Taboo Topics: Cultural Restraint on Teaching Social Issues

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Selection of subject matter in social studies has long been a concern of educational theorists and reformers. Over the history of social studies, many prominent thinkers have advocated curricular reform with greater emphasis on in-depth study of public or controversial issues (Engle and Ochoa 1988; Evans and Saxe 1996; Hunt and Metcalf 1955; Oliver and Shaver 1966; Rugg 1921). Despite the best intentions of social studies reformers over the years, a traditional, textbook-centered, fact-myth-legend approach to teaching history has continued to dominate the social studies curriculum (Goodlad 1984; Hertzberg 1981; Shaver, Davis, and Helburn 1979; Wilen and White 1991). Previous attempts to explain the failure of issues-centered social studies reform have focused on rational explanation: the realities of schools as tenacious bureaucracies resistant to change; the dominant influence of social studies textbooks on classroom discourse; and the basically conservative orientation of social studies teachers toward content and discussion, owing in part to the mode of education they experienced as students in schools and universities (Gross 1989; Onosko 1996; Shaver 1989). We believe a cultural analysis may shed some additional light on the process by which subject matter in social studies remains relatively constant and controversial materials and issues are de-emphasized or omitted.

Although the focus of this article is on examining a major restraint on teaching social issues, we hope that the reader will not interpret this as a swan song for issues-centered education. Instead, it is intended as an attempt to understand cultural obstacles and to approach them realistically, with eyes wide open, and thus to build hope for significant progress in the field. We must fully understand the obstacles to issues-centered education before we can hope to overcome them.

From an anthropological perspective, controversial issues and topics receive little attention in schools because in the culture of schooling, and the culture of society, many controversial topics and issues are taboo. Taboo or tabu is a Polynesian word that means a general ban on a specific object, which should not be touched. For the purposes of this study, taboos may be defined as beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviors and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged. Thus, taboo topics are those topics that social studies topics teachers may chose to avoid or de-emphasize because of their perceptions or beliefs regarding the sensitivity of the topic. Noa is the Polynesian word that has a meaning opposite from that taboo. The noa topics in social studies are topics teachers generally perceive as proper for discussion in local cultures. Those topics do not threaten the belief system of the culture (McGinnis 1992). "When society was simply structured and static, taboos were important because their goal was to preserve the status quo. Breaking a taboo often brought about punishment, danger, or ostracism from society" (Mann 1984, 10). Taboos are the "permitted and the prohibited, the do’s and don’ts" and are "developed by society for its members out of

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self-preservation, tradition enhancing motives" (Farberow 1963, 1–2). In social studies education, taboos represent the traditional—the attitudes and actions of times past. Brown (1984) described taboos as "the power of our ancestral behaviors which haunt and control much of our present and to a large extent direct and control our future" (3). Taboos exert control on our everyday lives, as well as our schools and determine the boundaries for what is acceptable and unacceptable. Many taboos are the shadow of the sacred or the ideal.

Social studies suffers from a relatively large set of prohibitions, what anthropologists in an earlier era might have termed a "primitive mentality." Some of the prohibitions are strict, others common. The social studies teacher, subject to this way of thinking, is beset by fears, thus making certain topics potentially dangerous and prompting the teacher to avoidance based on emotional potential or "superstition." A system of taboos imposes severe disabilities on teaching and thinking in social studies classrooms. Loosening or breaking taboos has the potential for freeing the human mind and helping to make social studies education a more exciting and interesting field of study.

Although the origins of taboos are largely inexplicable, taboos may exist because of the influence of dreams or visions and fears aroused by mishaps, or because through experience, taboos were found to produce unwholesome results or sanctions (e.g., discipline problems, an irate parent, a concerned administrator, censure). Once established, a taboo tends to multiply endlessly. The power of a taboo is transmissible, thus a prohibition against discussing one controversial topic may lead to a general prohibition against discussion of issues. Webster (1973) notes that "An object becomes tabooed which for any reason reminds one of something else tabooed" (13).

Webster (1973) defined taboo as "the conception of the mystic dangerousness of a particular object" (14). Once taboos are created, compulsions and restraints center "not on what is prohibited, but on the mere fact of prohibition" (14), leading to simple dread of the potential consequences or sanctions. Because of its mystical or occult power, a taboo topic may arouse ambivalent sentiments, ranging from fear or respect to reverence. Webster (1973) noted that "instruction in the tribal taboo is a regular feature of the initiation rites found among many primitive peoples" (17): thus experienced teachers and teacher educators are part of a web of influences initiating the beginning teacher. Student teachers in particular are subject to initiation through explicit or implied instruction in the tribal taboos of the school. A state of taboo is either inherent in an object, imposed by superior authority, or acquired by contact. Social studies taboos may be imposed by a variety of sanctioning agencies including administrators (chiefs), textbook critics, civic or religious organizations (secret societies), experienced teachers (tribal elders), professors (priests), other public functionaries, parents, or local cranks, or they may be more diffuse in origin, affecting things great and small. Some are permanent, others temporary.

Research Related to Taboo Topics in Schools

Harmon Zeigler’s research (1967) on the political lives of teachers includes seminal work on teacher beliefs about the proper behavior of teachers and the perception of sanctions. Although he did not employ an anthropological framework in explaining his work, his findings are relevant to this article. Zeigler asked teachers to examine a list of teacher behaviors, both in class and in the community, and to indicate which of those they thought were proper. He also asked them to rank teacher behaviors in order of perceived likelihood of sanctions. Zeigler found that "teachers do not regard the classroom as a suitable forum for the expression by teachers of controversial opinions" (98). He also found that teachers’ relatively high degree of fear of sanctions restricts the likelihood that they will generate classroom discussions of controversial issues or take a classroom stand on a controversial issue, and that "the greater the perception of probable sanctions, the less proper the behavior is perceived to be" (101). In general, he found that the classroom "operates basically to reinforce a belief in the desirability of maintaining the status quo" (119), and that the agents that teachers perceive as potential sanctions tend to originate from within the educational system and include parents, school board members, superintendents, principals, other teachers, and local cranks (an exception). He also found that the overall impact of perceived sanctions seems to produce docility and conformity in teachers.

Research and theory on the teaching of controversial issues is also relevant to the exploration of taboos. The terms controversial and taboo are similar in meaning, although taboo is the stronger designation. A topic may generate controversy without being taboo. For example, the interpretation of the Second Amendment to the U.S. Constitution ("the right to keep and bear arms") may initiate controversy among students, but it is generally perceived to be an appropriate topic for classroom discussion. In a review of research on the teaching of controversial issues in social studies, Hahn (1991) situated controversial issues discussion at the heart of a democratic polity. "The rationale for including controversial issues in social studies instruction rests on the necessity of preparing citizens to participate in the democratic decision-making processes within a pluralistic society" (470). The few surveys that have been conducted of secondary social studies teachers indicate that their willingness to discuss controversial issues in the classroom varies according to the
broader political culture at the time (e.g., higher during the 1960s than the 1970s and 1980s), the teacher’s experience (higher among less-experienced teachers), the teacher’s gender (slightly higher among males), and topic (sex-related subjects have almost always been considered taboo).

The most systematic research study on the teaching of controversial topics was conducted over twenty-five years ago. On the basis of a questionnaire sent to a random sample of Michigan high school social studies, biology, and English teachers, Massialas, Sprague, and Sweeney (1970) found that only 16 percent of teachers spent as much as 25 percent of class time on controversial topics. The majority of educators considered some controversial topics, such as race relations and the Vietnam War, appropriate for classroom discussion. Teachers were most likely to avoid sex-related topics such as abortion and homosexuality. In general, teachers who reported the highest levels of belief in student expression devoted more class time to discussion of issues.

Of what significance are discussions of taboo subjects in the classroom? At the individual level, a number of studies link controversial issues discussions, held within an open and supportive classroom environment, with increased political interest and civic tolerance and decreased dogmatism (Goldenson 1978; Grossman 1976; Ehman 1977; Torney, Oppenheim, and Farnen 1975). At the societal level, the public’s ability to deliberate on significant civic issues is critical to the sustenance of democracy. Guttman (1987) has argued that “the ability [to reason about politics] is so essential to democratic education that one might question whether civics courses that succeeded in increasing political trust, efficacy, and knowledge but failed to increase the ability of students to reason about politics are indirectly repressive” (107).

Exploring Taboo Topics

Over four decades ago, Hunt and Metcalf theorized that the “problematic areas of culture” included power and the law, economics, nationalism, patriotism and foreign affairs, social class, religion and morals, race and minority group relations, and sex, courtship, and marriage. In their view, substantial aspects of each of these problematic topics were “closed areas” where conflicts between core values and beliefs and actual behaviors might be illuminated through classroom discussion (1955).

Although we find some substantiation for a similar portrayal of sensitive topics in schools through the literature and through our experiences as educators and researchers, we wonder about the relative sensitivity of these topics in the 1990s. We decided to ask a small group of social studies student teachers (N = 32) about their perceptions of taboo and noa issues. We chose to explore preservice teachers’ conceptions because their responses provide a measure of teacher attitudes prior to in-depth socialization into the school culture. Further study comparing novice and veteran teachers’ conceptions of taboos and noas has potential value in the planning and preparation of teacher-training programs involving issue-centered education. We began by brainstorming and then organizing a list of topics that we believed might represent sensitive issues. Our student teachers were asked to indicate, on a questionnaire, the relative sensitivity of (a) teachers discussing various topics in the classroom, and (b) teachers sharing their support for a range of positions on issues. Our list did not include many standard “safe” textbook topics from history and social studies courses, that is, the Missouri Compromise, the Articles of Confederation, the United States Constitution, or the law of supply and demand.

Based on reviews of literature, our experiences in schools, responses to our questionnaire, and conversations with our student teachers, we have garnered the following impressions. Strictly taboo topics tend to be personal matters, topics considered obscene, dangerous, or inappropriate for classroom discussion. These include the following topics: abortion, pornography, open discussion of personal/family problems, obscene language, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, and criticism of school administration. Three of the seven topics relate directly to sexual issues (abortion, pornography, open discussion of student sexual experience).

Topics deemed moderately taboo are often “hot” social issues that tend to provoke strong emotional reactions. Eleven topics emerged in this category, including: sex and dating, race and intelligence, love and intimacy, prayer in schools, authentic portrayals of violence, teen pregnancy, white supremacy, expression of racist words or ideas by teacher or student, sexual assault, racial separatism, and date rape. More than three-fourths of the topics relate to either sex or race. The topics cited by student teachers as most likely to “put your job in jeopardy” were virtually all in these categories. We find it interesting that many of the most sensitive topics cluster around sex, race, and religion, areas of historic cultural conflict and taboo.

Common taboos, although somewhat less sensitive, may nevertheless represent closed areas of culture.
Those topics ranged from generally abstract personal and religious concerns to social and political issues. For example, marriage, divorce, cohabitation, teen suicide, euthanasia, and domestic violence were some personal concerns. Less-sensitive religious taboos centered on discussion of the occult, the religious Right, atheism, and eastern religions. Social and political topics included AIDS, environmental radicalism, exploitation of the poor and minorities, feminism, affirmative action, communism, and welfare. Additional topics include racially mixed marriage, student use of drugs and alcohol, questioning representative democracy as the best form of government, evolution, racial and ethnic conflict, controversial leaders, criticism of traditional heroes, environmental holocaust, conspiracy theories, criticism of capitalism, and discussion of school issues and controversies.

These are issues that can generate great controversy, but they are generally perceived as public issues. They are also issues in the larger society, and several of them may be a step removed from students’ lives. For example, feminism is perceived to be a safer topic than is abortion, and affirmative action a less-sensitive topic than is racial separatism. The relatively safe or noa topics tend to be even more distant from students’ lives—for example, American foreign policy failures, wealth and power in America, health care reform, labor/management issues, and the role of media in society. Other topics are animal rights, socialism, schools as a social institution, foreign policy decisions, nuclear weapons, gun control, the military budget, and consumerism.

We have noticed that some of the safer topics reflect more recent developments, for which our culture may lack long-term value conflict. Many of the topics are embedded in the stuff of history and the discipline-based concepts, topics, and subject matter that make up most of the social studies curriculum. But the issues associated with them do not generally receive emphasis in textbooks and classrooms (Loewen 1995). Too frequently classroom treatment of these topics within a discipline-based framework tends to distance students from the community and from themselves, serving as a boundary between the social control function of schools and the ferment outside. Unfortunately, many of the truly noa topics that schools treat extensively are also virtually guaranteed to put students to sleep. When we add the general reluctance of many teachers to share their positions on issues, it is little wonder that schools contribute to a society of conformity.

The general pattern based on our impressions from student teachers, our review of literature, our experiences, and our own perceptions regarding taboo and noa topics appears to be as follows: The greater the distance in space and time from the individual lives of students the greater the focus in the curriculum and the less chance of emotional involvement or controversy. The converse also appears to be true: The closer to students’ lives, the more meaningful, the more likely the topic is to be taboo. Areas of conflicting belief often reflect contested terrain supported by deeply embedded cultural values. Thus, the teaching of history and social science topics seemingly disconnected from students’ lives may serve as a way for the culture to address social issues obliquely, avoiding the confrontation and turmoil that might result from the direct examination of social issues and creating a layer of comfort for teachers, students, and administrators as well as those in positions of power in the larger society.

Explaining Silence

Teachers play a critical role in stifling or promoting the discussion of taboo topics. They decide whether such topics will be part of the intended curriculum, whether students can bring such issues into the classroom, and how the issues will be discussed (Bickmore 1993). Perhaps most important, they create a classroom environment that supports or inhibits the expression of student opinion. Several conditions may contribute to the silence of the curriculum on taboo topics. Certainly the fragmentation, segmentation, and compartmentalization of school subjects set a background for a system of taboos. The disciplinary borders that have traditionally defined school subjects are partly responsible. The disciplines have been dominated historically by an emphasis on objectivity and neutrality, an antiseptic de-emphasis on the emotional, a desensitization that occurs through schooling and culture to separate the mind from the heart under the guise of scientific neutrality (Zinn 1994).

In addition, the reality of schools as massive and tenacious bureaucracies with written rules and codes of conduct that emphasize a hierarchical stability, blandness, and sameness contributes to the taboo system (Zeigler 1967). In economic terms, schools are primarily aimed at developing human capital, workers who will do the nation’s chores without asking too many troublesome questions, serving as a giant sorting machine (Ayon 1980; Apple 1979; Giroux 1981; Spring 1989). From that perspective, the critical thinking that occurs is an anomaly. Ironically, the more intimate and important a topic in young people’s lives, the less likely it is to be studied in schools.

An anthropological perspective enlightens our understanding of sensitive and safe topics, which in turn may deepen our understanding of the relative lack
of progress for issues-centered approaches in schools. A cultural explanation for the system of taboos includes intolerance of those who are culturally or ideologically different. This is a sort of educational nativism in which the Christian Right, the Gglers, in-school sanctioning agents, the textbook marketing and adoption process, the general lack of academic freedom, fear of losing one’s job, ostracism, and self-censorship play major roles (Zeigler 1967). The student teachers with whom we work are very sensitive to the possibility of negative evaluations from sanctioning agents within the school community and outside. Zeigler’s conclusion almost thirty years ago that the fear of sanctions restricts the likelihood that teachers would generate discussion of controversial issues still appears valid.

In the years since Zeigler, the legal atmosphere has also shifted. Supreme Court rulings may also have an impact on the culture of silence. In ruling on the First Amendment rights of free speech as regards schools, teachers, and students, the courts have faced the dilemma of striking a balance between First Amendment rights and indoctrination. Until the Hazelwood case (1987), the Supreme Court generally supported openness, and case law regarding censorship in schools leaned toward support of the First Amendment. Hazelwood, a case in which the Supreme Court held that a Missouri high school principal’s action to censor a student newspaper did not abridge the First Amendment rights of the students because the newspaper could not be characterized as a public forum, set new distinctions and shifted the balance toward greater restriction and more administrative control. In Hazelwood, the Court established the precedent that schools can censor if that censoring relates to “legitimate pedagogical concerns,” and gave school administrators broad powers to control school activities and to limit the freedom of teachers and students. Unfortunately, the effect of Hazelwood includes the limitation of topics, making some of them taboo and contributing to the repression of open inquiry and teacher freedom to lead students to question and explore ideas independently, essential aspects of issues-centered social studies (Krutz 1994). In fact, one survey of high school English teachers documented the fear of losing jobs or public censure because of controversial reading materials or inclusion of controversial topics in the curriculum (Noll 1994).

In summary, drawing on insights from our literature review, our experiences in schools, and the perceptions of student teachers with whom we work, we concluded that a system of taboo and noa topics does exist, that selection of social studies topics in schools may be guided, at least in part, by such a system, and that behind the taboos and noas is a cultural system resembling earlier societies with chiefs, secret societies, tribal elders, priests, rites of initiation, and rituals in new forms. It also appears to us that in this cultural system, taboo issues and topics are viewed as a threat to ancestral traditions, that taboos are transmissible, and that a prohibition against discussing sensitive and controversial topics may lead to a general aversion to discussion of issues. Unfortunately, under the influence of a system of taboos and noas, teachers may play a relatively weak and subservient role, subject to fear of sanctions and possessing an almost superstitious attitude toward the possible consequences of selecting controversial topics for study.

Options on Silence

In most classrooms, taboo issues and topics are buried under an indigestible mass of facts, stories, and skills. Before we can seriously consider action to address the lack of treatment of these topics, we must appreciate the human need for comfort and the difficulty and turmoil these issues and topics create for teachers and students who inquire into them honestly, openly, and thoroughly. Staring into the heart of darkness can be a searing experience, can generate difficult and volatile conflict, and can unleash an emotional outpouring that many teachers will have difficulty controlling and directing.

One option to consider is to honor the need for silence and continue to ignore taboo subject matter and de-emphasize related issues and topics. That is an option that we cannot support. Another option is to address taboo subject matter carefully, when possible, and to do so within the dominant curricular structures currently found in schools. A third alternative deserving consideration is to open inquiry and discussion on taboo subject matter as thoroughly and competently as possible. That approach is best configured in an issues-oriented curriculum in which the issues raised by taboo topics become a central focus for student inquiry.

To create a more supportive environment for the exploration of taboo, ignored, and de-emphasized subject matter, the following may be helpful: materials appropriate to the taboo subject matter; revised textbooks created for problem posing; new curriculum guides and course plans; transformation of hierarchical control; and emphasis on academic freedom. Gantz (1978) describes five methods of taboo removal: relabeling the taboo, offering “diffuser” incentives, legalizing it, promoting the idea of popular approval of it, and creating a festive atmosphere around it. As Mesa-Bains and Shulman (1991) suggested, collaborative learning, case discussion, and other techniques hold promise for creating meaningful dialogue on real-life situations that are often sensitive. In addition, exercises created to make students aware of their attitudes about a taboo topic and to “move beyond the realms of mystery, ignorance, and taboo” may be helpful (Taylor 1981). A more novel approach is to plan a study of...
taboo subjects, much in the way that the "Subversive Film and Video Festival" was organized by the Danish Film Institute Workshop, and build around the ideal that "taboos are meant to be questioned and are often subject to criticism" (Vogel 1992). Somewhat similar is a curriculum focused on "closed" or "problematic areas of culture" (Hunt and Metcalf 1955).

Although work toward lifting taboos is important, we must recognize the deep-seated nature of the cultural forces at work in schools and society that create and maintain taboos. It may be very difficult to establish the openness necessary to create an issues-centered curriculum. Certainly the historical trend in social studies over recent years has been a move away from discourse on perennial human issues and toward a curriculum dominated by history and geography. In fact, the zenith of issues-centered social studies may have occurred during the 1930s and the glory years of Harold Rugg. Simply put, we cannot expect sudden or massive change. Nevertheless, we believe it is important for teachers to address many taboo topics and issues in the classroom and that an issues-centered approach to social studies holds great promise for improvement of practice in the field.

What to Do? Practical Suggestions

We believe that it is essential for teachers and students in schools to explore taboo topics. This can be done most readily using the methods and activities found effective by advocates of issues-centered curricula, and by including study of a wide range of controversial topics contained in and related to the contents of the curriculum.

Although it is important for teachers to be aware of the legal restrictions on teacher freedom, the scope of Hazelwood is not unlimited and can be challenged (Hazelwood Guide 1988). The court's ruling in Hazelwood does not deny the possibility of other protection, such as state, school board, or campus regulations or policies that might guarantee free expression to teachers and students. It does not strip high school students of all First Amendment rights, and it does not mandate that school administrators, boards, and officials must assume broader power to censor teachers and students (Hazelwood Guide 1988). How supervision is exercised will teach young people a powerful lesson in freedom of speech or oppression ("Civics or Censorship" 1988).

The implications of the Hazelwood decision will continue to be tested, but it is apparent that the present Court favors administrative control. Some level of censorship in schools is a reality, and teachers are faced with difficult choices. Nonetheless, there are specific things teachers can do. We believe that many of the recommendations made to teachers regarding Hazelwood and censorship are relevant for all social studies teachers facing the general cultural restraint on teaching taboo topics. We gathered our list of suggestions from various sources, including Krutz (1994, 224–29) and What to Do? (1988, 39–40), as well as the other sources cited in the text. A few items are listed as written in the original text.

- Do not self-censor, avoiding topics thought to be controversial. If others want to censor, let that be their decision.
- Do not try to guess what might be offensive to someone else. Anything can be offensive to someone. This leads to a watered-down curriculum.
- When selecting materials for students, use common sense. For example, sexually explicit materials or materials containing strong language that might not pass the test of community standards for obscenity may lead to censure. Develop a familiarity with school policy regarding such materials prior to using them in the classroom.
- Taboos and the cultural sensitivity surrounding taboo topics can be thoughtfully discussed with students to promote awareness, sensitivity, and openness. Include struggles over censorship and school policy as a topic in the curriculum, for study and student action (Repa 1990).
- Draw on the methods and activities found effective in teaching controversial topics by advocates of issues-centered curricula (Evans and Saxe 1996).
- Include reading and discussion of a wide range of alternative perspectives on the issue or topic under consideration including conservative, liberal, radical, and extremist views. Encourage students to make up their own minds.
- Use probing questions as a hinge for organizing lessons and materials, questions calling for a wide range of viewpoints. For example, "To what extent should our laws protect the rights of lesbians, gays, and bisexuals?"
- Bring in relevant evidence, resources, and materials that shed light on the question being investigated.
- Include discussion of the values supporting competing alternatives and the consequences that may result from each choice (Engle and Ochoa 1988).
- Develop caring and effective procedures for managing student behavior and creating a classroom environment that is open, safe, and supportive of free expression. Students must feel comfortable sharing unpopular perspectives and beliefs, even when they conflict with the teacher's.
- Develop clear guidelines for behavior appropriate to the lesson format. For example, "One person will speak at a time. When one person speaks, everyone else listens. We will discuss ideas, not personalities."
- Consider minimizing or withholding teacher opinions and perspectives until after students have substantially shared and examined their beliefs through investigation of relevant sources and subse-
quent discourse. The teacher’s perspective can then be evaluated as one of several possible views to be considered.

- At the school and district level, teacher involvement in curricular planning and decision making will also help promote academic freedom, creative thinking, and quality teaching (McMurty 1992).
- Urge schools to adopt an explicit policy for protection and encouragement of free expression, and supporting inclusion of controversial topics in the curriculum (Jones 1993). One strategy for resolving censorship attempts includes developing procedures for handling challenged materials or topics. Offer to help develop a school policy if none exists.
- If censored, appeal. Ask for specific objections in writing. If the problem concerns choice of topic, calmly and professionally discuss the educational rationale with the objector. An administrator can only censor if the school board permits. Appeal to the board, or the superintendent, but do not give up too soon. Draw on Justice Brennan’s dissenting opinion in Hazelwood as a source of arguments favoring free expression. He called the Hazelwood decision a “license for thought control in the high schools” (Hazelwood 1988, 268).
- Use public pressure to your advantage. Get parents, community, librarians, the press, other media, fellow faculty, and students to petition or take other public action, including debate. Probably no school wants to be labeled as censoring.
- Support and reward administrators and others who are committed to upholding and defending freedom of speech in the schools. Establish an award to honor them.
- Seek assistance from organized groups such as teachers, unions, local, state, and national affiliates of the National Council for the Social Studies, the Student Law Center, the state and national Coalitions against Censorship, and the American Civil Liberties Union.
- Create alternative forums not affected by Hazelwood, public forums that are open to all, whether school-sponsored or underground.
- Push for state legislation to protect students’ and teachers’ rights of free expression.

And, finally, do not give up your rights as a citizen and as a teacher. The power of school authorities to control the curriculum is not unlimited, but is fraught with ambiguity. Exploration of controversial and taboo topics in social studies is an important exercise of free expression and provides students with powerful lessons on living in a democratic society. Tacit acceptance of a system of taboos and noas sends a powerful message as well, one burdened with silence. As Theodore Mitchell (1988), of Dartmouth, wrote:

Intolerance of student expression is at odds with one of the central missions of every school: to teach democratic values, principles and actions. Ideals and practice cannot be divorced. A school preaching democracy while practicing tyranny is one in which hypocrisy and duplicity become de facto parts of the curriculum. Schools which fail to protect the constitutional rights of individuals (according to John Dewey) "strangle the free mind at its source and teach youth to discount important principles of government as mere platitudes." (12)

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