) (2011): 7.

22. Ibid.

23. Bryan Warnick & D. Spencer Smith, "The Controversy over Controversies: A Plea for Flexibility and for 'Soft-Directive' Teaching," *Educational Theory,* 64(3) (2014): 229.

24. Michael Hand, "What Should We Teach as Controversial? A Defense of the Epistemic Criterion," *Educational Theory,* 58(2) (2008): 213-228.

25. Warnick & Smith, "The Controversy."

26. Vajra M. Watson, "Censoring Freedom: Community-Based Professional Development and the Politics of Profanity," *Equity & Excellence in Education,* 46(3) (2013): 403.

27. Ibid.

correct. In order for this to occur, teachers must spend time planning and put forth effort in facilitating a true discussion.

The fourth component of handling controversial topics is comfort. Student engagement in discussion of controversial topics relies heavily on students being comfortable with each other. "The most feared entity in the classroom is not the professor or the test, but the classmate."[28] Students must feel comfortable in their educational environment to share their viewpoints. Teachers and students must foster an environment where multiple viewpoints exist. "Turning to the teacher, calmness and assurance are necessary, as well as audacity to expose the limits or frontiers of knowledge."[29] Effectively handling controversial topics in the classroom takes planning and effort on the part of facilitation. Educators must "set clear expectations regarding classroom behavior and discussion decorum without striking so much fear into students that they become reluctant to participate at all."[30] Student participation and engagement with the issues is the ultimate goal.

> Without clearly communicated codes of conduct, learning at any level is diminished. Once the rules are developed, instructors must enforce them if they are violated. Students learn which rules are important to an instructor based on the level of monitoring and correction they receive. Those behavioral rules not enforced do not exist in the student's experience.[31]

These codes of conduct must be applied consistently. Students will be able to ascertain which topics are of personal concern to the facilitator if the issues are handled differently. Many educators may think the effort needed to appropriately and successfully present controversial topics in the classroom may be futile; however, education cannot turn its back on the curriculum of the current moment. "Any classroom activity or experience that teaches students to deal more rationally and effectively with conflicting information and emotions may increase overall learning outcomes of higher education and life lessons in general."[32] Students will benefit from studying controversial topics.

> Institutional barriers and ineffective policies, personal idiosyncrasies and prejudices, and the overwhelming social-emotional needs of students come together and often collide inside classrooms. Moreover, implicit and explicit judgments within curricula can further alienate students from their own education. The results are all too familiar: disengagement, discipline problems, and a devastating drop-out crisis. As a solution, listening to who students really are as a basis for learning is not simply a first step, but rather the journey.[33]

Who are twenty-first learners? They are students who are immersed in a society riddled with controversial issues being discussed on every twenty-four-hour news channel. They are the students with information always readily available at their fingertips. It is the duty of education to guide students in navigating controversial topics in order to better understand their world.

28. Mason, & Briggs, "Myths and Moral Panics," 4.
29. Green & Gary, "Pedagogy for a Liquid Time," 60.
30. Burkstrand-Reid, "Teaching Controversial Topics," 678.
31. Mason & Briggs, "Myths and Moral Panics," 11.
32. 32. Ibid., 12.
33. Watson, "Censoring Freedom," 403.

Why is profanity needed in schools?

Profanity, or the "loosening up of language" has seeped into the pores of American ways of life.[34] Sobre-Denton and Simonis define *swearing* as "any conscious use of taboo language for communicative purposes."[35] The value of profanity in speech and literature is a topic of personal opinion that has been affected by culture, religion, and etiquette; however, profanity always finds a way to seep into the cracks of society. "Politics, the arts, economics, social and sexual relationships, and family interactions have all been touched by this greater latitude in speech."[36] Due to this saturation, profanity's role in classroom pedagogy is an inevitable occurrence. According to researchers at Brigham Young University, most research involving profanity deals with television, movies, and video games, not literature.[37] Profanity's role in literature deserves curricular attention. Teachers should embrace profanity as a teachable element of language that can aide in deeper textual analysis. Profanity becomes a useful literary element if "interpreted through educational and historical context with the aid of hermeneutics."[38] Rather than banning books from high school curricula, educators and students can interpret the meaning and underlying purpose of profanity in literature. Teachers deserve to have the freedom to teach using literature containing profanity. "Academic freedom refers to teachers having freedom to teach and students having freedom to learn without interference from within or from ideological conflicts outside the institution."[39] "Teachers' academic freedom interests are often viewed as subordinate to a school's freedom to make its own decisions about the content of the curriculum and research."[40] For this reason, many books are banned due to the profanity found on their pages. Books should not be banned for containing profanity; instead, profanity usage should be studied and discussed. Students could then analyze the language usage by certain characters? Students could answer questions such as: Why do literary characters use profanity? What does the profanity usage show about the mindset of characters? Is any factor affecting the profanity usage? Due to book-banning, profanity is oftentimes a suggested reason to avoid curriculum materials. By viewing profanity as a literary element rather than a deterrent, a new realm of literary analysis has been introduced.

"Should profanity be allowed in schools?" is considered a controversial question. "The use of dirty words or discussion of sex is one area of difficulty for parents, students, teachers and administrators alike."[41] Handling topics of the nature is not easy with children. "Teachers often struggle with representing the forbidden in their classrooms, from banned books to taboo terms."[42]

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34. Rob Chirico, *Damn! A Cultural History of Swearing in Modern America* (Durham, NC: Pitchstone Publishing, 2014), 15.

35. Miriam Sobre-Denton & Jana Simonis, "Do You Talk to Your Teacher With That Mouth?: Fuck: A Documentary on Profanity as a Teaching Tool in the Communication Classroom." *Communication Teacher,* 26(3) (2012): 180.

36. Chirico, *Damn! A Cultural History*, 15.

37. Sarah M. Coyne, Mark Callister, Laurea A. Stockdale, David A. Nelson, & Brian M. Wells, "A Helluva Read: Profanity in Adolescent Literature," *Mass Communication & Society,* 15(3) (2012): 361.

38. Mychelle H. Smith, "Profanity, Disgust, and Dangerous Literature: A Hermeneutical Analysis of *The Catcher in the Rye* and *The Chocolate War*" (PhD Diss., Texas A&M University, 2015), 2.

39. James Van Patten, "Academic Freedom," in *Encyclopedia of the Social and Cultural Foundations of Education* (2009), edited by Eugene Provenzo and Asterie Provenzo, (New York: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2009): 1.

40. National Coalition Against Censorship, "First Amendment in Schools: A Resource Guide," retrieved from: http://ncac.org/resource/first-amendment-in-schools/. n.d.

41. Timothy B. Jay, *Cursing in America* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1992), 33.

42. Sobre-Denton & Simonis, *Do You Talk to Your Teacher With That Mouth*, 180.

"Many English teachers don't debate or, rather, they avoid debate by avoiding hearing or seeing the taboo words."[43] Personal opinions often dictate the allowance or restriction of profanity. When personal opinions are set aside, the school code of conduct will then step in to dictate the language usage on school grounds. "Swearing is often castigated as the language of the inarticulate, but there is absolutely no evidence for the blatant prejudice"[44] "When considering the offensiveness of a profanity, simply considering the word alone does not account for the many aspects that affect why profane language is perceived as more odious when spoken by some individuals than others."[45] When educators ignore profanity and punish students for using it, "we turn our backs on the language of reality, hiding from and urging our students to hide from life."[46] Instead, educators must turn the tables on the use of profanity; the analysis of profanity will allow students to better understand their own environment and language usage.

Profanity mostly enters the English classroom by way of reading curriculum. "Since most teachers want to create (rather than negate) spaces for students to achieve, it is important to consider a form of literacy instruction that is multifaceted, locally constructed, and ever-changing."[47] In order to create and learn within a local environment, students must choose reading materials that speak to their culture and current historical moment. This freedom of choice will more than likely result in students choosing literature containing profanity and other controversial topics. "There should be an open-minded account of the genesis of open swearing and how the marked change in turn affected and continues to affect the language we speak and the culture in which we live."[48] Profanity now becomes a literary element to analyze and study within the text, which can result in better understanding of student lives and culture, rather than a reason for banning books.

Beginning at the high school level, students should be able to read and analyze the use of profanity by characters within literature. This analysis will result in conversations and understandings regarding students' own uses of profanity and whether or not they find it controversial. "At high school the curriculum is attuned to society's needs and the lives of the students after graduation."[49] This attuned curriculum allows more room for controversial topics, oftentimes in the form of argumentative writing assignments or structured debates. In the current era of standardized education, educators are not only working toward the educational endeavor, which includes "ongoing series of attempts to make sense of the world," but now the concern has moved to measuring the sense-making.[50] The structure and standards allow legislatures to count and measure students' knowledge and understanding. However, a movement has emerged in the current educational realm away from "contemporary trends in education that seek ever sharper quantification of learning outcomes as well as the most efficient means towards achieving those ends."[51] An educational shift is occurring beneath the standards and accountability current. "Traditional humanistic concepts of education and personality formation on the one hand, and learning and knowledge, on the other hand, have to be reconsidered from a perspective involving both the virtues of modernity

43. John Bens, "Taboo or Not Taboo," *College Composition and Communication*, 22(3) (1971): 217.
44. Chirico, *Damn! A Cultural History*, 10.
45. Lora Jacobi, "Perceptions of Profanity: How Race, Gender, and Expletive Choice Affect Perceived Offensiveness," *North American Journal of Psychology*, 16(2) (2014): 263.
46. Bens, *Taboo or Not Taboo*, 216.
47. Watson "Censoring Freedom," 389.
48. Chirico, *Damn! A Cultural History of Swearing*, 31.
49. Jay, *Cursing in America*, 33.
50. Green & Gary, "Pedagogy for a Liquid Time," 48.
51. Ibid.

and postmodern skepticism with respect to idealistic and rigid biases of modern thought."[52] As teenagers, high school students are living in the juxtaposition of idealistic and modern thought. The curriculum must move away from accustomed meanings and understandings; "by loosening one's grip on conventional meanings, we are much more capable of registering what is emerging in our culture."[53] Education must embrace the controversial topics that are shaping the future. By cutting the strings of standardization, educators can allow students to move beyond the recitation of facts and move into the realm of questioning, investigating, and understanding. "When teachers validate the perspectives of their students and facilitate deliberation between them, they effectively move away from teaching students about citizenship and instead treat them as the citizens they already are."[54] Students are allowed to form their own beliefs regarding controversial topics like profanity.

The use of profanity as pedagogy is not limited to only reading materials. To allow students to use profanity in their own writing and discussions or not is a decision teachers must also face. Watson conducted a study of secondary English classroom poetry workshops. She found that allowing students to write in their own colloquial language can not only affect students' education but also their lives. Teaching students to write is more important than scores on standardized tests and self expression of ideas; "when death, depression, and various forms of oppression loom so heavily in this world, writing and performing is not simply an act of expression, it is an outlet for healing"[55] Watson found that the use of profanity affected both the teachers and the students involved in the writing workshops. The teachers discussed how the "controversial conversations also allowed us to go deeper with one another as we wrestled to understand the purpose of school and our role as educators. By fixating on a cuss word sometimes we are remiss to address a teenager's call for help, explained one of the teachers."[56] Due to the content topics, the conversations were considered controversial. Some teachers wanted to prohibit the use of profanity in writing whereas other teachers wanted to allow students to express themselves and their true emotions by allowing profanity usage in written assignments. One participant spoke in support of allowing profanity within the classroom:

> To the adults that are concerned about students' use of explicit language, they are trying to avoid a problem rather than deal with it. The problem is not the profanity. The problem is the source. The source is not the youth. We did not make this world, we were born into it just like every other poet, student, teacher, human being. And in many ways, it's a fucked up world! This is the environment that raised us so what kind of adult criticizes our attempt to release, reshape, and create our own identity? […] students cussing is not as profane as an officer pepper-spraying their own college students trying to stand up for their rights, or as profane as a child being murdered by a grown man—Zimmerman—or as profane as the slaughter of Oscar Grant, JFK, MLK, X, Tupac, Diallo ...! Is cussing a big deal when our students are starving? Where are the priorities? One of the schools I work at […] looks just like a prison. Is cussing more profane than that?[57]

52. Grozdankal Gojkov, "Postmodern Pedagogy," *Journal Plus Education/Educatia Plus,* 8(2) (2012): 19.
53. Green & Gary, "Pedagogy for a Liquid Time," 49.
54. Nicole Fournier-Sylvester, "Daring to Debate: Strategies for Teaching Controversial Issues in the Classroom," *College Quarterly,* 16(3) (2013): n.p.
55. Watson, "Censoring Freedom," 399.
56. Ibid.
57. Ibid., 400.

The entire view of profanity is shifted by the questions referencing current issues of contention in the United States. Using profanity in the curriculum, i.e. spoken word poetry, is one facet of liberatory literacy. "Liberatory literacy does not silence nor does it turn off the microphone. Rather, it cuts open reality in a process that is vulnerable and revealing for artist and audience, teacher and student."[58]Profanity lives within the vulnerable spaces. "It is not that the presence of poetic qualities compels a certain kind of attention but that the paying of a certain kind of attention results in the emergence of poetic qualities…Interpretation is not the art of construing but the art of constructing. Interpreters do not decode poems; they make them."[59] Allowing students to delve into the quest of understanding profanity usage will allow education to move beyond measurable standards and into the realm of artistic expression. For the sake of the students, educators cannot hide from profanity. "A world without swearing would not be a world without aggression, hate, or conflict, but a world bereft of a key means of defusing these emotions, of working them out. Swearing is an important safety valve, allowing people to express negative emotions without resorting to physical violence."[60] Profanity becomes more than a controversial textual element to study; profanity is a therapeutic device used to survive.

How can Gadamer's hermeneutics be used to understand profanity?

Using Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics in the curriculum allows teachers and students to bring their own experiences to their understanding of language. "Teachers seek to enrich student classroom experiences of literature as much as possible."[61] One way to further enhance experiences with literature is to use philosophical hermeneutics to investigate the various interpretations of profanity usage within a text. The use of contextual hermeneutics was used to recognize "social and historical conditions" that play a role in the use and understanding of profanity.[60] Philosophical hermeneutics allows educators to discover what is missing when books are banned thus allowing for "creative responsiveness to the emergent nature of our culture."[63]

> Hermeneutics has to do with a theoretical attitude towards practice of interpretation of text, but also in relation to the experiences interpreted in them and in our communicatively unfolded orientations in the world. This theoretical stance only makes us aware reflectively of what is performatively at play in the practical experience of understanding.[64]

Hermeneutics can be used to examine the marriage—or for some the recent divorce—of controversy and profanity, as well as to understand profanity usage in students' own lived experiences. Why do some people consider profanity malignant when others find it illuminating?

58. Ibid., 404.
59. Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class?* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), 326-327.
60. Melissa Mohr, *Holy Shit: A Brief History of Swearing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 255.
61. Wei Lim Jia, "What Happens in a Literature Classroom? A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Perspective," *Malaysian Journal Of ELT Research,* 11(1) (2015): 62.
62. Patrick Slattery, *Curriculum Development in the Postmodern Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 131.
63. Green & Gary, "Pedagogy for a Liquid Time," 61.
64. Hans George Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1975), 112.

"Insight into the usage of profanity allows for deeper insight and understanding into lived experiences" as well as deeper insight into the nature of controversy.[65] Educators and students can use hermeneutics to better understand their own personal interpretation of profane language by creating a "fusion of horizons."[66] "Gadamer views understanding as a matter of negotiation between oneself and one's partner in the hermeneutical dialogue such that the process of understanding can be seen as a matter of coming to an 'agreement' about the matter at issue."[67] The dialogue partners could be fellow students or the teacher in a classroom example. In order for an agreement to take place, a common framework must be established.[68]

> Obtaining a fusion of horizons requires us to engage with the text in a productive way. This, however, is not something we can learn by coming to master a certain doctrine, method, or theory. It is more like a tacit capacity, which we acquire by following the example of others. The knowledge at stake is like a practical know-how; it resembles the Aristotelian phronesis. It is a knowledge that can neither be deduced theoretically, nor be fully articulated, but that rests on a kind of tact or sensitivity that is only exhibited in the form of exemplary judgments and interpretations. [69]

Interpreting profanity will not be a quantifiable task. Students may struggle with reaching an understanding in regard to profanity usage, but this should not deter educators from undertaking this journey with their students. "In the various themes of how literature is interpreted, conceptualised and actualised, there is a difference in what teachers and students value in literature."[70] Teachers and students can learn through the "fusion of horizons" created through interpretations.[71] By mediating what is familiar and what is alien, discussion allows participants to move toward understanding, yet understanding is a process, not a final destination.[72] Viewpoints of controversial topics such as profanity can be stretched without reaching ultimate conclusions. Profanity, although still controversial, has made progress in popular American culture.

Once considered "unprintable, the words are today printed in books, dictionaries, and occasionally in magazines, although not in newspapers, whereas once they adorned only toilet walls and out-lawed hard-core pornography."[73] Profanity can now be found in bestselling novels on the teen fiction list. "Societal norms, beliefs, religions, worldviews, and general consideration of manners affect the reception of profanity."[74] Investigating profanity's role as a perceived controversial element of literary analysis is a creative way to teach students about controversy, language, academic freedom, and literature simultaneously. Book censors, school board members, and parents may find profanity controversial, yet students want to read the banned books and write using free expression. By allowing students to study the controversial

65. Smith, "Profanity, Disgust, and Dangerous Literature," 126.
66. Gadamer, *Truth and Method.*
67. Jeff Malpas, "Hans-Georg Gadamer," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Summer 2015 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.), http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2015/entries/gadamer/.
68. Ibid.
69. B. Ramberg, & K. Gjesdal, "Hermeneutics," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy,* Summer 2009 Edition, Edward N. Zalta (ed.). 2009. http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2014/entries/hermeneutics.
70. Lim Jia, "What Happens in a Literature Classroom?," 62.
71. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 1975.
72. Malpas, *Hans Georg-Gadamer*.
73. E. Sagarin, *The Anatomy of Dirty Words* (New York: The Polyglot Press, 1962), 31.
74. Smith, "Profanity, Disgust, and Dangerous Literature," 129

aspect of profanity, they learn to deal with it in a healthy way. Students can become more involved in their reading experience due to the analysis of profanity. "During the act of reading, fictional speech... becomes 'real speech,' and as such, it works in and on the fictional world. At the same time, fictional speech works on the real world, continually shaping a new entity for the reader."[75] Focusing on the use of hermeneutics to gain an understanding of experiences and profanity allows for a deeper level of education than what can be bubbled in on a scantron. Students should be questioning, resisting norms, battling standardizations, and making an impact. Studying, discussing, and analyzing the use of profanity in literature allows for better understanding of the current historical and pedagogical moment, and for insight into controversial topics and what that means for young people in today's society. Studying a topic that older generations find controversial when their own generation does not allows students to engage in a historical, self-reflective, and engaging quest resulting in more insight into not only their self but also society. William Pinar further articulates this point: "The educational point of the public school curriculum is understanding, understanding the relations among academic knowledge, the state of society, and processes of self-formation, and the character of the historical moment in which we live, in which others have lived, and in which our descendants will someday live."[76] For this reason, students must engage with their lived experiences. "Cognitive and linguistic capacities enable reflection on, and the re-interpretation of, experience."[77] Thus there is a restless back and forth movement, or 'play,' between tradition and the experiencing, interpreting person.[78] "The person's present, past and future are constitutively involved in the process of understanding."[79] Student growth and development is intensified.

Conclusion

Without discussion of difficult controversial topics and understanding of lived-experiences, school is nothing more than courses being "mere conglomerations of skills and superficial concepts."[80] Is this what we want our students to learn? In the age of accountability, "teachers are subject to extensive accountability measures, for example, through imposed specifications of the knowledge to be 'delivered', scripted instruction materials and ongoing inspections."[81] What happens when students control the curriculum? Introducing controversial issues and topics into the curriculum can stimulate creative and critical thinking. Controversy can be used to stimulate questioning, thinking, and critical discussion.[82] Having students read and study their language, i.e. profanity, will allow students to engage on a quest to better understand their lived experiences and the role of controversy in those experiences. "Reader-response criticism mixed with hermeneutics allows education to move beyond normal bounds—beyond the page, beyond the words, beyond the

75. Deborah Rossen-Knill, "Creating and Manipulating Fictional Worlds: A Taxonomy of Dialogue in Fiction,"*Journal of Literary Semantics*, XXVIII(1) (1999): 42.

76. William F. Pinar, *What is Curriculum Theory?* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., 2004).

77. Elizabeth Smythe & Deborah Spence, "Reviewing Literature in Hermeneutic Research," International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 11(1) (2012): 11.

78. Gadamer, *Truth and Method, 1975.*

79. Smith, "Profanity, Disgust, and Dangerous Literature," 41.

80. Nel Noddings, "Conversation as Moral Education," *Journal of Moral Education*, 23(2) (1994): 107-118.

81. Teresa Cremin, "Perspectives on Creative Pedagogy: Exploring Challenges, Possibilities and Potential," *Education 3-13*, 43(4) (2015): 354.

82. Watson, "Censoring Freedom.

scantron—and into the realm of lived experiences in the current historical moment."[83] "If controversial topics and ideas are kept from inquiring young minds because their teachers fear reprisal, opportunities to challenge, inform and enlighten students are being missed in the nation's public schools."[84] Education must move beyond the safety cloak of controversy. Claiming a topic is too controversial for a classroom is no longer an option. Students can engage with their own thoughts, opinions, and experiences in regard to controversial topics; students can make their own meaning.

83. Smith, "Profanity, Disgust, and Dangerous Literature," 140.

84. David L. Hudson, *The Silencing of Student Voices: Preserving Free Speech in America's* Schools (Nashville, TN: First Amendment Center), 2003, 87.

Reframing the "Controversy" over Evolution and Intelligent Design

Ronald Lee Zigler

Abstract

It is clear that the 1926 Scopes Trial marked the beginning, and not the end, of the emergence of what John Dewey described as a serious division in the "foundations upon which our culture rests." This division is yet illustrated today by the persistence of anti-evolution legislation, as well as the emergence of vocal advocates of "intelligent design." While many educators, as well as concerned citizens, pay lip service to the importance of nurturing "critical thinking" skills in our students, it is clear that the cultural conflicts which emerge between science and religion are formidable and thus make this topic especially challenging for educators seeking to develop thinking skills in their students. This paper addresses this challenge, but also advances a recommendation for those who wish to introduce this conflict as a "controversy" for discussion in public schools.

Keywords: *John Dewey, Aldous Huxley, Evolution, Intelligent Design, Metaphysics*

Introduction

In her 1993 text *Educating For Intelligent Belief and Unbelief*, Nel Noddings advocated an ambitious plan. She wanted to challenge our students by actively engaging them in a dialogue on the religious issues that define those questions, which "matter deeply to us."[1] This was seen as a dialogue that can take place at all levels of education, but was initially aimed at helping teachers learn to explore links between traditional subject matter and profound existential and religious questions. More recently, in an essay that appeared in the *Harvard Educational Review*, Noddings ventured to add that, in her estimate "we should add frank, critical discussion of evolution and intelligent design" into our classroom "wherever the topic arises—in science, history, mathematics, or English."[2]

One might note that well before Noddings' observations—specifically, since the Supreme Court banned devotional Bible readings in our public schools in 1963—there have in fact been a steady chorus of citizens who have called for just this: the linking of thoughts from religious traditions to school subject matter. Among the attempts to foster this dialogue, was the introduction of *Creationism* into public school biology classes—i.e., the idea that the Biblical account of "creation" should be presented as an alternative explanation to Darwin's theory of evolution. This endeavor led to yet another Supreme Court verdict in 1987 in which it was decided that the teaching of Creationism in a public school represented an inappropriate (and unconstitutional) incursion

1. Nel Noddings, *Educating for Intelligent Belief or Unbelief* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).
2. Nel Noddings, "The New Outspoken Atheism and Education," *Harvard Educational Review*, 78(2) (2008): 387.

of religious doctrine. Notwithstanding this decision, in 2004 a public school district in Pennsylvania attempted to introduce *intelligent design theory* into its ninth grade biology classes in an effort to address what was perceived by school board members as "weaknesses" in Darwin's theory of evolution. However, in the federal lawsuit that subsequently emerged on account of this effort, the judge concluded that intelligent design was merely "relabeled creationism" and hence, again, an inappropriate incursion of religious doctrine into the curriculum of a public school. In spite, (or perhaps because) of these court decisions, Noddings subsequently wrote the statement cited above: namely, that "we should add frank, critical discussion of evolution and intelligent design" into our classroom.

Whether or not we choose to engage in a "frank, critical discussion," this dispute is unlikely to disappear. Indeed, the enduring nature of this issue was illustrated recently when the state of Tennessee passed a law that encourages teachers to present the "scientific strengths and scientific weaknesses" of topics that arouse "debate and disputation" such as "biological evolution, the chemical origins of life, global warming, and human cloning."[3] Several additional state legislatures have attempted to pass similar laws. The upshot of all of these events and court cases is to illustrate, if nothing else, how eager a portion of the American population is to, as Noddings suggested, infuse the science curriculum with profound existential and religious questions. The matter which I seek to revisit then is this: how precisely might we best apply Noddings' recommendation and thereby properly and profitably address this issue in our public schools today without either violating our Constitution's establishment clause or appearing insensitive to the religious convictions of a significant portion of our population?

Controversy Defined and Reframed

The emergence of this dispute constitutes a potentially educable moment for all concerned citizens whether or not they are directly involved in our public schools. The problem, however, with most such deliberations over religion, science and public schools regarding the origin of life, is that they seldom unpack the three different ways in which this matter may be deemed a "controversy": 1) the *scientific* controversy, 2) the *philosophical* controversy, and 3) the *public policy* controversy. In this regard it should be acknowledged at the outset that if we were to apply a strict scientific, epistemic criterion to the nature of this dispute, then we may be inclined to dismiss the issue altogether and acknowledge, at the outset, that there is no *real* controversy.[4] After all, the overwhelming majority of scientists and science educators maintain that from a scientific perspective the theory of evolution—and not intelligent design—has a strong epistemic foundation; (similar claims may be made regarding climate change). On this account, it is clear that what we have is a *philosophical* and *public policy* debate, which itself may be legitimately addressed in a classroom—even if it does not occur in the biology class. Such debates have periodically occupied educators and our public schools, and have included such questions as the role of Latin language study for college preparation (a practice still endorsed by "classical" schools and academies), or the priority given to vocational education opportunities. This matter also illustrates what has been termed the "social criterion" for controversy.[5] The question which then lies before us, once again, is this: how can we engage in this discussion in such a manner as to optimize its pedagogical value

3. Accessed at: http://ncse.com/news/2012/04/monkey-bill-enacted-tennessee-007299.
4. As understood in this volume's *Criteria for Controversy: A Theoretic Approach*
5. Ibid.

for our diverse, democratic society—whether those members be secular and inclined toward atheism (or agnosticism) or devoutly Christian from an evangelical or fundamentalist perspective?

In arguing that we should participate in this discussion, we must nonetheless acknowledge the formidable obstacles to honest, constructive pedagogically successful engagement. These obstacles explain precisely why these debates generate more heat than light and seldom lead to a change of mind or a change of heart among the participants. I believe there are two reasons for these obstacles to constructive engagement and deliberation. The first reason is linked to the very conception of religion itself which is being advanced by a vocal portion of our population. The second, related reason, while underscored by John Dewey, has begun to emerge more prominently in recent years on account of the accumulation of considerable research: namely, the fact that our emotions and emotional responses are paramount when it comes to our opinions—the strategic application of our reasoning skills often serves as "cover" for our emotionally charged beliefs. Without recognizing this situation, our attempts at dialogue will inevitably generate more heat than light.

The first reason, as stated, is linked to the very conception of religion itself as advanced by a vocal portion of our population—widely known as "fundamentalism." In 1922, three years before the Scopes trial, Dewey specifically addressed this fundamentalist challenge to our nation and culture as it manifested in the "campaign against science" that was already underway and being led by William Jennings Bryan—the man who would emerge as the prosecutor at the Scopes trial. Dewey maintained that the popular appeal of Bryan's campaign among a significant portion of the American population was troubling, and even suggested that it "raises fundamental questions about the quality of our democracy."[6] Two years later, in a direct response to the Scopes Trial, British author Aldous Huxley also addressed this "fundamental question" when he opined that a democracy could not go on indefinitely "afflicted by anti-evolution laws."[7] Today, as we have seen, we are still "afflicted" by the fixed beliefs that generate anti-evolution policies—and even a "Creation Museum" that was established in Petersburg, Kentucky in 2007. Thus we are still compelled to contemplate the very "quality of our democracy" as Dewey had done almost 100 years ago.

In his 1939 text *Freedom and Culture* Dewey underscored this incompatibility when he wrote that the historic influence of religion, dating back long before the founding of the United States, has often—if not always—had the effect of "producing habits of mind at odds with the attitudes required for maintenance of democracy."[8] This is the reason Dewey believed that enmity toward science in general—and Darwin's theory in particular— "raises fundamental questions about the quality of our democracy." Precisely why? For the most part, Dewey believed that dogmatic religious beliefs were incompatible with the critical thinking skills necessary for sustaining democratic values. On this account, Dewey pointed out that if we merely spread literacy through our schools and neglected the cultivation of critical thinking skills as well, then, in his words, "the so-called educational work of schools is a dangerously hit-or-miss affair as far as democracy is concerned."[9] For Dewey, this dangerous situation emerges specifically on account of our failure to cultivate within our students something of the *scientific attitude*. This is not the same thing as making everyone a citizen scientist. Rather, the challenge Dewey set before us is one of

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6. John Dewey, "The American Intellectual Frontier," *The Middle Works: 1899-1924: Volume 13, 1921-1922*, Jo Ann Boydston (ed.) (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008), 301.

7 Aldous Huxley, "The Outlook for American Culture: Some Reflections in a Machine Age" in *Aldous Huxley Complete Essays: Volume III, 1930-1935*, Robert S. Baker & James Sexton (eds.) (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2001), 192.

8. John Dewey, *Freedom and Culture* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1963 edition), 151.

9. Ibid., 150.

cultivating the same type of thinking skills that a good scientist must apply to research and problem solving. What skills did Dewey have in mind? The ones he identified should be familiar to anyone who has studied even the elementary features of critical thinking; they include:

> …Willingness to hold belief in suspense, ability to doubt until evidence is obtained; willingness to go where evidence points instead of putting first a personally preferred conclusion; ability to hold ideas in solution and use them as hypotheses to be tested instead of dogmas to be asserted; and (possibly the most distinctive of all) enjoyment of new fields for inquiry and of new problems.[10]

Without these skills, Dewey doubted that we could generate "public opinion intelligent enough to meet present social problems."[11] For this reason, contemporary resistance, in the United States, to addressing the challenge of global climate change may well illustrate a deficiency in these skills among a significant portion of our population.

For Dewey, and most educators, the significance these skills hold for democratic communities is thus self-evident. Yet, Dewey does not deny that advancing these thinking skills would be difficult. He even points out that "Every one of these traits goes contrary to some human impulse that is naturally strong."[12] This then brings us to the second prominent obstacle to constructive, pedagogically effective engagement on matters pertaining to science and religion in the public schools. As Dewey put it in *Freedom and Culture*: "We are beginning to realize that emotions and imagination are more potent in shaping public sentiment and opinion than information and reason."[13] In this text Dewey addressed this conflict between emotion, imagination and reason. He believed it exemplified a serious division in the "foundations upon which our culture rests." [14] But more importantly, Dewey characterized this as a conflict between the ideas that generate scientific knowledge, and "ideas that are emotional and imaginative and that directly actuate conduct."[15] Herein Dewey acknowledges a fact that the modern study of moral psychology has begun to illuminate: how the emotional, imaginative ideas which are the wellsprings for much of human conduct—as well as religion—interact with a scientific understanding of our world. The short answer for many is that "they don't"—meaning people tend to cling to emotionally based ideas and biases, which, in turn, shape their thinking and conduct—even in the face of contradictory evidence. Where, then, does this leave us?

According to Dewey, we need to remember that democracy is much more than a political form of government. Rather, as he argued in *Democracy and Education*, it is "*primarily* a *mode of associated living*."[16] That is, democracy and democratic principles must be understood in the context of a *social psychological milieu* in which we live and continually interact. For Dewey, it is only through the endeavor in which human society replicates the interactive virtues of a human *community* that democratic values become infused into a culture. This is deemed obligatory since democracy, as a form of government exclusively, does not by itself solve social problems. Rather, it establishes the proper conditions under which human communities can appropriately address

10. Ibid., 145.
11. Ibid., 148-149.
12. Ibid., 146.
13. Ibid., 10.
14. Ibid., 168.
15. Ibid., 168.
16. John Dewey, *Democracy and Education: An Introduction to The Philosophy of Education* (New York: MacMillan, 1944, Free Press edition 1966), 87.

those challenges that inevitably—and continually—emerge in social life. Democracy as a mode of associated living optimizes the possibility for the identification of important shared values and consequently—by virtue of these shared values—increases the likelihood for the successful reconciliation of conflicting values and opinions; something that inevitably emerges in any group of people who seek to live together as a nation, state or community. If scientific method marks the optimal model for solving physical problems, democracy can be appropriately viewed as the corresponding model in which social, moral or political problems can be humanely resolved. Furthermore, it might be pointed out that for Dewey science and democracy are not wholly separate domains. They overlap. According to Dewey scientific method is not simply a matter of quantitative assessments applied to the problems which only interest scientists. Rather, it should also be intimately linked to the lived, experienced problems of people and social groups—even those problems and challenges which may be said to emerge on account of a perceived conflict between science and religion.

Because of these observations, Dewey believed that a most formidable obstacle to the successful application of democratic principles in our society is the emergence of social isolation and segregation among competing populations within that society—populations who maintain competing, and often, conflicting interests; including those populations who look toward science and those who look toward religious scripture for guidance on how to live their respective lives. Failing to foster a "mode of associated living" among our highly diverse population, it is small wonder that American society, in particular, has grown increasingly factious and polarized. Dewey predicted as much. This is what he had to say about the effects of social isolation among groups comprising a culture or society:

> The isolation and exclusiveness of a gang or clique brings its antisocial spirit into relief. But this same spirit is found wherever one group has interests 'of its own' which shut it out from full interaction with other groups, so that its prevailing purpose is the protection of what it has got, instead of reorganization and progress through wider relationships. It marks nations in their isolation from one another; families, which seclude their domestic concerns as if they had no connection with a larger life; schools when separated from the interest of home and community; the divisions of rich and poor; learned and unlearned. The essential point is that isolation makes for rigidity and formal institutionalizing of life, for static and selfish ideals within the group. That savage tribes regard aliens and enemies as synonymous is not accidental. It springs from the fact that they have identified their experience with rigid adherence to their past customs. On such a basis it is wholly logical to fear intercourse with others, for such contact might dissolve custom. It would certainly occasion reconstruction. It is a commonplace that an alert and expanding mental life depends upon an enlarging range of contact with the physical environment. But the principle applies even more significantly to the field where we are apt to ignore it—the sphere of social contacts.[17]

In the final analysis, Dewey's recommendation for remedying our increasingly polarized culture is wholly consistent with the pedagogical implications of two of our most important theorists/researchers who have made significant contributions to the study of moral psychology: Lawrence Kohlberg and, more recently, Jonathon Haidt. Kohlberg and Haidt offer us two contrasting theories on how we develop our value-laden opinions as well as our sense of right and wrong, good and bad. According to Kohlberg's cognitive-developmental model, the interaction of individuals

17. Ibid., 86.

engaged in rational, cognitive deliberations provides the foundations for a cognitive restructuring of our understanding of moral principles and human values. Haidt, on the other hand, has argued that in our social and moral deliberations, our emotional responses are paramount when it comes to our opinions—the application of our reasoning skills are secondary and merely serves as "cover" for our emotionally charged beliefs. Nonetheless, in spite of these fundamental differences, both Kohlberg and Haidt make the same recommendation if we wish to bring about a change in someone's heart and mind: namely, we must encourage *social interaction*—just as Dewey maintained, so that we "enlarge" the range of our social contacts. As Haidt has explicitly written: "the main way that we change our minds on moral issues is by interacting with other people."[18] It is on this account that the social, moral, and politically charged "controversy" over intelligent design, religion and science needs to be addressed not as a scientific controversy with a clear epistemic foundation, but rather, I propose that this issue should instead be treated as a *philosophical* controversy—more specifically, as a *metaphysical* controversy. As a metaphysical controversy it also embodies that form of dispute which Dearden identified as a clash over *differing conceptual frameworks or worldviews*.[19] More recently social psychologist Haidt has argued that these kind of differences are so profound that they can be profitably conceptualized as a clash of philosophical or "moral matrices"—as illustrated in the 1999 movie *The Matrix*.[20] Accordingly, a philosophical matrix reflects a whole web of interrelated assumptions and understandings that are taken for granted and are foundational to the worldview of the inhabitants of that matrix. It is something of a *consensual hallucination*. So much so, that growing up in a particular matrix can make one impervious to the challenges of other, competing matrices. Consequently, any attempt to reconcile such differences through an appeal to logic or reason alone—and the hope of a shared, *epistemic* criterion—is likely to be incomprehensible if not unacceptable. On these accounts, the purpose of the strategy that I am proposing here is—if nothing else—aimed at finding an alternate route toward fostering both dialogue and mutual understanding through civil *social interaction*. This constitutes a first step toward constructive pedagogically successful deliberations.

In some respects, this strategy is similar to those who have recommended "religious literacy" as an important goal for public schools. Religious literacy merely reflects an understanding of religious vocabulary and religious doctrine—something that is well within the Supreme Court guidelines which otherwise banned prayer and devotional Bible study. But, in addition, this is also an issue of respect for diversity in a pluralistic society.[21] In a country where a large percentage of citizens profess religious beliefs, it would appear insensitive and disrespectful to ignore the religious voices in our culture. Rosenblith and Priestman, however, carry this idea one step further. They maintain that it may not be possible to truly show respect for religion without also entertaining the possibility that there are valid truth-claims to be found in those religions. Indeed, to this end it is suggested by coauthor Rosenblith that "to demonstrate true respect, we must submit religious claims, beliefs, and experiences to some shared process of evaluation."[22] Yet, the problem

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18. Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2012), 68.

19. Robert F. Dearden, "Controversial Issues and the Curriculum," *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 13(1) (1981): 37-44.

20. Haidt, *The Righteous Mind*, 107-111.

21. Suzanne Rosenblith & Scott Priestman, "Problematizing Religious Truth: Implications for Public Education," *Educational Theory*, 54(9): 2004: 365-380.

22. Ibid., 372.

is not so simple. As coauthor Priestman contends, since religions often make claims about "*metaphysical Truths*" that are not found on reason, they are beyond the scope of our evaluation.[23] This, it would appear, may be the principal reason why Dewey underscored the role of religion in "producing habits of mind at odds with the attitudes required for maintenance of democracy"—unlike rational, scientific claims, those advanced in the name of scriptural authority and/or religious revelation are beyond the scope of rational deliberation and consensual validation, since they are advanced and accepted as articles of "faith," or, more accurately, "belief." This is a formidable obstacle, since the advancement of science or democratic values, does not proceed merely through the efforts of a few gifted individuals who can unilaterally impose their superior understanding on the nation or its schools. Rather, resolving scientific or social problems involves the participation of a community capable of reaching a significant measure consensus. Without a significant measure of consensual validation on the part of the wider scientific or democratic communities respectively, even the work of a few, gifted individuals is likely to be ignored. While an Albert Einstein or a Thomas Jefferson could have made important contributions to any culture and community in which they lived and flourished, those contributions would unlikely be the same renowned accomplishments which we now celebrate respectively had they lived in a much earlier generation—and consequently in very different scholarly and political communities.

Notwithstanding the formidable task of establishing a widely accepted standard to evaluate the truth claims of religion, I would nonetheless offer students instead the opportunity to examine, compare and contrast alternate *metaphysical paradigms*—especially since, as Priestman notes, religious traditions often make truth claims grounded in a particular metaphysic. Indeed, a metaphysical paradigm may be said to underlie not only all religious traditions, but even science as well—thus providing an appropriate, and essential, common denominator for our deliberations. In examining competing metaphysical paradigms, I believe we might create the social and psychological climate requisite for advancing mutual understanding. This alone, would serve the purpose of enjoining those forces necessary to create, as Dewey once wrote, "public opinion intelligent enough to meet present social problems."[24]

As indicated, it is being suggested that we introduce students to a basic discussion of the underlying, *metaphysical assumptions* from which competing metaphysical perspectives emerge. It is true that the approach I am advocating would not necessarily establish the claims of particular religious truths per se. However, it would serve two important functions. First, it would provide a context for advancing civil dialogue with the possibility of nurturing mutual understanding; but, in addition, it would inadvertently provide a context in which we could perhaps, as author Aldous Huxley recommended, distinguish a *good metaphysic* from a *bad metaphysic*. According to Huxley, a good metaphysic is simply one that corresponds reasonably closely with observed and inferred reality. That is, it does what Rosenblith suggests: it provides a shared process of evaluation from which a measure of consensus can emerge; a bad metaphysic does not.[25]

To advance this dialogue in the hope of fostering pedagogically constructive engagement, I would like to propose four different metaphysics in a framework from which we may launch our dialogue: 1) *Supernatural Metaphysics,* 2) *Philosophical or Metaphysical Naturalism,* 3) *Methodological Naturalism*, and 4) *Naturalistic Metaphysics*. Each of these metaphysics can be examined in terms of the kind of truth claims they make: smaller "truths" or larger absolute "Truths" with a capital "T." Furthermore, these truth claims can also be examined in terms of their foundational

23. Ibid., 374.
24. Dewey, *Freedom and Culture*, 148-149.
25. Aldous Huxley, *Ends and Means* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), 291.

claims to the source of their validity. That is, the validity of either truth claim may be seen to be anchored in one or more of three different "arenas" from which truth claims may be seen to emerge. These arenas are composed of *internally* valid truth claims, *externally* valid truth claims, and those claims on truth that rest solely on *traditional* sources of validity—such as scripture. These sources of truth claims will be examined as we summarize our four metaphysics. I wish to emphasize, however, that these paradigms constitute a tentative proposal that is aimed at fostering a new direction for constructive dialogue and the promotion of mutual understanding.[26]

Supernatural Metaphysics

A *Supernatural Metaphysic* is what most people may think of when they hear the term "metaphysic", in so far as metaphysics is deemed to stand for a reality beyond the physical world in which we normally live. A Supernatural Metaphysic advances a strict dualism between the natural world of sense experience, and a supernatural world beyond sense and ordinary human experience. It is the same dualistic approach, which distinguishes the soul from the body and identifies a Supreme Being of supernatural qualities. The validity of Supernatural Metaphysics rests primarily, but perhaps not exclusively, with *tradition*. Such claims to *traditional validity* uniformly rest with an established authority that is not questioned but is accepted as a foundation of "faith"—it is not found on reason and is beyond the scope of rational evaluation. Many such traditions are linked to either scripture or a particular individual personality or both. Belief in the validity of the scripture or religious leader—the traditional source of validity—does not extend beyond those that can accept these sources as authoritative. For this reason, there is little or no *external validity* inherent in a Supernatural Metaphysic, in so far as non-believers cannot publicly verify the claims to Truth in this paradigm. With regard to *internally* valid claims, which are based upon personal, subjective experience, they are nice but not universally deemed necessary. Indeed, if we are to believe the scriptural story of the doubting Thomas, then merely believing through faith without the verification of personal experience is deemed much more laudable.

Philosophical or Metaphysical Naturalism

Philosophical or *Metaphysical Naturalism* advances the metaphysics of materialism. While this may seem an oxymoron to some, it is not since Philosophical Naturalism, like a Supernatural Metaphysics makes a claim to absolute Truth with a capital "T." Indeed, this is its one absolute claim: the material world is the *only* reality. Some, especially religious thinkers, consider Philosophical Naturalism as the official metaphysics of science and secularism—although it is not necessarily so as we will see in the other paradigms to be considered. Its principal focus is on publically observable, publically verifiable truth with a small "t." For this reason, while its claim to small "truth" is high on external validity, its claim to a valid position on absolute "Truth" is no more secure than that of Supernatural Metaphysics since there is no publically valid way to unequivocally verify this "Truth" claim either. This point is similarly made by the twentieth century philosopher Bertrand Russell who suggested that dogmatic religious claims as well as the uncompromising assertions of a skeptical materialist are both absolute philosophies: one is certain of knowing the other of not knowing. For Russell, as well as our own educational purp-

26. Some of the ideas I present are discussed in Barbara Forrest's essay, "Methodological Naturalism and Philosophical Naturalism: Clarifying the Connection,"*PHIL*, 3(2) (2000): 7-29.

poses, philosophical dialogue should dissipate undo, arrogant certainty, whether of knowledge or ignorance.[27] Indeed, whenever dealing with claims involving absolute certainty, we should eschew unseemly confidence in our position. What Russell's statement offers is a caution to epistemic arrogance: something that sometimes affects both religious dogmatists and scientific skeptics. What is called for is something quite rare: epistemic modesty and humility—regarding *all* of our truth claims.

In Philosophical Naturalism, no authority is allowed to be sacred—except, perhaps its materialistic assumption. All other truth claims are open to further testing, verification or rejection. Public, consensual validation is the hallmark of external validity and the central path toward establishing truth. In an extreme form of Philosophical Naturalism, sometimes termed *scientism*, there is no room for internally valid truth claims that are subjective and remain unverifiable.

It should not be surprising that many adherents to Philosophical Naturalism are among those who are not merely skeptical about the claims of religion and/or religious experience, but critical as well. As an expression of scientism, Philosophical Naturalism is not only atheistic, but in many respects openly hostile to religion and religious beliefs—a perspective that is illustrated in the writings of Richard Dawkins.[28] It is both interesting as well as highly appropriate to note an observation about this form of materialistic atheism that was articulated by William James in the first chapter of his ground-breaking study *The Varieties of Religious Experience*.[29] James noted that even in his day, the penchant toward "medical materialism" in the scientific community led to a reductionist explanation of James' topic of study: namely, religious experience. According to the medical materialists, the phenomenon of religious experience was to be dismissed as simply the subjective accompaniment to an abnormal brain function—such as in epilepsy. James' response to this predisposition is as relevant today as it was in 1902 when he expressed it in what is, arguably, his most famous text. James' clever response to the medical materialist was to point out that if one was going to explain mental phenomena through an appeal to functions—or dysfunctions—of the brain, then it must be applied consistently to *all* mental states. Consequently, as James points out, the disposition of the "sturdy atheist" may be no less conditioned by physiological forces. In other words, the intense skepticism of obstinate atheism may also reflect an internal physiological condition that, in turn, reveals a disability of its own. It could signal an inability to experience the world with a heightened aesthetic sensibility, or in a manner that highlights a deeper sense of meaning in even ordinary experience. In making his observation, James makes it clear that we should remain opened minded about the study of *all* mental phenomena and not be too hasty in ascribing a positive or negative valence to it until it is better understood. In this sense, we are afforded yet another endorsement of the virtue of epistemic humility.

Methodological Naturalism

Methodological Naturalism differs most significantly from Philosophical Naturalism in that it makes no Truth (capital T) claims regarding the ultimate materialistic nature of reality. Rather, it assumes that the tools of scientific inquiry are limited to those features of reality that lend themselves to scientific study. Whether or not there are other realities or Truths (capital T) is beyond the scope of study for Methodological Naturalism. In other ways, it is similar to Philosophical Naturalism in that it emphasizes truth that is externally valid and open to public inspection

27. Bertrand Russell, "Philosophy for the Layman," *Unpopular Essays* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1950), 27.

28. Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008).

29. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York, Mentor Books, 1958), 29-30.

and consensual agreement. Likewise, there are no sacred authorities, personal or textual. However, on matters of religious revelations or religious/spiritual authority, Methodological Naturalism, while not hostile to religion, is nonetheless officially agnostic on matters that cannot be subjected to the empirical demands of scientific study.

Naturalistic Metaphysics

John Dewey may be seen as a principal contributor to a *Naturalistic Metaphysic* insofar as he maintained that what we allude to by the notion of metaphysics, is nonetheless contiguous with our natural world of ordinary experience. In other words, it is not "supernatural" and beyond systematic, empirical inquiry. The guiding principle underlying a *Naturalistic Metaphysic* was articulated by Aldous Huxley as well. Huxley maintained, as many do, that it is impossible to live without an assumed metaphysic—whether or not we choose to articulate it. As we noted earlier, Huxley maintained that our choice is not between any kind of metaphysic and no metaphysic at all; rather, our choice is always between a *good* metaphysic and a *bad* metaphysic.[30] As I also noted earlier, according to Huxley a "good" metaphysic is simply that which corresponds reasonably closely with observed and inferred reality. For this reason, a Naturalistic Metaphysic is firmly committed to scientific method and inquiry as a means of building external validity and a consensual measure of truth—for both small "t" as well as "Truth" with a capital "T." While traditional sources of validity (authorities and scripture) may be respected, the question that must be asked is not whether custom and traditional authority will be respected and followed, but rather our choice is, as Dewey suggested, between adopting more or less intelligent and significant customs from a competing range of traditions.[31] These traditions may nonetheless remain the source of a "working hypothesis": that is, a tentative understanding that can be maintained, but without the assumption of certitude which often accompanies a chosen metaphysic. This point should be emphasized. That is, from the perspective of a Naturalistic Metaphysics, all truth claims, whether small "t" truth or large "T" Truth are tentative and open to possible revision if warranted by future inquiries. In this respect, all truth claims constitute a "working hypothesis" that is open to later clarification and revision—while simultaneously functioning as something of a "best bet" in our endeavor to understand either form of truth. [32] In other words, a Naturalistic Metaphysic is predicated upon a healthy measure of epistemic humility.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of a Naturalistic Metaphysic is its approach to that category of truth, which may be said to hold a measure of *internal validity*—personal subjective experience. As John Dewey also recognized, "knowledge" –meaning scientific understanding—is not our only *mode of understanding*.[33] There is much that we learn from our personal private experiences that may not be open to public inspection and verification. This, alone, does not necessarily render such understandings invalid. Rather, it underscores the idea that not everything we learn in life can be readily subjected to public inquiry—it may remain internally or *personally* valid nonetheless. There is, however, a limit to our claims to the validity of such truths. That is,

30. Huxley, *Ends and Means*, 291.

31. John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct*, *The Collected Works of John Dewey: 1882-1953*, The Electronic Edition, mw 14.58.

32. Originally published in Aldous Huxley's 1944 novel *Time Must Have a Stop* (Urbana/Champaign: Dalkey Archive Press edition, 2006): 247-249. Subsequently republished in *Vedanta For the Western World*, edited by Christopher Isherwood, and more recently in *Huxley and God; Essays*, edited by Jacqueline Hazard Bridgeman.

33. John Dewey, *How We Think*, *The Collected Works of John Dewey: 1882-1953* The Electronic Edition, lw.8.226-227.

we cannot expect others to find the understandings we reach through personal experience to be persuasive, unless they too have had similar experiences. A case in point would be a personal encounter with an extraterrestrial life form or a spiritual experience, or an experience of religious revelation of some form. But even here, with regards to broadly conceived religious experience, John Dewey was confident that it was only a matter of time before scientific method would be applied toward its study—rendering it a part of "natural" (as opposed to supernatural) knowledge. This was among Dewey's principal observations that he advanced *A Common Faith* over 80 years ago: namely that the application of scientific method to the study of broadly conceived spiritual experiences is likely to allow us to better understand them, and in doing so, make them more widely shared as well as understood. He deemed this endeavor important since such experiences, in Dewey's words, can lend "a deep enduring support to the process of living."[34]

The field of neuroscience and its study of the brain through modern brain scanning technologies (e.g., fMRI, etc.) has made especially important contributions on this account during the past 30 years. Dewey predicted as much when in *A Common Faith*, he wrote that one would be "bold to the point of rashness who asserts that intimate personal experience will never come within the ken of natural knowledge."[35] For this reason, neuroscience is central to the advancement of a Naturalistic approach to metaphysics since it underscores this idea that what we seek to embrace by our notion of "metaphysics" is itself contiguous with the natural world of ordinary experience. In this regard, the emergence of the field of *Neurotheology* is especially compelling in so far as it is explicitly concerned with the study of the brain during an individual's endeavor to cultivate a spiritual, or religiously significant experience.[36] Nonetheless, it is important to acknowledge that this research cannot confirm the *ontological veracity* or the phenomenological accuracy of the subjective experience encountered through meditation or other spiritual practices; however, it may mark the beginning of a road of inquiry and dialogue that can help us better understand, as William James wrote, the *varieties* of such experiences as well as their practical impact on human life—in effect rendering such experience a part of the *natural* world as opposed to one that is *supernatural*. One possible implication, on this account, might be that the notion of "intelligent design" be re-conceived not as a strictly empirical claim that lends itself to scientific testing and validation (i.e., *external* validity), but rather, it might represent a manner in which the world is subjectively experienced—an experience that may nonetheless hold personal meaning and a measure of *internal* validity for those who share that experience.

Conclusion

As already considered, there is a persuasive case for allowing our public schools to treat religion in their curriculum. Religious literacy is a compelling goal, in so far as it helps students understand the vocabulary of religious dialogue and the diversity of religious traditions. However, if schools are willing to engage students in the kind of existential exchange that Noddings would recommend, I believe they would be better served by focusing their discussions on the underlying metaphysical assumptions that appear to be at the heart of the most intense disagreements—especially those regarding science and religion. There are important reasons why this recommendation is made; and they have to do with the equally incommensurable nature of religious ideologies, within the religious domain, and the often mutually exclusive status of certain religious ideologies

34. John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1934), 15.
35. Ibid., 35
36. Andrew Newberg, *Principles of Neurotheology* (Burlington, Ashgate Publishing Co., 2010).

and the principles of scientific inquiry—these perspectives representing competing *philosophical matrices*. It is on this account that an examination of the underlying metaphysics of these alternate visions may help to expose and clarify the incommensurable nature of these ideological conflicts. In other words, we may create a more amicable environment in which citizens can learn to respect one another and reach a mutual understanding of the not wholly justifiable assumptions with which we are *all* compelled to live—whether they be embraced by "sturdy atheists" or religious dogmatists. This could at least create a measure of epistemic humility and thereby a more cordial social climate in which we "agree to disagree" if nothing else.

Notwithstanding our discussion so far, it does not preclude the possibility that students also learn about the arguments that have been advanced for the existence of God—as Noddings suggests. However, I suspect that the primary impediment to such a discussion is more psychological than philosophical. What philosophers like Noddings seem to overlook, is the impact of what social psychologists refer to as the *confirmation bias*. The manifestation of this widespread phenomenon can be stated in a simple assertion: *believing is seeing*.[37] As social psychologists point out, we are much more likely to hear, attend to and remember arguments that support our beliefs, biases and *philosophical matrix* than we are those statements, testimonials and other bits of evidence that contradict them. For this reason, students should spend more time examining the fundamental, underlying metaphysical assumptions to their own beliefs rather than engage in an extensive review of competing religious doctrines and how they conflict with each other and with science. In this manner, students are encouraged to momentarily step outside their *metaphysical matrix*: to thereby consider on what basis one might feel compelled to revise and reconstruct his or her metaphysical assumptions. When is it warranted and why it might be difficult? If as a result of this dialogue, we nurture a measure of epistemic humility in our students, we will have fulfilled an important educational objective.

I believe the approach to classroom discussion outlined here also provides an appropriate means for addressing the most recent attack on the theory of evolution as it is taught in public schools. The most recent attack on the teaching of evolution is one that urges schools to "teach (the) strengths and weaknesses of evolution." This call is accompanied by the slogan "open minds teach both sides." [38] In this instance, we are not being asked to teach intelligent design per se, just the *weaknesses* in the theory of evolution. This is a fair request, since all scientific findings and theories should be open to revision if truly warranted. However, this recommendation does not go far enough. Indeed, it provides a more compelling rationale for why students need an elementary understanding of the philosophy of science as well as an appreciation of the competing metaphysical paradigms that underlie either science or religion—each of which may be seen to be characterized by their own "strengths" and "weaknesses." In effect, what students need to learn is something about the nature and range of scientific inquiry and how it differs from religious inquiry: both those approaches to religious inquiry which see itself compatible with evolutionary theory, and those approaches which view scientific assumptions and religious doctrine as mutually exclusive. In either instance, there is an assumed metaphysic underlying these approaches that should be exposed. In doing so, we may, as suggested, help nurture a measure of epistemic humility among our students since no metaphysic can advance a claim for its unequivocal veracity.

I think it is clear that the central problem in the debate over evolutionary theory and religion in our public schools comes down to the inherent conflict between a supernatural approach to

37. Carol Tavris & Elliot Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made (but not by me): Why We Justify Foolish Beliefs, Bad Decisions and Hurtful Act* (New York: Harcourt, 2007).

38. See the following web site: http://www.strengthsandweaknesses.org/weaknesses.htm.

metaphysics, and the other metaphysical paradigms. On this account, unless the metaphysical underpinnings of these perspectives are first laid bare, discussions over God's existence and/or intelligent design may be the 21st century equivalent of discussing the question of how many angels can stand on the head of a pin. It is for this reason that the strengths and weaknesses we should be discussing are those of the competing metaphysical assumptions—not the relative merits of Darwin's theory of evolution.

Yet, having said this, I think it is time to acknowledge that honest reasoning and debate is not necessarily going to be welcomed by many of Darwin's critics. I do not suspect that they want a discussion on the strengths and weaknesses of a Supernatural Metaphysic. Indeed, as suggested, the root of our challenge may be psychological, not philosophical. Summarizing a large body of research, social psychologists Carol Tavris and Elliot Aronson offer us this caveat:

> Most people, when directly confronted by evidence that they are wrong, do not change their point of view or course of action but justify it even more tenaciously. Even irrefutable evidence is rarely enough to pierce the mental armor of self-justification.[39]

As Tavris and Aronson also point out, when it comes to firmly held religious convictions, one is not likely to change any minds with a discussion of strengths and weaknesses in metaphysical theories. Indeed, people who are somewhat insecure in their religious outlook are going to feel most uncomfortable with anyone or any set of ideas that challenge their fundamental faith and beliefs. The mere presence of contradictory statements (i.e., Philosophical Naturalism) can arouse the painful dissonance of doubt. People seek a sense of consonance regarding their identity, beliefs and self-image and are made most uncomfortable by the presence of those people, and or ideas, whose mere presence may inspire doubt—in them or, in the case of our schools, in their children. For this reason, it is highly ingenious for critics of Darwin to call for an "open discussion" on the strengths and weaknesses of evolution. I do not believe an open discussion of metaphysical paradigms would be as welcome, even though this is precisely the kind of discussion that is needed.

It must also be conceded, however, that, as Tavris and Aronson also state, not all scientists are scientific, open-minded and willing to give up their strong convictions either.[40] One can adhere to Philosophical Naturalism—*scientism*—with the same degree of dogmatic certainty and epistemic arrogance that one can adhere to a supernatural approach to metaphysics. What may be the most valuable outcome of the kind of dialogue suggested here is that it might help us identify more clearly the difference between *epistemic arrogance* and *epistemic humility*. In a pluralistic, democratic society there is little doubt that epistemic humility and modesty are critical for advancing democratic ideals. Indeed, democracies demand *pluralistic citizens.* Unlike the absolutist (e.g., Biblical literalist), who arrogantly proclaim to have all the answers, or the relativist who obstinately rejects any and all claims regarding "truth" or "virtue" the pluralistic citizen makes two critical assumptions: first, we are capable of assessing both truth and virtue, but different people will inevitably disagree about their nature; and secondly, if we are to make a democracy work, our first task is to engage in a respectful dialogue on questions of truth and virtue, to avoid epistemic arrogance and to build consensus through compromise—made possible by humility. In other words, the pluralistic citizen applies what Brighouse terms "the norm of reciprocity" to public

39. Tavris & Aronson, *Mistakes Were Made*, 2.
40. Ibid., 102.

dialogue.[41] In applying these principles, citizens are not required to abandon their beliefs and values. However, there must be some recognition that imposing beliefs and values on others in the absence of a significant measure of public consensus is not simply undemocratic but anti-democratic. Unfortunately, the arrogance and self-righteousness that affects many of those who subscribe to a dogmatic, Supernatural Metaphysics (i.e., Biblical/scriptural literalists) have a history of condoning cruel, inhumane and undemocratic actions on account of their unwillingness to compromise "the word of God" that they have identified in their scripture and tradition. Dewey was quite candid about this problem and the challenge that it poses to the democratic ideal. In *A Common Faith* it led him to this ominous conclusion:

> I cannot understand how any realization of the democratic ideal as a vital moral and spiritual ideal in human affairs is possible without surrender of the conception of the basic division to which supernatural Christianity is committed.[42]

The best explanation I have found, for why a dogmatic, supernatural Christianity (or any dogmatic supernaturalism) may be incompatible with our democratic ideals is provided by Aldous Huxley, when he wrote: "It is fatally easy to kill people in the name of a dogma; it is blessedly difficult to kill them in the name of a working hypothesis."[43]

It is true that at this time in human history, the Muslim World in particular has generated tragic publicity on account of the willingness of some to kill people in the name of their dogmatic beliefs. However, it is important to recognize that this has not always been the case. Tragic examples of mass killings in the name of beliefs in the Christian World are clearly illustrated by the Inquisition, the Thirty Years' War, and the Salem witch trials of Colonial America. On this account, the Western "Christian" World should not assume chauvinistic confidence in their cultural superiority—in spite of the fact that some time that has passed since religion was a major source of widespread and fatal disagreements in Western Civilization (although the Nazi Holocaust is not so distant, and inflammatory rhetoric has not gone out of style).

The United States may be unique in the industrialized world for the degree of religiosity prevalent in a large portion of its population—and this is why my recommendations are particularly relevant to our nation's public schools. On that account, it is not unreasonable to view our Constitutions First Amendment's separation of Church and State as a critical protection essential for both "believers" and "unbelievers" alike. For Aldous Huxley our culture of science and democracy is in many ways a protective *veneer*, albeit an effective one, that safeguards us from our otherwise troublesome impulses and non-rational (if not irrational) biases. He reminds us that while the human brain is capable of generating science, philosophy, art and literature, it also retains the potential to be quickly victimized by "fanaticism, superstition, dogmatic bumptiousness, and the nationalistic idolatry" made possible by "rabble-rousing propaganda and organized lying"—all of which can make mass murder quite possible and even acceptable.[44] For this reason, Huxley believed our protective cultural veneers can be readily shattered by any number of man-made or

41. Harry Brighouse, *On Education* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 67-73.

42. Dewey, *A Common Faith*, 84.

43. Aldous Huxley, in "Aldous Huxley's Revisions of the Old Raja's *Notes on What's What* in His final Typescript of Island" by Bernfried Nugel, *Aldous Huxley Annual: A Journal of Twentieth Century Thought and Beyond, 9* (Berlin: Deutsche Nationalbibliothek, 2009): 69-90.

44 Aldous Huxley, "Culture and the Individual," in *Moksha: Aldous Huxley's Classic Writings on Psychedelics and the Visionary Experience*, Michael Horowitz & Cynthia Palmer (eds.) (Rochester: Parker Street Press, 1999 edition), 248.

natural disasters of sufficient enough scale, thereby unleashing the tragedies our Constitution is designed to prevent.[45] On this account, the ultimate purpose of education in a democracy is to provide a curriculum and instruction that fortifies this protective veneer. This is the central meaning of the notion advanced long ago by Thomas Jefferson and Horace Mann that education is the "bulwark" of democracy. It is only through these efforts in strengthening that bulwark—or veneer—that we may hope to realize, as Dewey wrote, "the democratic ideal as a vital moral and spiritual ideal in human affairs."[46]

45. For a fuller consideration of Huxley's ideas on education and those forces which can undermine our humanity and our protective cultural veneer, see Ronald Lee Zigler, *The Educational Prophecies of Aldous Huxley: The Visionary Legacy of Brave New World, Ape and Essence and Island* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

46. Dewey, *A Common Faith,* 84.

White on White Education: The Power of Intersectional Sociological Imagination and Autobiography as Tools for Examining Controversy in Teacher Education

Sheri C. Hardee & Kelly McFaden

Abstract

The Social Foundations of Education is a field of study dedicated to critically examining issues of social justice in both society and education. When future educators engage in these conversations around race, gender, orientation, socioeconomic status, and so forth, these undergraduates often approach such topics with the belief that they are controversial and unsettled. A fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of controversy acts, in these cases, as a barrier to intellectual growth and, thus, to socially just educational practices in their future classrooms. In this paper, we set forth an argument for a pedagogy of controversy that can aid instructors in conceptualizing how to approach these topics with future educators, and other undergraduate majors, through the use of sociological autobiography and narrative employing the sociological imagination.

Keywords: *social justice, whiteness, social controversy, poetic analysis*

"This class is bigoted bullshit."[1]

We teach Social Foundations of Education (SFE) courses often viewed by students and faculty as controversial courses because we discuss the supposedly "controversial issues" of race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, native language, religion, and so forth. For our mostly white, female, and privileged students, anything outside of the dominant ideology is seen as controversial. They are often consumed with policing their own boundaries and not letting in anything they deem as "not like them," including divergent ways of thinking.[2] Yet students have a fundamental misunderstanding of what makes something controversial. They perceive many of their SFE professors as presenting opinion rather than the culmination of work and research. For many of these students, if it is not hard science, it is not established truth and is subjective. For other students, like the one

1. White Male, Spring 2015, Sociocultural Diversity Course.

2. Judith Butler, from *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, in *Feminist Theory: A Reader*, Wendy K. Kolmar & Frances Bartkowski (eds.) (Boston: McGraw-Hill, 1990); Laura Niesen de Abruna, "Homi Bhabha as Public Intellectual at the Turn of the Millennium: Introduction to Keynote Lecture at the Annual NEMLA Conference, Boston, March 8, 2003," *Modern Language Studies,* 33(½) (2003); Cyrus R. K. Pattell, "Comparative American Studies: Hybridity and Beyond," *American Literary Histo*ry, 11(1) (1999): 166-186

quoted in the introductory comment to this paper, SFE professors are seen as indoctrinating students to a particular political ideology.[3] One of the battles we face, then, is how to negotiate false controversy in the classroom and how to help our students navigate their way through what they perceive as controversy to what is actually controversial.

We owe it to our students—and to their future students, as these undergraduates are education majors—to explore rationality and controversy in our classrooms. The American public is losing trust in education due, in part, to the handling of controversial issues. There is no neutral position: It is a fallacy to believe that education or those who convey knowledge can be positionless.[4] For example, our students often argue that racism no longer exists and therefore questions about race can be ignored. Since racism is nonexistent in their view, it is possible to remain positionless in matters involving race. So, when we teach about anti-racist education these same students often see this as negatively biased and controversial however, an unwillingness to acknowledge racism and to learn about anti-racist education is participating in an oppressive and racist institution and it is not, as they would construct it, being neutral or positionless. It is a misunderstanding of controversy to believe that the opposite of anti-racist education does anything other than maintain institutionalized racism in education. There is no safe middle ground. As seen through this example, we have an obligation to teach our students what constitutes real controversy and what does not—we want them to be able to approach non-controversial topics directly and to be able to approach both controversial and non-controversial topics from a socially just perspective. We need, in other words, a pedagogy of controversy, and we argue the first steps in implementing such a pedagogy start with using informed dialogue and theoretical readings to (1) teach students to understand rationality and apply this to education and (2) ask students to examine their own positionality through sociological autobiography and imagination. We see this as a vital pedagogical approach for teacher education programs to model for their students, as we want to help our students problematize trust and education and to help them become educators with the ability to act and teach from a critical multicultural framework in order to catalyze much-needed social change.

Controversy Defined

Before we move into how we approach controversy from a pedagogical perspective, it is important to discuss the nature of controversy in regard to how we, as educators, and our students conceptualize it. Hand and Levinson cited Dearden's definition of controversy when they wrote, "To teach something as controversial is to teach it as *unsettled*, to present it as a matter on which contrary views are or could be held; and we take it that teachers ought only to teach something in this way when 'contrary views can be held on it without those views being contrary to reason.'"[5] This is based on an epistemic criterion, rather than political or behavioral criterion, and not from a practical accommodation frame. Thus, dispute does not equal controversy when that disputation

3. Barbara Applebaum, "Is Teaching for Social Justice a 'Liberal Bias?'," *Teachers College Record,* 111(2) (2009): 376-408

4. Applebaum, "Is Teaching for Social Justice a 'Liberal Bias'?"; Henry A. Giroux, *Education and the Crisis of Public Values: Challenging the Assault on Teachers, Students, and Public Education* (New York: Peter Lang, 2015).

5. Michael Hand & Ralph Levinson, "Discussing Controversial Issues in the Classroom," *Educational Philosophy and Theory,* 44(6) (2012): 618.

is rooted outside of rationality. As Hand and Levinson continued, "What matters, from an educational point of view, is not whether disagreement actually occurs, but whether it is epistemically warranted, whether more than one view on a matter is rationally defensible."[6]

In such a definition, cultural and religious diversity, ethnicity, prejudice, race and racism, for example, cannot be defined as controversial topics. Our students, however, do see these topics are controversial, and thus we utilize an epistemic approach as a first step to illustrate for them that the existence of racism, for example, is not controversial. According to Hand, to teach something in a nondirective manner is to teach it as unsettled or up for continued debate and dialogue as opposed to directive, indicating that the matter is settled.[7] As Hand asked, "What possible justification could there be for commending nondirective teaching on the matters of prejudice and racism?"[8] However, he went on to note that these issues are being presented as controversial, citing bullying and racism, in particular, as two issues often tackled in teaching materials related to handling controversial issues in the classroom.[9] We argue this is because many educators do not understand the nature of controversy or the difference between controversy and disagreement, and, as a result, do not teach students the best techniques for employing rationality in their thinking.

We recognize that there are limitations when utilizing the epistemic criterion as a theoretical framework for defining controversy. As Bertucio notes in this volume, the epistemic criterion is not without its faults, including a tendency for ahistorical implementation and a moral relativism that borders on a socially constructed domination by the majority. Because modern moral dilemmas lack the "body of public knowledge, criteria of truth, critical standards and verification procedures" that Dearden suggests are necessary for defining a matter as settled, Bertucio argues any determinations as to the controversial nature of a topic are more likely to be influenced by an individual's biased perspective and desire to belong to a particular intellectual group than by rational justification.[10]

In this same volume, Anders and Shudak argue that no single criterion is sufficient in determining what is controversial but behavioral, epistemic, political, social, and theoretical must all be considered in making such determination. We argue, however, that beginning with the epistemic criterion and establishing a basis for rationality in thought and argumentation is essential to the pedagogy of controversy. While we recognize the epistemic criterion is not the only criterion, we argue that this is a starting point for resistant students or students unwilling to acknowledge their privilege and power. Without this foundation of rationality, it is more difficult for students to consider the social or theoretical criterion discussed by Anders and Shudak.[11] The social and theoretical are important to the Social Foundations; however, if students are unwilling or unable to recognize the social prevalence of an issue in their lives, such as racism, or if they are unable to distinguish between political and theoretical authority of their professor, then it adds an additional challenge to using these criteria as a starting point for consideration.

Thus, we are using the rationality framework of the epistemic criterion as the basis for our pedagogy of controversy because rational and critical thought can help students in assessing social, theoretical, and other criterion. Byford, Lennon, and Russell noted, "students are often unable to

6. Ibid., 618.
7. Michael Hand, "What Should We Teach as Controversial? A Defense of the Epistemic Criterion," *Educational Theory,* 58(2) (2008): 213-228.
8. Ibid., 216.
9. Ibid., 216.
10. Ibid., 216
11. Ibid., 216

justify their own opinions and debate various issues through rational reasoning."[12] Therefore class discussions are often "based on disagreement and not rational reasoning."[13] The reasons behind this are twofold: First, students tend to accept their parents' or guardians' views without question.[14] Secondly, they argue, P-12 teachers lack the pedagogical skills, confidence, preparation, and support to navigate such discussions.[15] This is why it is key for us, as professors of future educators, to ensure that our students understand what controversy is, know how to guide students toward rational thinking in regard to perceived and real controversial issues, and recognize when and how to act on controversial issues for social change. Our future educators should be able to navigate through controversial issues related to their field—such as the impacts of educational policies on their students, they should be able to discuss non-controversial issues surrounding social justice directly utilizing theory and critical thought, and they should be able to teach their students to do the same.

Controversy Misunderstood

In order to begin exploring controversy as pedagogy, we must first understand how and why our students misunderstand and misinterpret controversial issues. Whereas controversy requires, by the epistemic criterion, a rational argument to be present on both sides of the discussion, our society often conflates disagreement with controversy, irrespective of the validity of one's argument. Take, for example, a recent skirmish in a school system in suburban Georgia. In September 2015, more than nine years after the state implemented the Georgia Performance Standards (GPS), a small handful of parents raised the alarm, accusing middle school teachers in this district of preaching Islam to their students. Standards related to the academic study of world religions, including Islam, occur several times in the Social Studies GPS, including 7th grade World Geography. The "controversy" was sparked when a parent saw her/his child's homework assignment that identified Allah as the same deity worshipped in both Christianity and Judaism. Since the initial complaint went public, accusations have ranged from teaching incorrect content (identifying Allah as described above), to questioning the balance of instruction (suggesting that teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time on Islam as compared to other religions, particularly Christianity), to questioning the true motives of the lessons (that teachers were actively trying to convert students to Islam).[16]

So what is the controversy in this situation? The GPS in question asked students to be able to describe the diverse cultures of peoples in Southwest Asia, including by ethnicity and religion.[17] The academic necessity of studying Islam, in this case, is clear, as one cannot understand the historical, social, and political environment of Southwest Asia if one does not understand the role that religion has played in the region. In order for this to be a truly controversial issue, however, there must be a rational argument against teaching this content. Ignorance and Islamophobia, however,

12. Jeff Byford, Sean Lennon, & William B. Russell III, "Teaching Controversial Issues in the Social Studies: A Research Study of High School Teachers," *The Clearing House: Teaching Controversial Issues,* 82(4) (2009): 166.

13. Ibid., 166.

14. Ibid., 166.

15. Ibid., 166.

16. Ty Tygami, "Some Parents Concerned about How Islam is Taught in Schools," *Atlanta Journal Constitution,* (September 29, 2015). Accessed at http://www.ajc.com/news/news/local-education/some-parents-concerned-about-how-islam-is-taught-i/nnqdJ/

17. Social Studies, Georgia Performance Standards, Georgia Department of Education (2015). Accessed at https://www.georgiastandards.org/Standards/Pages/BrowseStandards/SocialStudiesStandards.aspx.

largely inform the arguments presented. In a conversation with a 7th-grade social studies teacher in this county on October 11 of 2015, one of the authors of this paper learned that it was clear that the loudest objections were coming from parents who were ill informed about Islam and the curriculum in their children's schools. At a meeting of the county's Board of Education on October 13th, 2015, community members were able to speak on this matter. Two of the three speakers focused their attention on the ever-looming threat of Muslims infiltrating "our" country and how teaching about Islam in a public school is an attack on the local Christian community.[18] The immigration of Muslims to this country and the teaching Islam as a world religion are not, in and of themselves, threatening to American public education. What can be seen as threatening, however, are the stereotypes that shadow the religion of Islam and its people. In discussing this issue with our pre-service educators, however, many of our students agreed this was obviously a controversial topic and that no party was clearly in the right. Our students, operating under their misconceptions regarding controversy, would apply the behavioral criterion, which suggests that merely having two sides to an argument is sufficient to deem something controversial. Our job, then, is to help students re-conceptualize controversy from the epistemic criterion and to be able to employ rationality in their own thought and future teaching.

To get us to a deeper understanding of how our students come to misunderstand controversy, such as the example illustrated above, we are going to explore the construct of whiteness and how students view it as controversial. This serves as an illustrative example that can be applied to many identity categories addressed in a typical diversity or social justice oriented course. It is a common refrain in modern political dialogue to assert that Americans live in a post-racial society. Events over the past year, however, have proven this notion incorrect. The constant juxtaposition of the narratives of the likes of Fox News and the social media savvy #BlackLivesMatter and #FergusonSyllabus movements implies an equity to a controversy that does not exist. There has been a great deal of research on examining whiteness for the purpose of deconstructing individual and institutional systems of oppression.[19] This process is particularly important in teacher education where upwards of 90% of the teaching core in America is white, middle-class, and female[20] but more than 40% of the population are students of color,[21] a fact which "is of great concern to critical multiculturalists as we wrestle with the dilemma of how to provide a basic understanding of groups with whom the majority of students have no authentic relationships."[22]

One's racial identity is deeply contextualized and rooted in the social and historical contexts in which it is developed,[23] yet most white students do not see themselves as being raced or

18. Board of Education Minutes (Oct. 13, 2015). Accessed at http://www.walton.k12.ga.us/boardmtgvideos.html.

19. bell hooks, *Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Joe L. Kincheloe & Shirley R. Steinberg, "Addressing the Crisis of Whiteness: Reconfiguring White Identity in a Pedagogy of Whiteness," in *White Reign: Deploying Whiteness in America*, Joe. L Kincheloe, Shirley R. Steinberg, Nelson M. Rodriguez, & Ronald E. Chennault (eds.) (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2000); Frances Maher & Mary Kay Thompson Tetreault, "They Got the Paradigm and Painted it White: Whiteness and Pedagogies of Positionalities," in Kincheloe, et. Al., *White Reign*; Peter McLaren, "Whiteness Is…The Struggle for Postcolonial Hybridity," in Kincheloe, et. Al., *White Reign*.

20. Robin DiAngelo & Özlem Sensoy, " 'OK, I Get It! Now Tell Me How to Do It!': Why We Can't Just Tell You How to Do Critical Multicultural Education," *Multicultural Perspectives*, 12(2) (2010): 97-102; Sonia Nieto & Patty Bode, *Affirming Diversity: The Sociopolitical Context of Multicultural Education* (Boston: Pearson, 2012).

21. Caryn Terwilliger, "Mapping Stories: Taking Detours to Challenge Whiteness," *Making Connections: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cultural Diversity*, 11(2) (2010): 14.

22. DiAngelo and Sensoy, " 'OK, I Get It!'," 99.

23. Terwilliger, "Mapping Stories."

having a racial identity.[24] White people in the US are raised to not talk about race, so as not to be seen as impolite or racist, and are conditioned to see themselves as racially neutral (the norm) and to see non-white people as being raced or "Other."[25] Not recognizing themselves as raced makes it difficult for white pre-service teachers to acknowledge and understand how racial prejudice, privilege, and oppression operate in wider society and in the schools. This lack of perspective often leads students to develop a notion of colorblindness, or the belief they are not influenced by another person's race and treat everyone equally.[26] This idea is especially damaging to students of color who are acted upon not only by the unquestioned stereotypes and biases of the white teacher but also by wider macro-social and institutional discriminatory forces.[27] According to Mazzei, "in such an environment, stereotypes are furthered rather than confronted, and perceptions of self and Other are allowed to remain circumscribed in a protective caul."[28]

If white students, then, are conditioned to not see themselves as raced, what happens when the conversation turns to institutional and individual racism? Many scholars have demonstrated processes through which white students conceptualize race and work through racial identity.[29] These are processes, though, that require consistent action, attention, and thought. White students, not unexpectedly, typically do not want to conceptualize themselves as being racist or as having contributed to the oppression of minoritized racial groups.[30] According to Cooney and Akintunde, white pre-service teachers, in an attempt to negotiate this new awareness, may reject ideas of racism and remain deliberately ignorant of issues, racial inequalities, lash out on anger at feelings of blame for injustices and approach these conversations from a defensive or aggressive perspective, conceptualize issues of inequality from a personal, individual perspective and ignore the wider systematic concerns, or be receptive to being told what to do in a multicultural classroom but fail to deeply explore the impact of their attitudes on the effectiveness of their teaching.[31] It is this second, defensive reaction that is most relevant to the wider conversation about controversy. In an effort to distance themselves from acknowledging their role in systems of oppression, white pre-service teachers often conceptualize the conversation around the existence of racism to be unsettled and up for continued debate. Thinking about racism in this way allows them to argue for their own goodness and excuse themselves from the weight of privilege afforded to them by their race.

Sensoy and DiAngelo have identified a series of common ways students attempt to turn conversations about racism into controversial debate: (1) claiming that schools are politically neutral, (2) dismissing social justice scholarship as the overwrought personal opinions of left-wing

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24. Karon N. LeCompte & Audrey D. McCray, "Complex Conversation with Teacher Candidates: Perspectives of Whiteness and Culturally Responsive Teaching," *Curriculum and Teaching Dialogue*, 4(1) (2002): 72-77; Lisa A. Mazzei, "Silence Speaks: Whiteness Revealed in the Absence of Voice," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24 (2008): 1125-1136.

25. Terwilliger, "Mapping Stories."

26. Patricia J. Williams, *Seeing A Colorblind Future: The Paradox of Race* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1997).

27. Mazzei, "Silence Speaks"; Özlem Sensoy & Robin DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal? An Introduction to Key Concepts in Social Justice Education* (New York: Teachers College Press, 2012).

28. Mazzei, "Silence Speaks," 1129.

29. Dan W. Butin, "Identity (Re)Construction and Student Resistance," in *Teaching Social Foundations of Education: Contexts, Theories, and Issues*, Dan W. Butin (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2005); Janet Helms, "Toward a Model of White Racial Identity Development," in *Black and White Racial Identity*, Janet Helms (ed.) (New York: Greenwood/Praeger, 1993); Sandra M. Lawrence & Takiema Bunche, "Feeling and Dealing: Teaching White Students about Racial Privilege," *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 12(5) (1996): 531-542.

30. Alice McIntyre, "Exploring Whiteness and Multicultural Education with Prospective Teachers," *Curriculum Inquiry*, 32(1) (2002): 31-49.

31. In LeCompte and McCray, "Complex Conversation."

professors, (3) citing exceptions to the rule, (4) arguing that oppression is human nature and inevitable, (5) appealing to a universalized humanity, (6) arguing against socialization, (7) ignoring intersectionality, (8) refusing to recognize structural and institutional power, (9) rejecting the politics of language, (10) claiming over-sensitivity of the oppressed, (11) rationalizing that if choice is involved then it cannot truly be oppression, (12) positioning social justice as an ancillary field, and (13) using guilt to excuse inaction.[32] In each of these claims, students often attempt to argue a non-rational position as a means of mitigating their role in an oppressive racial hierarchy. As an example of the non-rational implementation of citing an exception to the rule, in a journal entry written in response to the seminal Peggy McIntosh work, *White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack*,[33] one white, female student posited that "racism is a mute [*sic*] point. We have a black president now." It is fitting in this situation that the student utilized the term "mute," as she does not recognize the voices of those who argue that racism is still very much alive. Such non-rationalizations are essential to protect their limited worldview and short-term mental wellbeing. In taking such beliefs into the classroom, these future teachers maintain the status quo, and this results in the continuation of institutional racism—the very opposite of what an anti-racist educational approach would entail. Our responsibility as educators is to help them use a rational approach to rebuild a more robust understanding of privilege and oppression and to acknowledge their roles in these systems of power.

The question then centers on how we can help our students move from a misunderstanding of the existence of racism and implementation of anti-racist education as controversial topics to the ability to think critically and deeply about issues of social justice. In relation to racial injustice, white students need to be able to see and understand themselves as racialized beings. They need to "brush up against their own whiteness" and question their own privileges, biases, and assumptions.[34] Rather than shunning the idea of themselves as raced, they should be taught to embrace and explore their racial identity and consider how this identity influences their views and interactions with the world around them. They should consider how race shapes their lives, not just how it shapes the lives of people of color. Once they have achieved a deeper understanding of their own racial identity and the privileges that entails, the next step is to decide how they can use their white privilege to either perpetuate the status quo or fight against it.[35] This is one of the biggest stumbling blocks for many pre-service teachers. To be neutral in this context, to argue that anti-racist education is biased, or to fail to acknowledge that racism exists is to support the status quo and participate in a racist pedagogical perspective. Additionally, to misunderstand a topic such as "the existence of racism" or the teaching of anti-racist education as controversial issues indicates that racism, the binary to antiracism, has a rational basis. To be clear, many of our students challenge the construct of racism as applying to modern America. They see it as an historical issue that no longer impacts individuals or institutions. While they would avow they are not themselves racist, they simultaneously reify racist rhetoric and ideals.

In order to prepare our students to be critical multicultural educators, we have an obligation to teach them about the nature of controversy to better understand themselves and their values as educators. If we want our students to be critical agents of change, we do not want them to be muddled over questions of whether the existence of racism and the implementation of anti-racist

32. Sensoy & DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?*

33. Peggy McIntosh, "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack," Accessed at http://ted.coe.wayne.edu/ele3600/mcintosh.html.

34. Mazzei, "Silence Speaks," 1134.

35. Lawrence & Bunche, "Feeling and Dealing."

education are controversial. We want them to be strong in what they believe and what they are teaching. We want them to be able to rationally defend against irrational arguments. In order to accomplish this, we propose the use of a pedagogy of controversy in teacher preparation courses that helps students through the process of recognizing what is rational and what is not so they can apply this knowledge to their own teaching in regard to content and pedagogy.

The Pedagogy of Controversy

In an effort to teach students how to determine what is controversial by epistemic standards first (and then the social and theoretical recommended by Anders and Shudak[36]), we need a pedagogy of controversy. In discussing disagreement and the epistemic criterion, Kelly noted that the following questions guide students as to whether disagreement is controversy:

> Can one rationally hold a belief while knowing that that belief is not shared (and indeed, is explicitly rejected) by individuals over whom one possesses no discernible epistemic advantage? If so, what assumptions must one be making about oneself and about those with whom one disagrees? In deciding what to believe about some question, (2) how (if at all) should one take into account the considered views of one's epistemic peers?[37]

Thinking through these questions would require that students are able to (1) reflect on their views in relation to the self and the world around them and (2) dialogue—rather than debate—with their peers. These are both skills, though, that require critical thinking and the application of a pedagogy of controversy on the part of the professor/teacher.

To start with dialogue, most scholars posit various forms of discussion/dialogue as the means of addressing controversial issues.[38] There are several issues, though, in regard to engaging in meaningful discussions in class, especially those discussions that may involve working through whether an issue is controversial. For one, many institutions, including educational ones, as bell hooks reminds us, fail to support discussion. More often than not, our educational institutions tend to operate from a banking model,[39] where the teacher, as expert, filters information down to the students.[40] This unidirectional model of instruction does not allow students the space to grapple with challenging concepts or engage in the kinds of critical thinking necessary for intellectual growth. Given the deficiencies of this model, why are so many educators reluctant to engage with dialogue in the classroom?

Many educators often opt out of discussion due to the fear of these conversations turning into angry debates.[41] Instead, many educators often opt for "negotiating a compromise position

36. Anders and Shudak, "Criteria for Controversy."

37. Thomas Kelly, "The Epistemic Significance of Disagreement," in *Oxford Studies in Epistemology*, John Hawthorne & Tamar Gendler (eds.), forthcoming.

38 Byford, Lennon, & Russell, "Teaching Controversial Issues;"; Hand, "What Should We Teach"; and, Hand & Levinson, "Discussing Controversial Issues." While we prefer the term dialogue, we use the terms discussion and dialogue interchangeably, as the majority of the sources reference herein utilize the term discussion.

39. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2000).

40. Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007).

41. Byford, Lennon, & Russell, "Teaching Controversial Issues."

acceptable to discussants with conflicting views," or what Hand also defined as "the practical accommodation frame."[42] Even organizations such as the National Council for Social Studies noted that a standard for teaching students how to address controversial issues should include "the recognition that reasonable compromise is often an important part of the democratic decision-making process."[43] Yet, as Hand would debate, reasonable compromise is difficult when "some participants in a discussion hold false views for bad reasons" or if "*all* the considerations on one side of an issue are groundless."[44] Going back to Kelly's quotation, the problem in some ways is teaching our students to listen to and understand their peers and to engage with theory in order to dialogue. Some are not necessarily willing to take others' views into consideration and to weigh the rationality of those views. Instead, they view disagreement as the only necessary criterion for controversy.

Additionally, many educators argue about how to appropriately approach discussion/dialogue. Hand and Levinson write, "Without exception, as far as we can tell, the contributors to this body of literature hold discussion to be the pedagogical approach most appropriate to the exploration of controversial issues in the classroom. Remarkably, however, they give little serious attention to the questions of what discussion is, why it is the preferred approach, and how best to facilitate it."[45] Hand and Levinson take this further by noting that listening and learning are key to classroom dialogue in order for students to shift their thinking, and they note that "reasonableness, peaceableness and orderliness, truthfulness, freedom, equality and respect for persons" are important elements for meaningful conversations with the power to impact individuals' thinking.[46] There are many steps involved, though, in preparing students to engage with one another while keeping these characteristics in mind.

Lastly, dialogue can and should be part of both directive and nondirective teaching, but the approaches for both methods are debated. With directive teaching, the teacher has a specific position to which she/he encourages/guides students to accept, while teachers using a nondirective style do not attempt persuasion to any one viewpoint.[47] As Gregory explained, with directive teaching "teachers should attempt to persuade students to accept the correct positions on topics that are not rationally controversial—even in the face of significant opposition."[48] With nondirective approaches, teachers "should *not* attempt to persuade students one way or another on topics that *are* rationally controversial—even if the teacher, personally, holds one of the opposing views."[49] Thus, when discussing truly controversial issues, teachers should refrain from "attempting to ensure that…students come to the same conclusion" held by the instructor.[50] When, however, discussing issues viewed by students as controversial but not meeting the epistemic criterion for controver- siality, directive teaching is appropriate and often necessary.[51]

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42. Michael Hand, "Framing Classroom Discussion of Same-Sex Marriage," *Educational Theory*, 63(5) (2013), 507.

43. Byford, Lennon, & Russell, "Teaching Controversial Issues," 166.

44. Hand, "Framing Classroom Discussion," 509.

45. Hand & Levinson, "Discussing Controversial Issues," 614.

46. Ibid., 616.

47. Hand, "What Should We Teach."

48. Maughn Rollins Gregory, "The Procedurally Directive Approach to Teaching Controversial Issues," *Educational Theory*, 64(6) (2014): 628.

49. Ibid., 628.

50. Hand, "What Should We Teach," 220.

51. Bertucio, "Alasdair MacIntyre." We would like to reinforce the distinction here between directive teaching and teaching a matter as settled. As Bertucio notes, model moral dilemmas lack the "body of public knowledge" to be

When issues are non-controversial, such as "racism as a current problem in America," and can be taught in a directive manner, there is disagreement about the best way to approach such classroom dialogues. Gregory, for instance, noted that directive teaching could bring power issues into play, with the teacher as expert.[52] Gregory went on to argue for procedurally directive teaching an approach that "provides positive support that gives students practice in asking critical questions and thinking carefully through the information and ideas presented to them."[53] This is an approach that is both personal and collaborative, utilizing "evidence from the students' own experiences" and dialogue with peers.[54] This is where Anders and Shudak, in this volume, argue for the theoretical criterion. The educator has a theoretical basis that the students do not have, and thus has expertise that gives her or him authority. This is not to be confused with political authority, they argue, that necessitates obedience from the students.[55] The problem, as stated previously, is when students do not recognize the difference and view theoretical authority as political indoctrination of liberalism.[56] Such misunderstandings can results in arguments rather than dialogues and student resistance to participating in dialogue.

Dialogue on controversial issues and discussion over whether an issue is controversial are activities that one cannot jump right into without establishing a classroom climate conducive to such conversations. Hand and Levinson, for instance, found that discussion required four factors including "effective preparation, accessible topics, strong and diverse views among discussants, and appropriate facilitation."[57] Another critical factor is establishing a climate of trust within the classroom, which is predicated on the willingness of an individual to be in a position of vulnerability and interdependence with others.[58] Mazzei remarked on the prevalence of silence in her classroom when discussing issues of race and racism: "due to cultural conditioning and the sensitive, potentially controversial, even explosive nature of racial interchange, these fears are exacerbated when entering that milieu of potential embarrassment and conflict with their peers."[59] Students learning in a high trust environment are more likely to feel empowered and invested in the learning process,[60] which can be especially beneficial in an environment where we are asking students to confront long-held beliefs and stereotypes.

There are other elements involved in teaching controversial topics, most notably helping students understand what is controversial and what is not and why this distinction should be made. We agree with Gregory that students' experiences should be a significant part of directive teaching[61] and that students should learn about how to distinguish what is actually controversial (rational) from what is not (emotional). Although directive teaching is appropriate when establishing whether an issue is controversial or not, once the issue has been deemed to be controversial, a nondirective approach is preferred. Students see the world through their particular sociocultural

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taught as truly settled. This does not negate, however, the ability to teach modern moral dilemmas in a directive fashion where epistemic criterion dictates one position to be more rational and defensible than another.

52. Gregory, "The Procedurally Directive."

53. Ibid., 637.

54. Ibid., 637.

55. Anders and Shudak, "Criteria for Controversy."

56. Applebaum, "Is Teaching."

57. Hand & Levinson, "Discussing Controversial Issues," 620.

58. Debra Shelden, Maureen Angell, Julia Stoner, & Bill Roseland, "School Principals' Influence on Trust: Perspectives of Mothers of Children with Disabilities," *The Journal of Education Research*, 103 (2010): 159-170.

59. Mazzei, "Silence Speaks," 1132.

60. Curt M. Adams & Patrick B. Forsyth, "Revisiting the Trust Effect in Urban Elementary Schools," *The Elementary School Journal* 114, no. 1 (2013).

61. Gregory, "The Procedurally Directive."

lenses—they are engaging through their habitus, as Petrovic noted, which is directly impacted by the history, culture, and politics surrounding them.[62] As educators, we have to "meet them where they are," so to speak, and work through students' experiences and lenses to discuss controversy—including what should and should not be included under this designation. We cannot expect students to automatically understand why an issue is not controversial (i.e., racism or bullying), if this is what they have been socialized to believe. The challenge, then, is to help students understand the limited relativism of their perspective and to acknowledge that their experience is not universal. Students must be able to critically reflect on their experiences, understand them in the context of their habitus, and then rationally locate them in the wider context of systems of power and privilege. This has to be a process, and it is a lengthy one.

While student experiences are significant to this process,[63] we should try to avoid students' falling into the trope of viewing one personal experience as the Truth ("X happened to me, therefore X is true") or utilizing exceptions to the rule to demonstrate their arguments ("I know someone to whom X happened, therefore X is true").[64] How we bring students' experiences into the classroom, then, is key in this process. When engaged in classroom dialogue, we do not want students "to construe any further attack on the opinion in question as an attack on their identity."[65] This can occur when students utilize the tropes mentioned above in integrating personal experience into dialogue about controversial topics (or non-controversial ones). As previously discussed, students often have strong, if misguided, reasons for clinging to faulty thinking, as to do otherwise is uncomfortable and potentially upsetting, particularly in conversations around privilege, power, and oppression.

Sociological Imagination and Autobiography as Pedagogy of Controversy

Prior to bringing students' experiences into discussion through directive teaching, we should start with self-reflection and writing about one's beliefs, where they emerge, and upon what they are based—in other words, engaging students in sociological autobiographies or connecting their biography with their social history.[66] To move to the point where students do not see a topic such as the existence of racism and the teaching of anti-racist curriculum as controversial, because it is not, we have to take a journey with them to explore the rationality (or lack thereof) behind their belief system, which is not easy. It is difficult to discover that there is no rational basis behind one's beliefs (no epistemic basis), and thus this has to be navigated with compassion and care. In regard to this process, Kebede wrote the following:

> Old habits do not go away easily. To use Pierre Bourdieu's expression, since one's habitus is an enduring embodied sensibility, although not a permanent one, it cannot be abandoned every time we are exposed to new ideas even if they are earth shattering (Bourdieu 1992; see also Brint 2001). Hence, it would be unwise to aim at destroying an old habitus in one

62. John Petrovic, "Reason, Liberalism, and Democratic Education: A Deweyan Approach to Teaching about Homosexuality," *Educational Theory*, 63(5) (2013): 525-541.

63. Gregory, "The Procedurally Directive."

64. Sensoy & DiAngelo, *Is Everyone Really Equal?*

65. Hand & Levinson, "Framing Classroom Discussion," 625.

66. Alem Kebede, "Practicing Sociological Imagination through Writing Sociological Autobiography," *Teaching Sociology*, 37(4) (2009): 353-368.

> stroke. Instead the instructor should pave the way for embracing sociological disposition alongside with other forms of sensibility.[67]

The sociological autobiography can help us, as educators, to better understand where our students currently are. More importantly, it can help the students understand where they really are. We routinely have students complete autobiographical narratives and without fail, numerous white students in the class, when asked to talk about their ethnic heritage, will reply in the beginning that they do not know where their family comes from. For many, this is a profound realization and the first time they view themselves as potentially Other. These autobiographies can be personal at first—shared only with the instructor, who provides feedback—and then shared with others, if the class feels comfortable.

These autobiographies, while intensely personal, cannot be written in a vacuum. Terwilliger argues that one of the critical missing components of multicultural education is the lack of opportunities for students to engage in guided self-reflection.[68] This is particularly relevant in situations where students are put into diverse field placement experiences and then asked to reconsider what they know about themselves and others. Lacking guided self-reflection in these situations means that students may not actually confront their misconceptions related to race or other identity categories and will leave the class with the same misconceptions with which they entered. It is essential, then, that the creation of the autobiographies be a discursive process between the professor and the student and then, if possible, between the students themselves. Critical self-reflection is essential for identity renegotiation and the acknowledgement of one's place in the existing systems of privilege and power.

Thus, it is important that we approach student autobiographies from an intersectional standpoint, bringing in the multiple and intersecting elements of their identities and asking for exploration as to how these identities merge and change over time.[69] For example, if we are approaching narrative from the perspective of examining why a topic such as the existence of racism is not controversial, we may want to pair theoretical readings on whiteness and privilege with narrative prompts, asking questions such as (1) when was the first time you realized race was significant? (2) in what ways did race impact your family when you were growing up? (3) in what ways did your family influence your current views on race? and (4) how did the community in which you grew up influence your views on race? In terms of an intersectional approach, we also want students to explore the ways in which their views on race have (or have not) changed and how their socioeconomic status, gender, sexuality, religion, and native language—just to name a few—have impacted their views on race and vice versa.

We have also found it useful to leverage students' oppressed identities to open up the communication pathway to their dominant identities. For example, our students are largely white females, as is typical in teacher preparation programs in America,[70] so beginning the conversation with sexism before bridging the intersectional gap to racism can help students understand the complexities of identity, privilege, and oppression. These prompts can take place over the course of a unit or semester, depending on class time, in an effort to have students truly explore the impact of

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67. Ibid., 354.

68. Terwilliger, "Mapping Stories."

69. Lynn Weber, *Understanding Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework* (New York: Oxford University, 2009).

70. DiAngelo & Sensoy, "'OK, Now I Get It!"; Nieto and Bode, *Affirming Diversity*.

race on their personal lives. Through these in-depth explorations, along with carefully chosen readings and class discussions, students who may have been more reticent may begin to understand how privilege can be unrecognized and unacknowledged.[71]

Practice with the intersectional sociological autobiography can also assist in asking students to step into the shoes of another, a vital second step to this process of understanding what is controversial and why. Once students write their autobiographies, bringing in their multiple and intersecting identities, then we can move them into activities that incorporate Mills' sociological imagination,[72] writing and thinking from the perspective of someone with identities different from their own. Kebede describes this in more detail in the following quotation:

> sociological imagination involves the ability to move between sociological consciousness and other forms of cultural and social viewpoints. Such a view under-scores the idea that the possessor of sociological imagination can be engaged in "double hermeneutics" (Giddens 1984): one can make a good interpretation of how individuals make sense of their social world.[73]

Dandeneau argued that the sociological imagination is not philosophy but is critical theory.[74] This may be true, but it can provide a means for a philosophical understanding of what is controversial and what is not based upon the self-recognition of whether a student's viewpoints are rational. Once a student has the rational capacity to determine whether a particular issue is controversial or not, they can then apply this fundamental skill to modern questions. Thinking about the question of the existence of racism, for instance, the student must first understand that racism is as much a modern phenomena as it is a historical one. Personal narrative can then be paired with activities incorporating the sociological imagination, one event can be explored from the perspective of another in a way that helps enlighten an individual to the social, cultural, and historical forces at work. Once a student has written a personal narrative, we, as professors, can create individual assignments for a student to explore an event from another perspective. As an example, one former student wrote about her high-school prom, where Black students and white students still had separate dances. The general gist of the narrative was that this was not an issue because this was the way the town had always been—"a live and let live" mentality. Yet having her explore this same topic from another perspective helped her to realize that this viewpoint was held more by the white students than the African American students. She conducted research on the town's racialized history; spoke with individuals from varying racial, gendered, and socioeconomic backgrounds in the town; and wrote a new narrative based upon her discoveries.

The point, though, is that we, as educators, may understand that an issue such as the existence of racism is not controversial. As professors, we must help our students understand not only that everyone should have equal and equitable resources and the same rights and privileges, to which they do not object, but also how their unacknowledged privileges and biases prevent them from a comprehensive understanding of what that looks like. Students will often profess a commitment to equality while simultaneously espousing support for programs and policies that oppress others; they do so because they have not engaged in both critical self and social reflection. Yet,

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71. McIntosh, "White Privilege."

72. C. Wright Mills, *The Sociological Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

73. Kebede, "Practicing Sociological Imagination," 354.

74. Steven P. Dandeneau, "Sisyphus Had It Easy: Reflections of Two Decades of Teaching the Sociological Imagination," *Teaching Sociology*, 37(1) (2009): 8-19.

when some of our students do see issues such this as controversial, we have to meet them where they are in an effort to move the class forward. In doing so, we have to remember that knowledge is always politically and socially constructed and influenced, and power plays a large and undeniable role in knowledge production.[75] Students may see issues of racism as controversial because they are typically presented this way in school, in the media, and in other mainstream forms of communication. While our students would categorically deny being racist, they fail to see that their uncritical participation in perpetuating dominant ideologies maintains status quo racist practices. In teaching future educators, we want them to understand that there is no neutral option that ignoring or denying the racial dimensions of issues is, in fact, racist and that the examination of this topic is not controversial. We want them to understand that issues, such as the existence of racism, are more complex than the simplistic portrayals they have been previously exposed to so that they can move into their own classroom with the ability to teach in a directive manner on these topics. We also want our future educators to enter their classrooms with the confidence to counter an example such as the one above with action—to understand not only that a segregated prom is not an acceptable approach for a high school to take and to take steps to change such inequities but to also see how this is merely one example of a wider system of privilege and oppression to which we are all subject. We skip a step, however, if we do not acknowledge that many undergraduates do not understand controversy as it relates to rationalism, and to teach in a directive manner on these topics when students are not open to this can defeat the very purpose of this approach. We hope that our students will take this knowledge, as well, into their own future classrooms to help them better understand and value the backgrounds of their students.

Conclusion

Our experiences teaching at an institution with largely monocultural students means that quotations from students like the one at the beginning of this paper are, unfortunately, not rare for us. This also means, as we noted previously, that asking students to recognize that their opinions are not rational and teaching them to understand what a controversy consists of and how to advocate on behalf of their future students in regard to controversial issues are difficult—this is a process requiring much care and time on behalf of the professor, as it can take significant time to convince some students that anti-racism, for example, is not "bigoted bullshit" when such knowledge has been ingrained in them throughout their lives.

Self-reflection prior to, during, and after discussion, along with thoughtful reading, discussion of theory, and the construction of a sociological autobiography, allows students to come to recognize the irrationality of their beliefs, we hope, in a manner that is not throwing them into the lion's den, so to speak. This is made even more difficult when institutional structures do not support such processes. hooks noted, "our institutions are conservative and they confine our voices and our imaginations more than we know. Unwittingly, we become our own gatekeepers, representatives of an institution, and not devotees to the sacred world of the imagination. We censor ourselves. We bring an aura of death into the classroom."[76] In an effort to bring the classroom back to life and to attempt to show these future educators how to bring life into *their* future classrooms, it is our duty to find a theoretical, philosophical, and pedagogical approach to our Social Foundations of Education courses that can help them on this journey. We see this as achievable through a

75. Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, & Leslie McCall, "Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis," *Signs*, 38(4) (2013): 785-810.
76. hooks, *Teaching Community*, 169-170.

pedagogy of controversy. As stated throughout this paper, though, this type of pedagogy involves struggle. After all, as hooks argued:

> The quest for knowledge that enables us to unite theory and practice is one such passion, which has to be fundamentally rooted in a love for ideas we are able to inspire, the classroom becomes a dynamic place where transformations in social relations are concretely actualized and the false dichotomy between the world outside and the inside world of the academy disappears. In many ways this is frightening.[77]

While it is frightening, it is a necessary journey for teacher preparation programs to make. In this manner, we can work with our future educators to ensure that they approach their classrooms utilizing pedagogies of controversy—they should learn to love their students enough to wade through the "bullshit" and help their own students become critical, rational thinkers.

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