



The (Inherently) Political Classroom

Presentation to MSSTA-MTS PD Day

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Context

- My story
 - September 11, 2001
 - Master's
 - Freedom Convoy



Why is dialogue important?

Learning to live together

“The most frequently articulated reason for including controversial issues in the curriculum is the connection between learning how to deliberate controversial issues, especially those that focus on public problems, and participating effectively in a democratic society.”

- Hess, 2008

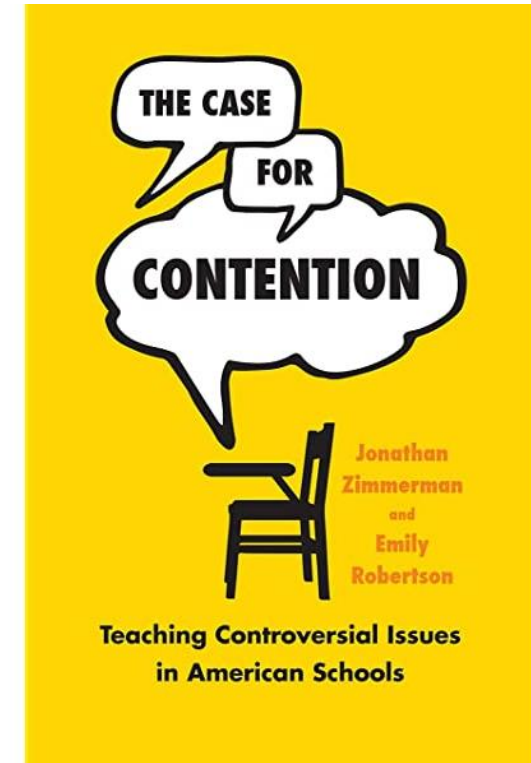
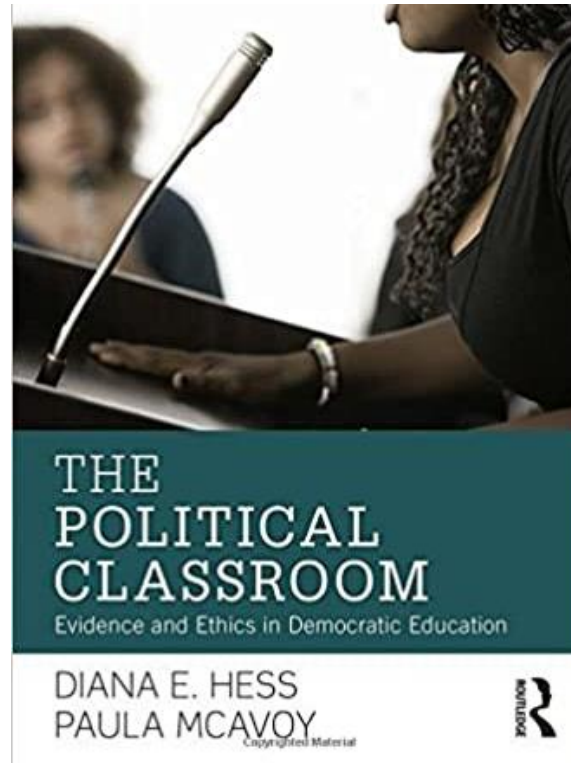


The Importance of Contentious Dialogue

- Increasing Political Divide in Society
- Dialogue Encourages Complexity
- Political classroom where student learn to live together in diverse and democratic societies
- Strive for solutions to difficult problems that emphasize the common good
- Be able to self-reflect and speak about content
- Learning to have dialogue and deliberation with others who don't share opinions
- Developing shared understandings
- Individualism Reins in Society--Community Continues to Erode

What is contentious dialogue?

- Hess & McAvoy, 2015
 - Empirical or Political, Open or Settled
 - Behavioral, Epistemic, Politically Authentic
- Zimmerman & Robertson, 2017
 - Maximally Controversial
 - Expert-Public
 - Expert



What's open, what's closed?

Building Safe
Injection Sites

Vaccination for
Employment

Decriminalization
of All Drugs

Opening Portage
& Main

Interracial
Marriage

Human Caused
Climate Change

What are the barriers?

- Political, Institutional, and Curricular Contexts (chilling effect)
 - Neoliberalism/political climate
 - Parental rights movement
 - Getting through the curriculum
 - Permanent vs. term
 - Private vs. public
 - Teacher knowledge base (of issues and practice)
 - Assessment

What are the barriers? (Cont.)

Emotional Histories

- Trauma-informed pedagogy

Teachers' Identities, Beliefs, and Sense of Purpose

- Neutral Impartiality – kids to discuss but no teacher opinion
- Exclusive Partiality – teachers encourage students to adopt their view
- Exclusive Impartiality – total avoidance of controversy
- Committed Impartiality – teachers engage with their opinion but encourage different opinions

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Schools in democratic societies must teach students how to ask challenging questions – the kinds of questions that are, at times, uncomfortable, the kinds that question tradition. Although most of us would agree that traditions are important, without any questioning there can be no progress. Students need practice in entertaining multiple perspectives and viewpoints on important issues that affect our lives. These issues can sometimes be controversial. But improving society requires embracing that kind of controversy so that citizens can engage in democratic dialogue and work together toward understanding and enacting the most sensible policy decisions possible.

- Westheimer, 2015