DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 116 990 SO 008 814

AUTHOR Gillespie, Judith; Lazarus, Stuart
TITLE Controversial Political Issues: Providing the Participant's Eye-View.
PUB DATE 75
NOTE 23p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies (Atlanta, Georgia, November 26-29, 1975)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 HC-$1.58 Plus Postage
DESCRIPTORS Case Studies; Conflict; *Course Descriptions; Curriculum Development; *Documentaries; *Political Issues; *Political Science; Secondary Education; Social Studies; Speeches; *Teaching Techniques
IDENTIFIERS High School Political Science Curriculum Project

ABSTRACT

Three ways to develop curriculum materials dealing with controversial political issues are described. Currently the two most popular approaches are the general theoretical discussion of important concepts and case studies. Whereas the theoretical approach may be too abstract and the case study approach too brief, a third approach combines the positive aspects of both and yet avoids their pitfalls. This documentary approach is an extensive treatment of a well-defined topic which avoids lengthy narratives of a theoretical approach and yet is more in-depth than a case study. To teach about the concept of political conflict, a documentary would present students with a wealth of information about a single political system experiencing conflict. The High School Political Science Curriculum Project under development at Indiana University uses the documentary approach in "Comparing Political Experiences." One specific unit focuses on the issue of court-ordered busing in Boston by providing participant eye views of the various actors in the conflict situation. This interview technique provides a powerful set of examples of political conflict. Guidelines for the creation of a documentary are provided. (Author/DE)

Controversial Political Issues:

Providing the Participant's Eye-View

Judith Gillespie and Stuart Lazarus

Social Studies Development Center
513 North Park Avenue
Indiana University
Bloomington, Indiana 47401

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the National Council for the Social Studies, Atlanta, Georgia, November 25-28, 1975. The COMPARING POLITICAL EXPERIENCES material referred to herein is a product of the High School Political Science Curriculum Project. The project receives support from the National Science Foundation and is sponsored by the American Political Science Association's Committee on Pre-Collegiate Education.

This paper focuses on the development of curriculum material on controversial political issues. It begins with a brief discussion which sets a context for an analysis of the topic. It then addresses two commonly used approaches, and introduces a third -- the documentary approach. The paper concludes with two sections: one illustrates the "participants-eye-view" of a documentary; the other outlines guidelines for creating a documentary.

The term "controversial issues" is common parlance in social studies education today.[1] However, the ideas behind the term have received attention from educators since early in this century. In 1919, John Dewey argued that schools should saturate students with the "spirit of service" and provide them with the "instruments of effective self-direction." Dewey felt these things would be the "best guarantee for a larger society which is worthy, lovely, and harmonious."[2] In short, Dewey perceived the school as an agent for social change. Though he never used the term "controversial issues Dewey's assertions that the school should expand a student's perception of social reality was itself controversial.[3] It implied that the curriculum should include opportunities for students to question accepted societal norms. Thus the groundwork for inclusion of "controversial issues" had been set. As Dewey suggested:

> It thus becomes the office of the educator to select those things within the range of existing experience that have the promise and potentiality of presenting new problems which by stimulating new ways of observation and judgment will expand the area of further experience.[4]

Methods books used throughout the twentieth century have paid attention to the ideas which Dewey first espoused. Many books developed a heading called "controversial issues" to focus class discussion which challenged social norms. While educators take differing positions with respect to teaching controversial issues, they all agree that this represents an area of special attention.[5] "Controversial issues" represented a vague catchall notion suggesting simply that some topics were, in fact, controversial; controversial became equated with debatable or arguable. Issues which remained open to question became, by nature, controversial.

In 1955, controversial issues became the focal point for Maurice Hunt and Lawrence Metcalf. They coined the term "closed areas" to describe issues to which people react emotionally rather than rationally; issues which are open to question. They outlined "closed areas" in each of the following six subject areas:

1. economics
2. race and minority-group relations
3. social class
4. sex, courtship, and marriage
5. religion and morality
6. nationalism, patriotism, and national institutions

In each of these subject areas, questioning of certain topics became controversial. For example, in the area of social class, Hunt and Metcalf cited four closed areas:

1. the belief that social classes exist in America, but that some people can advance more quickly and reap more rewards from life.

2. the belief that America provides opportunities for those who try to get ahead.

3. the belief that all Americans should strive toward the goal of success.

4. the belief that some children are best suited to a "liberal" education and some are best suited to a vocational education.[6]

Hunt and Metcalf warned teachers to prepare themselves to confront these issues, to know that "closed areas" exist. Throughout the 1960's and early 1970's, methods books continued to pay attention to controversial issues. In fact, some books focused exclusively on these issues.[7]

In addition to methods books, entire curriculum projects focused on controversial issues.[8] These issues often appeared in materials in case studies, a format which has been widely adopted.[9] Case studies, as used to present controversial issues, represent investigations of single issues. A series of concrete case studies tied together by a more abstract text can form an entire set of curriculum materials.[10] Most curriculum developers value this approach because it provides content variety, facilitates opportunities for comparison among cases, and mixes concrete with abstract presentations of student materials.

The case study approach is one of several employed by the High School Political Science Curriculum Project in the COMPARING POLITICAL EXPERIENCES (CPE) program. CPE represents an alternative approach to high school government and civics programs. By focusing on the areas of political knowledge, intellectual skills, and

participation skills, CPE aims to promote effective political participation by students using the program.[11]

CPE is composed of two one-semester courses. The first semester, Political Systems, introduces students to the conceptual structure utilized to organize the program. It is designed in three sequential units.[12] In addition, it offers students opportunities to practice the range of skills in CPE. Political Issues is composed of four independent units. Units may be taught by themselves, or they may be combined for use as a Problems of Democracy alternative. Additionally, the units may be combined with Political Systems to form a year-long government program.[13] The development of instructional materials which treat controversial issues represents an area in which CPE has broken new ground.

Three Approaches

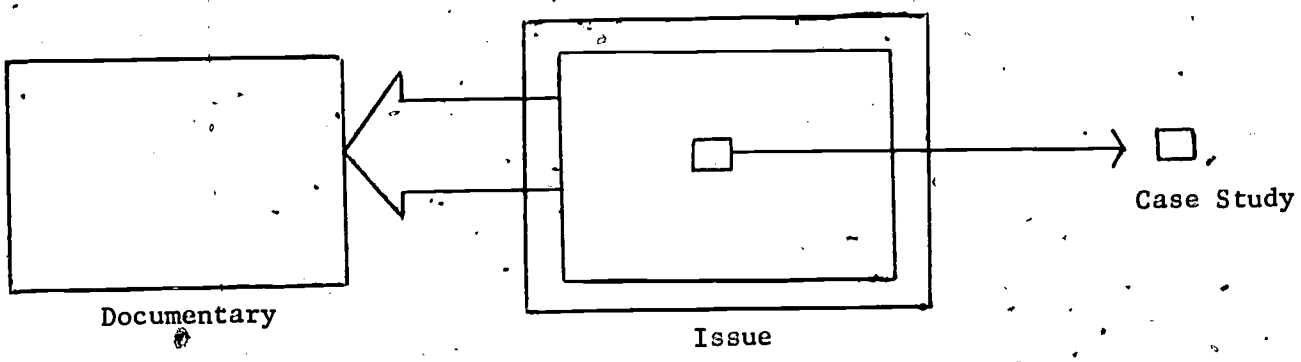
Instructional materials focusing on controversial issues in political life might take a variety of forms. For example, the material could be a brief theoretical discussion of the meaning of important concepts which help make sense of an issue or event. Such a discussion might be documented with the most recent literature in the field. This general conceptual discussion holds many virtues for students with an interest in government and political education. However, many students enroll in government courses because of school requirement and not due to personal interest. A strictly theoretical presentation might engage only a minority of highly intelligent, highly motivated students.

A case study approach represents another way controversial issues might be presented. Here the material would focus on several themes tied together by a narrative. Case studies of various political systems would run through the narrative and serve to illustrate the themes. As argued earlier, this approach is appealing because it provides curriculum materials with content variety. For example, the same set of material can contain cases about the political systems of South Boston High School, Chicago, California, OPEC, Mexico, the United Nations or General Motors. Also, a case study approach takes on value for comparing patterns of political resources and political activities in many systems. Students can practice skills of comparison as they look for similarities and differences among various systems.

Case studies also allow for the presentation of material at a variety of levels of government including local, state, national, and international.

Because they are well-suited to a variety of knowledge and skill objectives, case studies have been used extensively by curriculum developers and authors of textbooks. This approach however, while extremely useful, can limit student involvement with the subject matter. Generally, case studies give students only a superficial understanding of a particular issue; they outline major actors and events, but rarely delve deeper. Case studies are usually short, and, therefore, exclude a great deal of relevant information.

Instead of a general theoretical approach or a case study approach, Political Issues makes use of "documentaries." A documentary in Political Issues is an extensive description of a single concrete political situation which illustrates an abstract concept. Each documentary is presented from the point of view of actors in an issue. Students can get inside an issue by viewing it through the eyes of participants. Because a documentary is extensive, it departs from a case study approach. By presenting students with an extensive treatment of a well-defined topic, a documentary approach avoids lengthy narratives more characteristic of a general theoretical approach. A documentary approach focuses on one situation over an entire unit of instruction rather than on different case studies. Therefore, it probes deeply into a single issue, presenting a broader base of knowledge about an issue than a case study. The figure below illustrates the relationship of case studies and documentaries in terms of the amount of data each contains about the same issue.



Documentaries serve as concrete illustrations of abstract concepts. An issue is chosen as the focus of a documentary not only because an abundance of data is available on the issue, but because the issue contains all the attributes of a concept. Unlike a case study, which is often used to illustrate one aspect of a concept, a documentary is comprehensive enough to illustrate all of the aspects of a concept. Therefore, for concept-learning a documentary can be successful in illustrating attributes of a concept and also in providing substantive continuity. There is no need to move from text to case study to text to case study. A documentary becomes a complete piece of instruction.

To teach about the concept of political conflict through a case study approach, for example, students would analyze several case studies of political systems experiencing conflict. However, a documentary would present students with a wealth of information about a single political system experiencing conflict. Such a presentation would provide students with a large information base about a well-defined segment of political life.

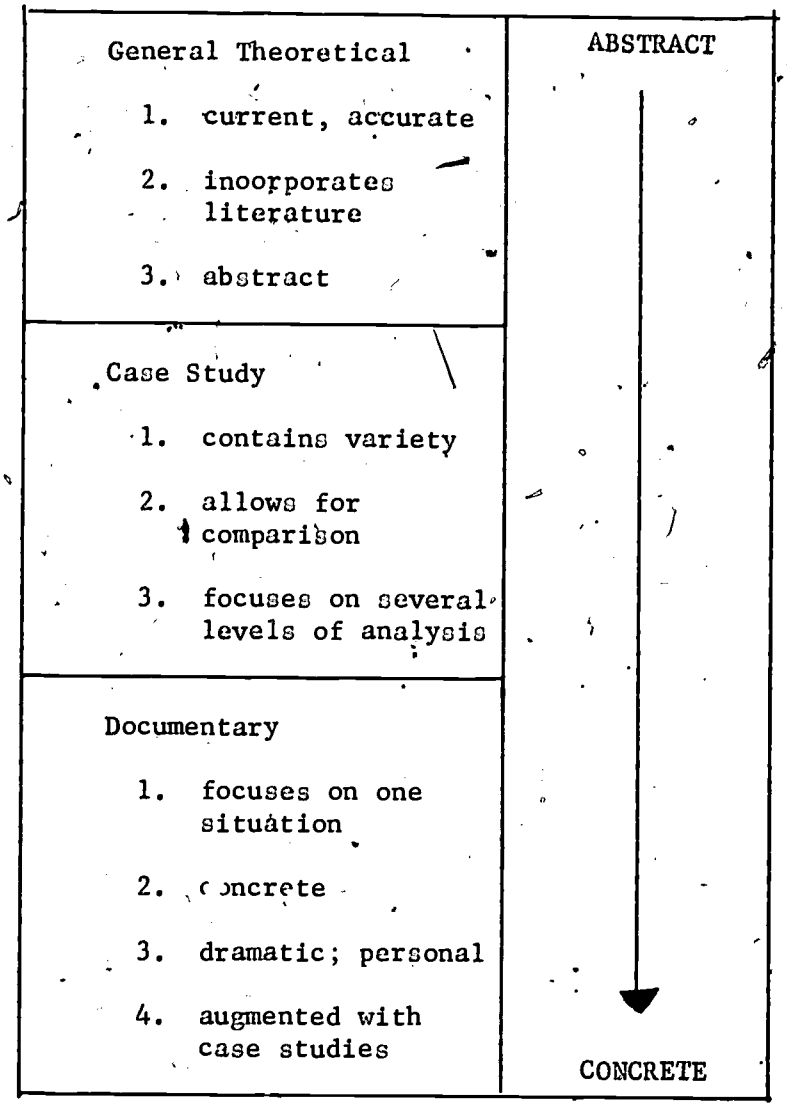
Each of the four units which comprise Political Issues is based on a different documentary. One unit, "Busing In Boston", highlights the issue of court-ordered busing and focuses upon how busing has affected students in the Boston schools and the Boston school system as a whole. It also demonstrates local government/court relationships and illustrates how a court order can affect local community members. Students are presented with a documentary which describes the activities of the citizens of Boston and the

actions of the students, teachers, administrators, and police in the Boston schools. The viewpoints of participants give realism to the issue for students.

The unit illustrates how mobilization and interdependence promote conflict. It also introduces the concepts of inequality and competition and illustrates how they promote conflict. "Busing In Boston" focuses exclusively on Boston and introduces comparative cases of conflict only after students have thoroughly examined the Boston experience.

Documentaries speak for themselves and require a minimum of abstract narrative. For instance, rather than analyzing the current political science literature regarding conflict, students study the actors in a political system experiencing conflict. Students receive detailed knowledge about a concrete example of conflict; they study real people in real situations.

A good documentary, then, also includes a rich base of primary source data. It avoids long descriptive commentaries and shows people talking in their own words about what happens to them. The primary source data can make a major difference in the transfer of learning from the course to other situations. The diagram on the next page illustrates the relationship between the general theoretical approach, the case study approach and the documentary approach.



Political Issues utilizes documentaries to illustrate the knowledge objectives for the course. Students use the documentaries as a base for identifying and applying concepts. In these ways, the documentaries promote a concrete knowledge base for the course.

More important, documentaries provide a variety of bases for undertaking skill activities and provide necessary springboards for undertaking participation activites. For example, "Busing In Boston" contains a short episode about a high school student deciding whether or not to join a boycott of South Boston High School. This episode functions as a device to enable students to practice skills of moral reasoning and to examine the consequences of their behavior. Additionally, "Busing In Boston" includes an activity which focuses on the uncertain future of the Boston school system. This activity enables students to practice skills in forecasting various alternative futures for a political system. This opportunity to practice this analytical skill represents only one of many contained in "Busing In Boston." Additionally, the documentary serves as a springboard for entry into a variety of participation experiences. The beauty of the documentary lies in this adaptability for skill exercises and participation experiences. It is at one and the same time a concrete yet dynamic mode of instruction. All of the objectives of the unit are linked to it.

The Participant's-Eye-View

In developing the "Busing In Boston" unit, we wanted to find out how a variety of people viewed the conflict situation. Throughout the winter and spring of 1974-75, we interviewed students, teachers, administrators, parents, school committee members, and others who were participating in the conflict to gain their perspectives. We found that the interview material gave us a different and much more powerful set of examples of political conflict than

we would have otherwise selected.

The following interview is an example of the type of material we gathered. It is part of an interview conducted last winter with a senior at Hyde Park High School.

Student: When I walked into the school this year, I knew that Hyde Park was different. The police were in the parking lot, and they wouldn't let you near there, you couldn't stand there, you can't talk there. The most important thing for us to do was to get into the school and get out again. This went on for the first month and a half of the first term. And on my first day back, we had a riot, and my parents came down to get me out.

Interviewer: Is it helpful to have the police around?

Student: I think so. If the police leave, I leave with them, as far as I am concerned. When they are outside, by the time I get inside somebody could be dead. All that concerns me is trying to make it through to the end of the year.

Interviewer: Why is busing creating such problems?

Student: I'm a 17-year-old girl, and I don't fight, but we just can't be stepped on like this. The problem with the whole thing is that the blacks don't want to be here either.

Interviewer: Do you think in the long run integration is a good idea?

Student: If anything, integration is supposed to make us more friendly with the blacks, and I never was prejudiced in my whole life until this year. This had made me more prejudiced. I think you should be able to go to a school that you want to go to, and if you are forced into integration, I think it is bad.

The interview speaks about conflict in ways that we couldn't possibly communicate in a straight narrative. One way to use such interview material is to create an "active voice" in a straight narrative or straight lecture in a classroom. We have used interview material in order to bring points home to students in a straight expository style. This particular use of interviews could be transferred to any course material.

There are many other ways interview material can be used. One is highlighted here. An audio tape has been developed in order to introduce students to the concept of conflict. The "All Those Arrested" tape consists of three scenes.

The first scene is in Judge Garrity's court. Judge Garrity is announcing the busing order and the students are giving their reactions to his statements. The second scene is a School Committee meeting where parents talk about how they feel about the busing situation. The School Committee members and the parents interact reflecting their attitudes and needs in the conflict situation.

The third scene focuses on two students on a bus talking about the stoning of buses at Hyde Park High School the day before. Together, these three scenes give three different perspectives on what a conflict is about and how people react to the busing conflict in Boston.

Approximately three dozen interviews were gathered while we were in Boston. Most of these interviews were used in some way to construct the introductory audio tape. Another type of interview was conducted with a black male senior at Hyde Park High School. This is what he said:

> I want everyone to go to school peacefully and just get an education. And they are not giving anybody a chance to get an education. They have been fighting so much, I mean they must not have had even a month of school, I mean really learning. There's policemen on each corner, where last year you were sort of free. I mean you had to have a pass to be in the corridors and things, but there were so many other activities and everything and the whole surrounding was so much nicer. There wasn't any tension or anything. You

know, everybody got along with everybody, the football team, the basketball team, everything, you know everything was good. This year there's none of that. We have none of that. We have nothing.

Both interviews have been used as part of an audio tape titled "All Those Arrested." Pieces were chosen so that students could give their reactions to Judge Garrity's order in their own words. Basically, what this part of the tape conveys is that there is a difference between the goals of the Judge and what people see happening in the Boston school system.

Guidelines for the Creation of a Documentary

The creation of a documentary requires the curriculum developer to leave the confines of the office, development center, or school, and to personally interact with the participants who are involved in a particular issue. The following set of guidelines may be helpful to those interested in constructing a documentary. In developing student materials for the Political Issues course of the COMPARING POLITICAL EXPERIENCES program, we followed these guidelines:

A. Focus on a set of objectives for instruction:

1. Since the collection of data for a documentary can be an immense task, the more precise one can specify objectives, the more manageable this task will be.
2. Precisely stated objectives can also lead to more successful instruction by giving a teacher the information necessary to plan for the use of a documentary.

B. Criteria for choosing an issue which clearly illustrates the objectives:

1. Match objectives to issue chosen Review as many possible alternative issues as possible. Then, match the specified objectives to the issue chosen. In choosing an issue, the most important criterion is the extent to which it illustrates the objectives.

2. Choose an issue where data is available.

   a. Be certain to focus on an issue where there is a large amount of information.

   b. Be sure to focus on an issue where access to this information will facilitate gathering data.

3. Proximity is important. To the extent possible, choose an issue which is going on in a nearby community. If two or three issues look equally useful, then choose the one closest to you. Because it will become necessary to return again and again to the site of the issue, proximity becomes a very important criterion.

C. Consult a variety of primary and secondary source material to obtain background on the issue:

1. Isolate the important actors in the issue.

2. Isolate the agencies and organizations relevant to the issue. Isolating both the actors and agencies relevant to the issue determines the amount of information which you can gather and also the access which you will ultimately have to the information needed to create a good documentary.

D. Contact with site: make contact with someone in the region to outline the tasks necessary for data collection:

1. Travel to the site. Though cost factors may preclude travel, choice of an issue in the local community will lessen that expense.

2. Contact a person at the site who can serve as a linking agent. Travel to the site or contact with the site becomes very important as it determines the amount of cooperation expected from important actors in data collection.

E. Arrange personal visit to the site to collect data:

1. It will become necessary to travel to the site to collect information. After identification of relevant actors and agencies, contact each one and arrange to see them. At this point it is very important to inform them that you will be interested in talking about a specific issue, and that you will want to tape record the interviews which you have. Make preparations to gather the following information while you visit the site.

a. Interviews: arrange interviews with important actors in the issue. These interviews will become useful when they have been turned into transcripts. They can be integrated into a documentary as written transcripts or they can be

converted into stimulating audio presentations for students.

b. Pictures: take and collect photographs which are relevant to the issue. These pictures will become useful pieces of instruction as students begin to synthesize primary data about the issue.

c. Local press: make contact with the local newspaper(s) in the area of the issue. This is often a source of additional pictures as well as other interviews. The local newspaper can also serve as a reservoir of additional background information.

d. Extant data: depending upon the issue chosen, gather a great deal of extant data. Maps, charts, graphs, tables, and other documents become extremely important.

F. Transformation of data into a documentary:

1. In transforming the data into a documentary, the "participant's-eye-view" is most important. The use of words and actions of people involved in the issue can make a documentary the most useful device for teaching about controversial issues. The example of the audio tape "All Those Arrested" serves as a model for transforming tape transcripts into instructional material.

These guidelines can aid a developer in creating a documentary. They could help a teacher who wishes to organize data about an issue in the local community. By employing the point of view of a participant in an issue and by allowing for the extensive portrayal of an event, a documentary can serve as a base for undertaking a variety of knowledge, skill, and participation experiences. It thus becomes an exciting alternative for presenting controversial political issues.

Footnotes:

1. See among others:

   Raymond H. Muessig, ed. Controversial Issues in The Social Studies: A Contemporary Perspective, 45th NCSS Yearbook (Washington, D.C.: National Council for the Social Studies, 1975).

2. John Dewey, The School and Society (Chicago: Collier-Books, 1899), pp. 43-44.

3. Lawrence Cremin, The Transformation of the School, Progressivism In American Education, 1876-1957 (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), pp. 115.

4. John Dewey, "Progressive Organization of Subject Matter," in Experience and Education by John Dewey (New York: Macmillan Co., 1938), pp. 75.

5. See among others:

   Arthur C. Bining and David H. Bining, Teaching the Social Studies for Secondary Schools (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1935), pp. 384-385.

   Clarence D. Samford and Eugene Cottle, Social Studies for Secondary School (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1952), pp. 61-62.

6. Maurice P. Hunt and Lawrence E. Metcalf, Teaching High School Social Studies: Problems in Reflective Thinking and Social Understanding (New York: Harper and Row, 1955).

7. Donald W. Oliver and Fred M. Newman, Teaching Public Issues in the High School (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1966).

8. Donald W. Oliver and Fred M. Newman, The Public Issues Series: Harvard Social Studies Project (Middletown, Conn.: Xerox Education Publications, 1967).

9. See among others:

   James P. Shaver and A. Guy Larkins, The Analysis of Public Issues Program (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1973).

10. For a brief discussion of the case study approach as used in the Public Issues Series see:

Donald W. Oliver and Fred M. Newman, Cases and Controversy: Guide To Teaching, the Public Issues Series, Harvard Social Studies Project (Middletown, Conn.: Xerox Education Publications, 1967), pp. 8-9.

11. For an extensive rationale statement see:

Judith A. Gillespie and John J. Patrick, Comparing Political Experiences (Washington: the American Political Science Association, 1973).

12. The three units of Political Systems are:

Unit 1: "Observing Political Systems," Unit 2: "Using Political Resources," Unit 3: "Participating in Political Activities;" all by Judith A. Gillespie and John J. Patrick.

13. The four units of Political Issues are:

"Busing In Boston," "Clean Air Now!," "Union Undergrounds," "Jobs and Engines;" all by Judith A. Gillespie and Stuart Lazarus.