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ABSTRACT

Two aspects of the place of controversy in the secondary school social studies curricula are considered in this study. First, students' attitudes and descriptions concerning the introduction of controversial course material into the social studies curricula are investigated; and, secondly, the possible consequences of such material are examined. Data collected from 588 secondary students in three southern Illinois communities through a questionnaire administered to English classes shows that students strongly prefer an emphasis on controversial subject matter in social studies, that they expect the teacher's role to be active, and that half prefer the expression of personal opinions by the teacher. The consequences for the student in a civic education class with open discussion of controversial subject matter are investigated in relation to positive educational outputs of attitudes, behaviors, or perceptions. General conclusions drawn from measures of these three correlates are that secondary students prefer a comparatively strong emphasis on controversial subject matter in social studies and that, when allowed to discuss controversial materials openly in the social studies class, students display marked behavioral and perceptual effects not manifested in students more constrained in this activity. (Author/KSM)

CORRELATES OF OPEN DISCUSSION OF CONTROVERSY IN THE SOCIAL STUDIES CLASSROOM

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I. Introduction

The place of controversy in the secondary school social studies curricula has been a major point of contention among educators for many years. Some favor the introduction of controversial material into the social studies program on the grounds that such material will both stimulate learning and provide the student with a more realistic portrayal of our social and political systems. One proponent of such an approach writes that

> Allowing students to examine their own values in a broad framework . . . offers them the opportunity of developing a meaningful understanding of the role of values as underlying guidelines for behavior, of acquiring a better comprehension of the place of conflict and disagreement in a society, and of developing a greater tolerance for the values of others. Some political education courses do not involve discussions of this manner because of the teacher's fear of controversy. But controversy is the essence of politics, and a thinking student will gradually discover that honest differences of opinion exist on most political matters. The classroom discussion of controversial issues presents opportunities to combine this learning with practice in the analysis of problems, the evaluation of arguments, and the ability to come to one's own decision on a recommended course of action (Cleary, 1971: 112).

Others oppose an emphasis on controversial course material in social studies courses because they feel such material will be too complex for secondary school students to fully comprehend and will also produce a negative reaction through a much too realistic presentation of subject matter, especially that regarding the actual workings of the social

and political systems. Muessig, summarizing this viewpoint, writes that

> . . . the unexamined life may be happier and smoother. The student who looks carefully at himself and his commitments may not like what he sees and could become more confused, insecure, and withdrawn. Through reflection, the learner might become aware of social problems that did not plague him before and dilemmas, inconsistencies, and hypocrisies that had previously escaped his notice. He could end up exchanging answers for questions, sureties for doubts, conclusions for hypotheses to the point where he might lose fixed beliefs that had formerly directed his decisions and relationships with others, question the statements and actions of persons in positions of authority, and even become alienated, cynical, or rebellious. Having gained new insights and skills he may not be able to use, he might find he has exchanged docility for frustration (1971: 438).

In this paper, two aspects of this topic will be considered. First, students' attitudes and descriptions concerning the introduction of controversial course material into the social studies curricula will be explored. Then, the possible consequences of such material being dealt with in the social studies class will be investigated.

II. Viewpoint

The consideration and discussion of controversial subject matter in the social studies classroom are considered to be lacking by many critics of civic education programs in the secondary school. As early as 1934, Charles Merriam in Civic Education in the United States commented on the dearth of realism and controversy in the social studies curricula. More recently, Lunstrum has written, "In spite of the importance attached

by educators to the task of bringing intellectual discipline to bear on the examination of crucial issues, teachers are frequently advised to postpone the treatment of such issues if the community is aroused" (1965: 146). After reviewing six widely-used and representative social studies textbooks, Massialas concludes:

> (1) Highly controversial issues . . . such as laws governing homosexuality, prostitution, birth control information and aid, pornography, abortions, illegitimate children, interracial marriages, and drug addiction, are excluded from discussion in the textbooks. (2) When controversial issues are discussed, they are presented in an 'antiseptic' context where, with a few exceptions, the authors refuse to take a stand on the issues and to support their stand on valid and publicly communicable grounds (1967: 185).

Even when the community does not attempt to constrain the social studies teacher and even when the textbook does not omit reference to controversial topics, the social studies teacher's civic education agent role conception may itself inhibit the introduction and discussion of controversial material in the civic education program. Zeigler concludes, for example, that ". . . teachers do not regard the classroom as a suitable forum for the expression by teachers of controversial opinions, or for that matter of noncontroversial opinions" (1967: 98). In support of this conclusion, he cites data which show that of the 803 Oregon teachers in his sample, only 43 percent would speak in class against the censorship of pornographic literature, 41 percent would speak in favor of socialism, and 27 percent would be willing to explain to students their reasons for preferring a presidential candidate.

Much more commentary exists on the noncontroversial nature of the secondary school civic education program and other studies can be cited from the extant empirical literature supporting the contention that secondary school teachers, especially in the social studies, are hesitant to introduce controversial topics into the civic education curricula and to make personal comments on those topics (Jennings and Zeigler, 1970; Ungs, 1969; Long and Long, 1974a; for an exception, see Merelman, 1971). Conversely, little attention has been dealt secondary school students' perceptions and expectations in this area (For exceptions, consult Jennings and Niemi, 1968; Johnson and Bachman, 1973; Remy, 1972; Remy and Zeigler, 1974; Long and Long, 1975). Do they perceive their teachers as av⁽ ding controversy? Do they view their teachers as refraining from the expression of personal values in the classroom? Do the students prefer the omission of controversy from the civic education program? And do they want their teachers to abstain from the expression of personal values in the classroom? These questions have not been adequately investigated nor satisfactorily answered.

Sample. The data reported here were collected in May, 1971 from 588 secondary school students residing in three Southern Illinois communities with average populations of 25,000. The paper-and-pencil questionnaire utilized in this survey was administered to students in English classes in the schools involved to control for possible social studies course specificity on student responses. The sample was composed of an approximately

equal number of students in grade levels seven through twelve. Boys and girls were rather evenly divided in the sample which was also predominantly white. The modal parental education level was twelve years.

Findings. As was rather emphatically stated in the references above, controversy is avoided in the typical social studies course. Does this generalization hold for this sample of secondary school students? The data seem to imply that if this proposition holds, it would seem most pertinent to the junior high school students in this study. When asked, "How frequently are controversial matters discussed in your social studies courses?," the junior high school students perceive less frequent controversial discussion than the senior high school students. But even here, almost 60 percent of the younger group respond that controversial discussion occurs frequently, while approximately 70 percent of the older group respond that such discussion occurs frequently. Obviously, the students' conception of controversy influences the interpretation of these figures, but even with a rather broad definition of "controversial discussion," it is apparent that these secondary school students do not perceive controversial discussion as lying dormant in their social studies courses.

It must be recognized, however, that classroom climate is an important factor in this context. It is possible that while controversial discussion occurs with some frequency in these students' social studies classes, the social studies teachers conducting these classes may be less enthusiastic

about such matters of discussion. To investigate this factor, the students were asked, "How willing are your social studies teachers to have controversial opinions advocated or discussed by students in the classroom?" The students' responses to this item indicate that approximately 70 percent of the students in both school levels report that their social studies teachers are willing to have controversial opinions forwarded and defended in their classes. Again, based on student perceptions, it appears that controversy is not eschewed in the social studies classroom or at least not in the form of student discussion of controversial subject matter.

But still the possibility exists that the students' social studies teachers are playing an objective role in the classroom, refraining from the expression of personal views when in front of the class. To tap this possibility, the students in this study were asked, "How frequently do your social studies teachers express their personal views on social and political matters in class?" From the distribution of student responses to this item, it is evident that little difference can be found between the two school levels. Two-thirds of both groups report that their social studies teachers frequently express personal political and social views to their students.

To summarize the findings so far, based on student reports of social studies teachers' classroom behavior, it is clear that: (1) two-thirds of both junior and senior high school students perceive controversial subjects being discussed frequently in their social studies classes,

(2) about two-thirds of the students feel that their social studies teachers condone the discussion of controversial subject matter in their classes, and (3) approximately two-thirds of the students in this survey state that their social studies teachers frequently express personal opinions on social and political topics to their students in the classroom. Thus, it seems that, at least in this instance, the model of the social studies teacher striving to remain "objective" and "neutral" through the avoidance of controversial discussion and the expression of subjective preferences in the classroom does not conform to student descriptions.

To this point, student perceptions of actual classroom behavior have been reported. It may be advisable to investigate student preferences regarding controversy in the social studies classroom, for they may not be congruent with their perceptions.[1] To tap such student preferences, three five-item attitudinal scales were designed to measure: (1) the relevance of controversial material in social studies education, (2) the justification for social studies teachers emphasizing controversial course topics, and (3) the acceptance of overt expressions of personal opinions by social studies teachers in the classroom.

On only one of the items on the controversy emphasis dimension do the two school levels substantially differ in their responses. About 88 percent of the senior high school students, as compared to 77 percent of the junior high school students, disagree with the item reading, "There's no place for the discussion of controversial issues in the classroom." Approximately 80 percent of the students in the sample express "pro-controversy" sentiments on all of the items in this scale. For example, about 80 percent agree that,

"If students didn't read about and discuss controversial social and political issues in the classroom, they wouldn't get much from their schooling," and, "The consideration of controversial social and political issues is an essential part of every student's education." Two items stated in a negative direction also receive strong disagreement. About 88 percent of both groups disagree that, "Because they are frequently misunderstood or misinterpreted, controversial subjects should not be stressed in the classroom," and almost 79 percent of the junior and senior high school students express disagreement with the item worded, "There should be no place in a social studies class for the expression by students of unpopular ideas."

It must be concluded, then, that almost four-fifths of the students in this sample are strongly in favor of controversial subject matter being stressed in secondary school social studies classes.

It is one thing for a controversial discussion to be spontaneously generated during a social studies period, but quite another for the social studies teacher to initiate and control such a discussion. To measure students' attitudes toward the social studies teacher's role in the consideration of controversial topics in the classroom, the teacher acceptance of controversy measure was developed. With two exceptions, it is apparent that the secondary school students in this study condone an active role by social studies teachers in controversial class discussions. Where minor discrepancies appear between students in the two school levels, the senior high school students generally approve of a more active teacher role in this context than do their younger peers.

This basic acceptance of the teacher's place in controversial discussions is apparent when it is observed that about 77 percent of the students at both school levels disagree that, "A teacher should avoid dealing with controversial political and social topics in the classroom," or that approximately three-fourths of the students agree that, "Teachers should encourage students to question basic political and social values, even if extreme viewpoints result." Additional evidence for this contention is found in the fact that almost four-fifths of the sample disagree with the item stating that, "The social studies teacher should see to it that certain social and political views aren't discussed by students in class."

On two items, however, somewhat less agreement is found among these students. About 44 percent of the students agree that, "The social studies teacher has a responsibility to restrict the discussion of certain radical values by students in the classroom." On the item stating, "A social studies teacher has no right whatever to tell students what social and political values can and cannot be talked about in class," less than 60 percent of the sample are in agreement. From the distribution of responses to all the items measuring the teacher's controversy role, however, it can be concluded that the students, in both school levels, condone, and probably expect, social studies teachers to play an active role in controversial discussions in class, while not appearing to limit or over-control such discussions.

On the third dimension measuring relevant dimensions of students' attitudes toward controversy in the curricula, more ambivalence is evident. A perusal of the response distributions for the teacher expressivism items

indicates that approximately 50 percent of the secondary school students are in favor of their social studies teachers deviating from the idealized model of the neutral teacher in order to express personal opinions on relevant topics of classroom discussion. Again, little difference occurs across school levels on this attitudinal dimension.

As an example of this more restrictive role expectation held by secondary school students regarding their social studies teachers, it should be noted that over 50 percent of the students agree that, "A teacher's job is to discuss factual information in the classroom, not his personal opinions on social and political matters." Forty-six percent of the students agree that, "Propaganda results when a teacher begins expressing personal opinions in the classroom."

On the other hand, almost 60 percent of the students disagree that, "When controversial public issues are discussed in the classroom, the social studies teacher should remain neutral and not express his own personal views." Also, over 50 percent agree with the item stating, "Part of a teacher's role in the classroom is to voice his own personal views on social and political matters" and only about 35 percent of the students agree that, "A teacher should try not to talk about what he personally feels concerning a social or political issue in the classroom."

On this cluster of items, therefore, less consensus can be found relative to the other dimensions of controversial discussion attitudes cited above. In fact, with regard to teacher expressivism in the social studies class, it would appear that the students in this sample at least are

divided equally, with one group preferring teacher expressivism on controversial topics and the other group expecting the social studies teacher to remain reticent on these matters.

Three generalizations result from this consideration of secondary school students' expectations and preferences concerning controversy in the classroom. First, these students express a strong preference for an emphasis on controversial subject matter in the social studies curricula. Second, the social studies teacher's role in controversial discussion is expected to be active, in the sense that encouragement and guidance are proffered. Third, students are more divided in their preferences regarding the expression of personal opinions by social studies teachers, with half of the students stating a preference for teacher subjectivity and half demanding teacher objectivity.

III. Outcome

Having discussed secondary school students' perceptions and expectations concerning controversy in the social studies curricula, the next objective of this inquiry is to investigate the possible consequences for the student of being enrolled in a civic education program characterized by a concern with controversial subject matter. Basic to this concern is the fundamental assumption made by many educators that attention to certain controversial matters in the classroom, particularly where that attention involves "critical thinking" and "valuing," somehow relates to positive educational outputs, such as changed or enhanced student attitudes and behaviors. Can this

assumption be supported empirically? Does exposure to controversial discussion in the secondary school social studies program have a beneficial impact on the student?

In attempting to answer this question, considerable evidence of a tangential nature can be forwarded to support the notion that the psychosocial characteristics of teachers influence both the content and style of the curriculum, as well as students' perceptions and evaluations of teacher behavior in the classroom (Cody and Goethals, 1960; Caliguri and Levine, 1967; McGee, 1955; Harvey, White, Prather, and Alter, 1966; Harvey Prather, White, and Hoffmeister, 1968; Walberg, 1968a; Walberg, 1968b; Long and Long, 1974b; Long and Long, 1974c). Similarly, support also exists for the contention that curricular content and style have an impact on students' attitudes and behavior, especially as mediated by student perceptions and evaluations of the curriculum (Yamamoto, Thomas, and Karns, 1969; Walberg and Anderson, 1968; Anderson, 1970; Anderson, 1971; Walberg, 1968c; Walberg, 1969; Anderson, Walberg, and Welch, 1969).

One of the few studies directly relevant to the above question was conducted by Ehman, who used a sample of 334 Detroit high school students to show that a relationship exists between the extent to which a student is exposed to controversial issues in his social studies classes and the extent to which positive attitudinal and behavioral changes in the student are effected. Ehman found that this association was especially pronounced in an "open classroom climate," i. e., one characterized by frequent treatment of controversial issues, teacher objectivity and neutrality, student

willingness to freely discuss such issues, and teacher discussion of racial problems. In such an open climate, political cynicism was reduced, a sense of citizen duty and feelings of political efficacy were enhanced, and political participation was increased. In summarizing his findings, Ehman writes, "If we are to expose students to controversial issues and we desire 'positive' attitude changes, we had better pay close attention to the climate in which these issues are introduced. More such controversial content presented in a biased and closed atmosphere can apparently be related to negative outcomes" (1969: 578).

Independent Variable. The independent variable in this study, the Controversial Discussion Index, has been constructed from two items included in the questionnaire administered to the secondary school students in this survey. The first of these two items is a measure of the frequency of controversial discussion in the students' social studies classes; the second item is a measure of social studies teachers' willingness to have controversial opinions advocated or discussed in the classroom.[2]

Controversial Discussion Index scores have been computed as follows. A low score results if controversial discussion is infrequent and if social studies teachers are reported to be unwilling to condone such discussion in the classroom. A high score on the Controversial Discussion Index is registered if controversial discussion is frequent and if social studies teachers are willing to permit it in the classroom.[3]

Dependent Variables. Three diverse sets of dependent variables will be of principal concern in this context. The first set, corresponding somewhat to that utilized in the Ehman study, is attitudinal in nature, tapping students' attitudes on dimensions such as political efficacy, political cynicism, civic tolerance, and political sophistication. The second set of variables is more behavioral and orientational in nature. These variables serve as indicators of political information, political interest, political discussion, media exposure, and extracurricular participation. The third set of dependent variables in this series relates more to student perceptions of the social studies curricula and the effect of various agents and procedures on the process of political socialization.

Hypotheses. Although they cannot be verified with the data at hand, two fundamental assumptions underlie this discussion. The first assumption is that open discussion of controversial subject matter in secondary school social studies classes serves a mediational role fostering acceptance of, and attention to, civic education-relevant communications. This mediational function might, for example, contribute to the typical social studies student experiencing feelings of greater positive affect regarding social studies courses in which controversial discussion is accepted and perhaps even rewarded and encouraged. This, in turn, may well result in a greater propensity on his part to internalize the civic education goals inherent in the social studies program.

The second assumption is that through open discussion of controversial material in the social studies class, relevant aspects of citizenship preparation can be introduced to the students' attention which would ordinarily not be broached, at least not under such conducive conditions. Thus, the acquisition of salient curricular material and the achievement of attitudinal and behavioral change are effected by means of the mediational role of open controversial discussion and probably also through peer group reinforcement in the discussion context.

Underlying both of these assumptions is the notion that the introduction and discussion of controversial course material in the social studies classroom contribute to greater student attentiveness to curricular content. Furthermore, by one means or another, the interjection of controversy into the typically more bland course offerings found in the social studies is held to contribute to the meaningfulness, the intensity, the surprisingness, the novelty, the complexity, and perhaps even the ambiguity of the content and style of the social studies curriculum (Berlyne, 1960: 18-44). Controversy as a mediator, in other words, serves to arouse the secondary school social studies student. In turn, this heightened level of arousal facilitates greater learning in the social studies classroom (Bruner, 1957). As Lefrancois writes, "Like effective behavior, maximally effective learning takes place under conditions of optimal arousal. Low levels of arousal are characterized by low attentiveness--a condition which, in a student, rarely leads to effective learning" (1972: 30). Therefore this mediator, while not providing a sufficient condition for political learning to occur, at

least through increased arousal, provides a necessary condition for such learning to take place.

It is, therefore, expected that student reports of frequent and open discussion of controversial topics in secondary school social studies courses will relate to:

I. Political attitudes, such as high scores on measures of
   a. Civic tolerance,
   b. Political sophistication,
   c. Political efficacy, and a low score on a measure of
   d. Political cynicism.

II. Behavior and orientations, such as levels of
   a. Political information,
   b. Political interest,
   c. Political discussion frequency,
   d. Media exposure frequency, and
   e. Extracurricular participation.

III. Perceptions, such as those concerning
   a. School influence,
   b. Course effect,
   c. Citizenship preparation,
   d. Qualitative civic education effect,
   e. Course emphases,
   f. Curricular credibility, and
   g. Curricular affect.

Attitudinal Correlates. Among the attitudinal dimensions most germane to participation in a democratic political system and most salient regarding socialization efforts in the social studies curriculum would be attitudes concerning the modifiability of the political system and the effectiveness of individual activity in that sphere. As a measure of this dimension, a modified version of the Political Efficacy Scale was employed in this study.[4] Robinson, et al. write that this scale was designed to

measure "the feeling that political and social change is possible, and that the individual citizen can play a part in bringing about this change" (1972: 459).

According to the proponents of controversial discussion in the classroom and Ehman's earlier study, political efficacy should correlate positively with the Controversial Discussion Index. Contrary to this expectation, however, a negative correlation results for both junior high school (gamma= -.24) and senior high school students (gamma= -0.27).

Political cynicism, defined as "the extent to which one is contemptuously distrustful of politicians and the political process" (Robinson, Rusk, and Head, 1972: 479), would also seem to be a fruitful attitudinal dimension to investigate in this context.[5] A slight relationship between the Political Cynicism Scale and the Controversial Discussion Index for junior high (gamma= .08) and senior high school students (gamma= .13) again appears to put into question the earlier findings and the assumptions underlying the arguments for controversial discussion in the social studies. Open discussion of controversy in the social studies classroom, for these secondary school students, is slightly associated with politically cynical attitudes on their part.

Civic tolerance is another desired outcome of the social studies program frequently cited in the literature on the subject (For discussions of this topic, consult Patterson, 1960; Wilson, 1966; Chester, 1967; and Marcus, 1964). Does discussion of controversial subject matter in the social studies classroom in an open fashion produce civic tolerance? The Civic

Tolerance Scale[6] employed in this study is negatively correlated with the Controversial Discussion Index for the junior high school students (gamma= -.15) and uncorrelated with the same measure for the senior high school students (gamma= .02).

Finally, in an attempt to further investigate the relationship between open discussion of controversial material in the social studies classroom and the political attitudes held by secondary school students, two scales measuring political sophistication were used. The first of these scales, the Political Process Scale, was designed to measure the respondents' understanding of "politics as an arena involving the actions of politicians, public officials, and the use of power and influence. . . " (Litt, 1963: 70).[7] Since one of the arguments for the introduction of controversial subject matter into the social studies curriculum is to present a more realistic picture of the political process, it should be expected that open discussion of controversial material should be associated with more political sophistication, as measured by this scale. The contrary would seem to be the case, at least for the junior high school students (gamma= -.12); and no relationship would seem to pertain for the older students (gamma= .06).

The second political sophistication scale employed in this study, the Political Function Scale, provides an estimate of a person's understanding of "political conflicts among economic, social, and ethno-religious groupings resolved within an agreed-upon framework of political rules of the game"(Litt, 1963: 70).[8]

Again, the prediction would hold that the Controversial Discussion Index would relate positively to this scale. The reverse holds, however, with a comparable relationship occurring for junior (gamma= -.16) and senior high school students (gamma= -.17).

What can be concluded with regard to the relationship between open discussion of controversy in the social studies class and the political attitudes investigated here? None of the hypotheses generated from the arguments forwarded by advocates of the introduction of controversy into the social studies curricula receives empirical support in this study of secondary school students in southern Illinois social studies classes. Indeed, in most cases, the opposite position receives support. For example, open discussion of controversy is associated with less political efficacy, somewhat more political cynicism, less civic tolerance (for junior high school students), and less political sophistication. Individual and simultaneous controls for the students' sex, race, grade-point-average or parental education level did not significantly alter the direction or extent of these relationships.

A number of explanatory possibilities may be of relevance here. First, it is possible that attitudes, such as those investigated in this study, once internalized by adolescents, cannot be readily transformed through classroom discussion alone. Second, it is also possible that through such classroom discussion, as well as through the mechanisms of selective perception and recall, political cynicism and civic intolerance may, indeed, be reinforced rather than modified or eradicated. Third, it is equally

possible that discussion of controversial topics in the social studies class either does not directly relate to, or is not perceived by students as relating to, such attitudes. Finally, as Massialas, et al. write,

> . . . the overt controversial nature of a topic is not necessarily related to whether the issue is actually presented as a controversial issue in the classroom. For example, a discussion of birth control . . . could focus on descriptions of birth control programs throughout the world and ignore related issues, such as the sanctity of personal privacy and the conception of human life. It is quite possible for a teacher to discuss topics which are overtly highly controversial in a safe, straightforward, bland fashion (1971: 568).

Some support for this contention has been recently provided by Ehman, who reports that there are at least two reasons for the high school social studies curriculum having little impact on the political attitudes of students:

> Controversial issues are not often discussed; and when they are, little if any of the verbalization involved is in the normative mode, a type of discourse which can be expected to have effect on political orientations. But when we examine the relationship between what little normative interaction does occur and change in attitudes, we find that such normative discourse is positively related to change in political cynicism. We might conclude that the kind of discourse occurring in social studies classrooms may be more important for students' attitudes than the amount of exposure to these classes (1970: 82-83).

Behavioral and Orientational Correlates. If the discussion of controversial issues in an open classroom climate is, in fact, serving a mediational role between the values expressed in the social studies program and student reaction to such values, then it should be expected that various aspects of student behavior would covary with their perceptions

of the classroom climate in their social studies classes. As the first test of this hypothesis, a political information index[9] was used to ascertain the effects of an open controversial discussion climate on the extent to which students are informed about their political environment. The expectation that those students reporting an open classroom climate concerning controversial discussion will be better informed is confirmed for both junior high school students (gamma= .23) and for senior high school students (gamma= .35).

Is there a relationship between open controversial discussion and political interest level?[10] Advocates of open classroom discussion of controversy would reply in the affirmative. The data support this expectation, but only for the younger students (gamma= .32); for the senior high school students no relationship occurs (gamma= -.01). This suggests perhaps that either the junior high school students are more susceptible on this dimension to the influence of controversial discussion or that once an effect is accomplished, similar efforts at the high school level will only prove redundant.

Does discussion of political matters[11] increase when the secondary school student is permitted to discuss controversial topics openly in the social studies class? For both junior high students (gamma= .28) and senior high students (gamma= .40), this would appear to be the case. If this relationship holds, then attendance to the mass media[12] may also be increased when social studies teachers allow their students to openly discuss controversial material in their classrooms. Again, the relationship

holds. Junior high school students (gamma= .60), even more than senior high school students (gamma= .31), show the influence of open controversial discussion on mass media exposure rates.

Finally, an ultimate objective of the social studies program in the secondary school is to encourage and facilitate the sociopolitical participation of students, particularly after high school graduation. The argument can be made that detailed discussion of controversial issues in the social studies classroom would not only motivate the student to become more involved but also to have a better understanding of how to participate and become involved. One measure of this type of involvement for the secondary school student would be the extent of extracurricular participation.[13] If the above assumption is correct, open controversial discussion should correlate positively with extracurricular participation. This assumption is borne out, especially for the junior high school students (gamma= .24) and less so for the older students (gamma= .10).

Social studies teacher acceptance and encouragement of controversial discussion in the classroom appear to be associated with various aspects of student behavior. Political interest level, mass media attendance, and extracurricular participation seem particularly salient behaviors in this context for junior high school students, while political discussion and political information levels are most affected for senior high school students in this sample. Controls introduced for the sex, race, grade-point-average, and parental education level of the students did not significantly alter the relationships reported here.

Perceptual Correlates. Eight different perceptual variables will serve as possible correlates of controversial discussion frequency in a relatively open social studies classroom atmosphere. The students' perception of the school's influence on their civic education is the first of these perceptual variables. To gain more specific information regarding the students' perception of the impact of the school on their civic education, a second set of items explored the individual impact of teachers, textbooks, class assignments, and class discussion on the civic education process.[14]

As can be seen in Table 1, all of the school influence indices correlate positively with the Controversial Discussion Index. It is also interesting to note that among the junior high school students, this index correlates quite highly with the teacher, textbook, and assignment measures; whereas among the senior high school students, the Controversial Discussion Index exhibits a relatively high correlation with the school measure and a much lower relationship with the field trip measure; finally, discussion does not appear to discriminate between the two measures when correlated with the controversy index. The fact that these school influence measures seem to correlate more with open discussion of controversy for tne younger students may be a reflection, at least in this particular geographic region, of open discussion of controversy having a singularly greater effect among junior high school students because of its novelty and exciting nature.

To investigate this influence dimension in a different manner, another set of indicators was utilized which gathered information on the perceived

TABLE 1.

CONTROVERSIAL DISCUSSION INDEX
BY SCHOOL INFLUENCE INDICES BY GRADE LEVEL
(GAMMAS)

Controversial Discussion Index by:	JHS	SHS
School Influence	.37	.78
Teacher Influence	.73	.43
Textbook Influence	.60	.43
Class Assignment Influence	.50	.31
Class Discussion Influence	.49	.44
Field Trip Influence	.09	.18

(N = 227)

effect and lasting effect[15] of the students' social studies courses on their preparation for citizenship in American society.

Both measures of perceived social studies course effect correlate quite highly with the Controversial Discussion Index. In the junior high school (gamma = .81) and in the senior high school (gamma= .74), open discussion of controversy is associated with student perceptions of social studies curriculum effectiveness. The same relationship holds regarding perceptions of lasting effect for junior high school (gamma= .84) and senior high school students (gamma= .69).

In another effort to study the students' perceptions of their preparation for citizenship in our society, they were presented with the Citizenship Preparation Ladder and instructed to place themselves on the ladder rung which corresponded to their citizenship preparation, as they perceived it, in 1971, 1966, and 1976. They were further instructed that rung #1 on the ladder represented the "lowest preparation level you could have for being a citizen in our society" and that rung #10 represented the "highest preparation level you could reach for being a citizen in our society." Using this measure, four indicators were generated: (1) the ranking for 1971, (2) the ranking for 1976, (3) the difference between the rankings for 1976 and 1971 (future preparation), and (4) the difference between the rankings for 1971 and 1966 (past preparation).

This series of four citizenship preparation measures seems most related to the Controversial Discussion Index among the junior high school students, where, as Table 2 indicates, the correlation between each indicator

TABLE 2.

CONTROVERSIAL DISCUSSION INDEX
BY CITIZENSHIP PREPARATION INDICES BY GRADE LEVEL
(GAMMAS)

Controversial Discussion Index by:	JHS	SHS
Citizenship Preparation: 1971	.57	.04
Citizenship Preparation: 1976	.58	.20
Future Preparation: 1976-1971	.49	.19
Past Preparation: 1971-1966	.41	.25

(N = 227)

and the controversy index is appreciably lower for the high school students relative to the junior high school students. This may reflect a realization on the part of the older students that their civic preparation, at least as regards the secondary school, is near an end, while the younger students still hold high expectations concerning the impact of the school on them during the impending high school years.

Having ascertained in a quantitative fashion the source and extent of the impact of the civic education program on the student, as he perceives it, the next objective is to determine the qualitative nature of that impact. For this purpose, the students were requested to rate the specific types of effect the social studies courses in their schools had had upon them. The three factors in this portion of the questionnaire dealt with the students' basic feelings, knowledge, and opinions and evaluations about government and politics.[16]

Again, the Controversial Discussion Index exhibits a relatively high relationship with student perceptions of qualitative course effect. Those who report open classroom discussion of controversial topics also perceive the social studies curriculum as having an impact on them in the three spheres dealt with here. Course effect on basic feelings, for example, relates quite highly to the controversy index, with gamma coefficients of .55 for the junior high school sample and .64 for the senior high school group. Similarly, course effect on knowledge, as perceived by these students, shows a strong association with the Controversial Discussion measure (gammas of .54 and .51 for the junior and senior high school students,

respectively). The controversy index exhibits a much stronger relation, however, with the indicator for opinions and evaluations among the older students (gamma= .42) than among the younger students (gamma= .21), perhaps reflecting a greater awareness and saliency for such matters in senior high school.

The next perceptual variable in this cluster concerns student reports of course emphasis. The students, on a four-point scale ranging from "no emphasis" to "great emphasis," recorded the degree of emphasis each of four subjects had received in their social studies courses: (1) "the citizen's ability to effectively influence governmental officials regarding the formulation and adoption of public policy," (2) "the citizen's ability to receive fair and responsible treatment from governmental officials regarding existing policies and laws," (3) "the desirability of having political parties as a means for the citizen to influence the government," and (4) "the obligation of citizens to participate in elections and other political activities."[17]

Table 3 shows that with the exception of an emphasis on political parties in senior high school, the Controversial Discussion Index correlates with social studies course subject emphases listed in the table. Two comments seem warranted in this context. First, it is possible that the subject matter cited here may encompass much of the controversial discussion in the typical social studies class. It is also possible that discussion of political parties, especially in the high school social studies classroom, is viewed by many teachers as being too partisan and, therefore, not to be broached in the normal course of discussion--at least not in the context of "controversial" discussion.

TABLE 3.

CONTROVERSIAL DISCUSSION INDEX
BY COURSE EMPHASIS INDICES BY GRADE LEVEL
(GAMMAS)

Controversial Discussion Index by:	JHS	SHS
Influence Officials	.52	.53
Responsible Treatment	.51	.56
Political Parties	.63	.30
Political Participation	.56	.47

(N = 227)

The last two sets of perceptual variables to be investigated involve student reactions to the social studies curricula. The first of these relates to the extent to which the students in this survey agree with what they read in their textbooks and what they hear in class lectures.[18]

The more secondary school students perceive open discussion of controversial topics being permitted in their social studies courses, the more they tend to perceive their textbooks and lectures as possessing credibility. The gamma coefficients between agreement with textbook materials and controversial discussion are .34 and .48 for junior and senior high school students,respectively. On the measure of lecture credibility, correlations with the controversy index for both junior (gamma= .54) and senior high school students (gamma= .60) are even higher. This latter finding may be a function of a generalized acceptance by students of what all teachers say, compared to a possible generalized dislike for all textbooks held by many secondary school students.

The other set of perceptual variables relating to student reactions to curricula-relevant factors concerns the use of a "feeling thermometer" to establish the level of student affect toward the three most pertinent objects in the social studies curricula: social studies courses, textbooks, and teachers (Cantril, 1965). The students in this sample, therefore, were told to rate each of the above objects on the basis of their personal feelings toward the object.

The openness of controversial discussion measure also correlates positively with student affect toward social studies courses, textbooks, and teachers. The gamma correlations between the Controversial Discussion Index and student feelings for their social studies courses are .70 for junior high school students and .65 for senior high school students. Little difference occurs between the two school levels concerning the correlations between the controversy index and feelings for social studies textbooks (junior high school: .57; senior high school: .52). Only on the social studies teacher affect index does a discrepancy appear; junior high school students relate the extent of open discussion of controversy to their social studies teachers (gamma= .74) more than do senior high school students (gamma= .43). This difference between the two school levels may at least be partially accounted for by the differential affective attachments to teachers generated at the two school levels. On the other hand, the relatively high correlations for both credibility measures may illustrate that the ability to comment on such material in the classroom, which in itself may be perceived as controversial behavior by students, contributes to greater acceptance of the content of textbook and lecture material.

Discussion. Two quite general conclusions can be drawn concerning the research reported here. First, secondary school students prefer a comparatively strong emphasis on controversial subject matter in their social studies curricula. Second, when allowed to discuss such controversial material openly in the social studies class, these students display

marked behavioral and perceptual effects not manifested in students more constrained in this activity.

Theoretically, these conclusions are of considerable consequence in that they may provide a mediating variable--the frequency and openness of controversial class discussion in the secondary social studies program--of the type that may perhaps bolster the rather simplistic model currently dominant in social science research on the impact of the social studies curricula on secondary students' political socialization. Indeed, the authors of the most comprehensive study in this area recognized this possibility when they wrote, "Another factor which might elicit different patterns among students taking such courses is the content of the materials used and the nature of classroom discourse" (Langton and Jennings, 1968: 858).

More practically, these conclusions suggest the prescription for the optimum teaching strategy for the secondary school social studies teacher: foster and encourage controversial discussion in an open classroom milieu in order to enhance student receptivity to, and increase the potential impact of, the social studies curricula and curricula-relevant objectives.

A number of caveats must be underscored concerning the conclusions reached in this paper. The first concerns the generalizability of the results of this study. Do these results, reported from a survey of southern Illinois schools, also pertain to other parts of the United States, as well as to school systems in other parts of the world? A

second cautionary note must be registered regarding the direction of causality assumed to hold between the variables investigated in this research. Although the direction of causality has been assumed to run from open discussion of controversy to attitudinal, behavioral-orientational, and perceptual measures, the case can be made that, at least with regard to some variables reported, i.e., the perceptual variables, the direction of causality may, in fact, be reversed. A replication of this study, preferably using an experimental design, would clarify these two points considerably.

A third consideration in this context involves the dynamics of the open classroom milieu. The assumption made throughout this paper has been that open controversial discussion plays a mediational role, allowing for greater awareness and acceptance of civic education goals. Other functions, however, may be equally applicable to this mediational model. Such complementary functions might include (1) positive or negative reinforcement of pre-existing attitudes, behaviors and orientations, or perceptions (as may be the case with political efficacy in this study), (2) the provision of a modeling source for students who strongly identify with their social studies teachers or with their peers, (3) a means by which the student can recognize and accept value systems other than his own, (4) the opportunity for the social studies student to accept and appreciate a critical, controversial stance with regard to the social and political systems (perhaps most pertinent to younger students), and (5) a way by which secondary school students may be able to develop their "critical thinking" and "valuing" skills.

Another plausible explanation for the findings reported would be that teacher style may be accounting for much of the variance evidenced here, especially regarding student perceptions of the social studies program.[19] This rival explanation would suggest that the findings reported for the impact of open controversial discussion are really the result of teacher behavior in the social studies classroom, in this case, the behavior of teachers opting for an open classroom climate.[20] It is also possible that through controversial discussion, the social studies teacher can knowingly or unknowingly insinuate personal value preferences into the social studies curriculum. If this were the case, then the relationships reported between open classroom discussion of controversial material and course outcomes would, indeed, be spurious. Again, future research utilizing an experimental design would supply answers to these questions.

Finally, although the sex, race, grade-point-average, and parental education level of the students in this study exerted no systematic influence on the conclusions reported here, other factors of a more psychological nature may be accounting for the receptivity of students to open controversial discussion in the classroom. It would seem especially important that these types of controls be introduced into future research designs in this area since

> By the time the child is ready to take his place in the educational system and assume the role of pupil, he is ready to react to it in a particular way . . . All children of a particular grade level may be exposed to the same expectations, but they do not therefore perceive the expectations in the same way. Instead, each child

comes with a characteristic set of cognitive and affective dispositions which determine in a large measure his particular relationship to the role of learner--what he will see and hear, what he will remember and forget, what he will think and say, and what he will do gladly with others and what he will do only under duress . . . .
The critical differences between the reactions of one child and those of another to the expectations imposed by the school are not only a function of differences in their intelligence . . . but also of differences in their affective dispositions: differences in their pattern of preferences, attitudes, drives, needs, values, and perhaps chiefly of their interests (Getzels, 1969: 469) .

FOOTNOTES

1

For a report on the reliability and validity of student perceptions in the classroom, see Ehman (1971).

2

The first item asked "How frequently are controversial matters discussed in your social studies courses?" and was scored on a six-point scale ranging from "Very infrequently" to "Very frequently." The second item read "How willing are your social studies teachers to have controversial opinions advocated or discussed by students in the classroom?" and was scored on a six-point scale ranging from "Very unwilling" to "Very willing."

3

For heuristic purposes, the middle or "mixed" category resulting from the construction of the Controversial Discussion Index has been omitted from the statistical calculations reported here. Therefore, the sample upon which the data analysis is based was comprised of 227 students, with 25 percent (57) falling into the "low" category and 75 percent (170) appearing in the "high" category.

4

The following four items constituted the political efficacy scale with a CR of .91: (1) People like my parents and me don't have any say about what the government does, (2) I don't think public officials care much what people like my parents or me think, (3) Sometimes politics and government seem so complicated that a person like me can't really understand what's going on, and (4) Voting is the only way that people like my parents and me can have any say about how the government runs things. This scale is a modification from Campbell, et al. (1954).

5

The political cynicism scale, slightly modified from Agger, et al. (1961), was composed of the following items with a CR of .87: (1) Money is the most important factor influencing public politics, (2) People are very frequently manipulated by politicians, (3) Politicians spend most of their time getting re-elected or re-appointed, (4) Politicians represent the general interest more frequently than they represent special interests, and (5) A large number of city and county politicians are political hacks.

6

The civic tolerance scale, originating with Langton and Jennings (1968), had a CR of .87 and was comprised of the following items: (1) If a person wanted to make a speech in this community against religion he should be allowed to speak, (2) The American system of government is one that all nations should have, and (3) If a Communist were legally elected to some office around here, the people should allow him to take office.

7

The political process scale was composed of the following five items with a CR of .92: (1) The use of political power is crucial in public affairs, (2) Many political decisions are made by a minority of political activists who seek to secure the agreement of the majority to the decisions, (3) Politics is basically a conflict in which groups and individuals compete for things of value, (4) Differences in race, class, and income are important considerations in many political issues, (5) Government institutions cannot operate without politicians.

8

The following three items comprised the political function scale with a CR of .91: (1) Politics should settle social and other disagreements as its major function, (2) Since different groups seek favorable treatment, politics is the vehicle for bargaining among these competing claims, (3) Politics is not a means of insuring complete harmony, but a way of arriving at temporary agreements about policies within agreed-upon rules.

9

The political information index from Langton and Jennings (1968), was composed of six questions which the students in this study were requested to answer: (1) The governor of their state, (2) the duration of a U.S. Senator's term, (3) President Franklin Roosevelt's political party affiliation, (4) the last two states to come into the U.S., (5) the country Marshall Tito leads, and (6) the nation which during World War II had a great many concentration camps for Jews.

10

The political interest level index was phrased as follows: "Some people seem to think about what's going on in government most of the time, whether there's an election going on or not. Others aren't that interested. Would you say you follow what's going on in government: Hardly at all, Only now and then, Some of the time, or Most of the time?"

11

The political discussion index asked the students: "How frequently do you discuss public affairs, current events, and politics with your family or friends: Very infrequently, Infrequently, Somewhat infrequently, Somewhat frequently, Frequently, or Very frequently?"

12

Students were asked on the media exposure index: "How frequently do you follow public affairs, current events, and politics in the mass media, such as television, radio, newspapers, or magazines: Very infrequently, Infrequently, Somewhat infrequently, Somewhat frequently, Frequently, Very frequently?"

13

The extracurricular participation level index was computed by means of the students' responses to the following questions: (1) During this school year, have you been a member of any of the following: A school athletic team; A school band, orchestra or singing group; or A school debating team? and (2) Have you been an officer or committee chairman of a class, club, athletic team or other school organization during the last three years?

14

The school influence measure was prefaced with the following instructions: "Different agencies in society have different effects on the civic education of individuals. Please rate the agencies below with regard to the influence which you think they have had on your civic education." The five school-specific items were introduced with the following instructions: "Different aspects of your social studies courses may have influenced you more than others. Please rate the following factors relating to your social studies courses as to how much influence you think they have had on you." On these items, and on the more generic item concerning the influence of the school, the students were provided with four response options ranging from "No influence" and "Little influence" to "Some influence" and "Great influence."

15

On the first of these items, the students were asked, "How much effect would you say the social studies courses you have taken in your school have had on your preparation for citizenship in American society?" Here, six response alternatives were provided which ranged from "Very ineffective" to "Very effective." The second item asked "How much lasting effect would you say the social studies courses you have taken in your school will have on your preparation for citizenship in American society?" Four response options were provided for this item which ranged from "No lasting effect" and "Little lasting effect" to "Some lasting effect" and "Great lasting effect."

16

On these three items, four responses were possible: "No effect," "Little effect," "Some effect," "Great effect."

17

These items originated in Jaros (1968).

18

The textbook credibility item read: "Social studies students differ concerning the extent to which they agree with what they read in their textbooks and what they are told in class by their teachers. Which statement below best describes your feelings concerning the extent to which you agree with what you have read in your textbooks?" The students were then asked "Which statement below best describes your feeling concerning the extent to which you agree with what you have been told in class by your teachers?" For each item, four responses were provided ranging from agreement with "None," "Some," "Most," or "All" of the pertinent material.

19

See Lunstrum (1965) for a summary of the literature bearing on learning and the discussion of controversy in the classroom. Consult White and Lippitt (1960) for consideration of earlier experimental work in this area.

20

For further discussion of this subject see Medley and Mitzel (1963), Withall and Lewis (1963), Jaros (1973), and Ryans(1960).

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