Social Studies Teachers’ Views on Committed Impartiality and Discussion

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Abstract

Nearly twenty years ago, Kelly (1986) forcefully argued that teachers had a responsibility to disclose their positions on controversial issues during discussion. Yet, while thoroughly grounded in theory, Kelly did not include classroom teachers’ responses in his call for teacher disclosure. This paper reports the responses to Kelly’s call for teacher disclosure from twelve secondary (grades 7-12) social studies teachers in a rural county located in a northeastern state. Analysis of interview transcripts revealed that teachers generally rejected disclosure of their position in favor of the role of an impartial facilitator for two primary reasons. First, teachers felt there was no guarantee that the tolerant environment they were trying to create in their classrooms would be present in the larger community. As a result, nine of the twelve teachers, in fear of a community backlash, rejected disclosure. Second, teachers preferred to disclose their commitment to a set of transcendent values such as tolerance, justice, and equality rather than disclose a point of view on a controversial issue. Fostering such values was seen by the teachers in this study to be more important than disclosure and could better be done by assuming the stance of neutral impartiality despite the acknowledgment that the stance was problematic. Implications and suggestions for future research are considered.

Importance of the Problem

Improving human relations and developing civic competence (defined as the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for the office of a citizen in a democratic, multicultural republic) has been a fundamental pillar of the social studies curriculum (Dewey, 1933, 1944; Evans, 2004; Parker, 2001, 2003; Saxe, 1997; Shaver, 1991). The pursuit of civic competence in a multicultural society is intimately tied to the idea that diversity informs decision-making. Individual differences such as race, socio economic status, culture, language, religion, sexual orientation, and ethnicity are to be recognized, respected, and embraced for purposes of the common good (Banks, 1996, 1997; Parker, 2003). The National Council for the Social Studies (2001) has claimed in two separate statements, Preparing Citizens for a Global Community and Creating Effective Citizens, that to build civic competence, students need opportunities to engage with one another in critical analysis of the issues and dilemmas that humans face. Quigley (2005) has also argued that civic education should attend to the “essential intellectual and participatory skills required for effective participation” in the US political system (p. 5).
Classroom discussion has long been considered a key vehicle for developing civic competence (Hess, 2002, 2005; Engle, 1960; Johnson & Johnson, 1985; Oliver & Newmann, 1967). Discussion provides critical opportunities to develop the attitudes and skills necessary to learn rather than fear diverse perspectives. Yet, while there may be general agreement on the potential of classroom discussion to develop civic competence, far less consensus exists on the proper role of the teacher during discussions (Hess 2002, 2005; Larson, 1997). Knowing how and why teachers make instructional decisions matters since teachers’ disclosure can influence students’ understanding of the content (Grant, 2001) and reveal the teacher’s philosophical beliefs and pedagogical approach (Fickel, 2000).

Nearly twenty years ago, Kelly (1986) presented one of the most coherent arguments for why teachers should disclose their point of view purposefully and explicitly during discussion. He called this stance Committed Impartiality, because the stance was committed in the sense of being loyal to a particular perspective and impartial in the sense that the goal of teacher disclosure was not to sway student opinion but rather to model the manner in which citizens take and defend a stand. The goal of Committed Impartiality was to model a thinking process not to advocate for an outcome. A teacher could disclose his or her point of view and remain an effective facilitator—the two roles were not mutually exclusive.

Kelly contrasted this ideal of Committed Impartiality with three other undesirable stances: (1) Exclusive Neutrality (labeled avoidance by Hess, [2005]) wherein teachers avoid discussions of controversial issues altogether and adhere to the prescribed curriculum without deviation; (2) Exclusive Partiality in which teachers disclose for the purpose of convincing students to accept the teacher perspective (this was labeled privilege by Hess [2005]), and (3) Neutral Impartiality in which teachers foster discussion of diverse issues but do not disclose their own perspective on the topic under investigation. While Kelly’s (1986) call for teacher disclosure was thoroughly grounded in theoretical rhetoric, he did not include data on whether classroom teachers actually endorsed his call for Committed Impartiality. This paper reports on the first stage of an effort to investigate whether secondary social studies teachers’ views are similar to those of Kelly. Do secondary social studies teachers find Committed Impartiality a compelling teaching method?

Sample

In this study, all twelve of the middle and high school social studies teachers in one school district in a rural county of one northeastern state were interviewed. The school district has one middle school that feeds into a single high school, and there are seven elementary schools. The total student population for the 2005-2006 academic year was 2,001 students. The seven elementary schools account for 984 students with the largest having 304 and the smallest 68 students. Middle school enrollment was 307, and high school enrollment was 710 at the time of the study. The town in which the middle and high school are located is characterized by the existence of a liberal arts college surrounded by dairy farms and cornfields. This mix creates classrooms in which some students complete hours of farm work before and after school while some high school students take advanced language or math courses at the college. While the state has a Republican governor, a majority of the population in the 2004 election selected the
Democratic candidate for President. Hence, politics in the state and the town in which the study took place represent a mix of liberal and conservative residents.

Participant selection was purposeful and based on proximity and accessibility. Hess (2005) has argued that teachers’ perceptions of the community may affect how they perceive their role in discussions. Thus, selecting all the secondary social studies teachers in one school district increased the likelihood of gaining an understanding of one group of teachers’ perceptions of their community and its impact on how, if, and when they disclosed during discussion. All participants in this study were European American, and of the twelve participants (eight males and four females), eight had been teaching in the district for more than fifteen years; three had been teaching in the district for more than five years, and one had been in the district for three years. The length of tenure of the participants suggested that, as a group, they would have a deep understanding of the community in which they taught.

**Procedures**

Through a small research grant from my own college to support undergraduate participation in research, two pre-service, social studies teacher candidates, Elissa Denton and Andrew May, were involved in the planning stages, collection of data, and final revisions. The high cost of travel and the two undergraduates’ need to attend their regularly scheduled classes required that the participants be selected from the local school district in which the higher education institution is located. Thus, research purpose and practicality were both considerations.

A semi-structured interview protocol was used for each interview. I conducted the first two interviews while Elissa and Andrew primarily listened. After the initial two interviews were completed, we discussed the process of asking questions, the point of determining the next prompt, and the timing of asking follow-up questions during an interview. The remaining interviews were divided among the three of us. Interviews lasted from 30-50 minutes and were held in the classroom teachers’ respective classrooms except in one instance; due to a back injury, one teacher was interviewed in her own home. All teachers were provided with a copy of Kelly’s (1986) article for review weeks prior to the interview.

Hess (2005), Larson (1997), and Parker (2001) have argued that teachers hold nuanced views about the use of discussion. As a result, Elissa and Andrew suggested creating a graphic organizer to clarify the four stances that Kelly (1986) examined in his article (Figure 1). They also decided to add a Likert scale to the organizer as a means to illustrate the complex positions that the teachers might hold. This graphic organizer proved to be extremely important in capturing the complexity of teachers’ stances on disclosure. The benefit of having thoughtful, energetic, and fresh undergraduate minds engaged in the research was evident in contributions such as the advanced organizer.
The following sections are organized to reflect the original structure of Kelly’s (1986) article with the addition of teachers’ voices. First, Exclusive Neutrality is defined, and the participants’ responses to this position are presented. Second, Exclusive Partiality is defined followed by Neutral Impartiality, and finally, Committed Impartiality is explained with participants’ responses to each stance presented in order. Discussion of implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research form the final sections.
Secondary Teachers’ Views on Discussion

Exclusive Neutrality

“Advocates of this position contend that teachers should not introduce into the curriculum any topics which are controversial in the broader community” (Kelly, 1986, p. 114). Kelly rejected Exclusive Neutrality for three reasons: the first of which he asserts, “Teachers, like scientists, act in a value-infused context.” The hidden curriculum identified by Anyon (1980), Apple (1975), and others has thoroughly debunked the notion that teachers and scientists can somehow stand outside of their own time, place, and positionality. Teachers display biases through the curriculum they choose to exclude and the methods they choose to employ. Secondly, Kelly (1986) argued that schools are important sites for meaningful civic education. As publicly financed institutions, schools have a moral responsibility to develop thoughtful citizens capable of informed decisions—sticking to the curriculum without attending to community issues is to abrogate a civic responsibility. Finally, issues of concern to the community should be important to teachers. Since “It is not impossible for teachers and students to address value issues in a fair and impartial manner,” (p.115) teachers should not fear engaging such topics.

High school teachers and middle school teachers reacted differently to Kelly’s argument. All the high school teachers agreed with Kelly (1986) that the hidden curriculum was real, and schools were sites of civic education and should engage controversial topics. However, none of the four middle school teachers agreed that community investment in a topic was necessarily reason enough to discuss it in the classroom. In fact, the opposite was often the case. Three of the four middle school teachers feared that community members might think that teachers were engaging topics beyond their purview, and discussing some controversial topics might so exorcise parents that the resulting reaction would inhibit future effectiveness and credibility. As one teacher put it, “I don’t want to fall into that trap.” Sometimes, self-preservation might have to trump a well-reasoned argument to engage in controversial issues. The fear of community reprisal was sufficiently significant that one middle school teacher stated that even the “2004 elections were off limits.” There were deep divisions in the community regarding the election, and this teacher felt that “the election was too volatile for parents.” In other words, there was no concern regarding whether the students could handle such a discussion; instead, the concern was whether their parents would be able to respond in mature and reflective manners to the fact their children might be in an environment where the opposition’s point of view was given a fair and respectful hearing.

No teacher disagreed with the claim that teaching took place in a value-infused environment and that their own biases played a role in how they implemented the curriculum. However, the conclusion that followed was not that a teacher should take more care in how they disclose. Rather, the response was best represented in one teacher’s statement, “I think the best way I can lessen the impact of my biases on my students is to not reveal them explicitly and work hard to be conscientious.” Such an approach was understood to be imperfect but preferable to disclosure.
**Exclusive Partiality**

“This position is characterized by a deliberate attempt to induce students into accepting as correct and preferable a particular position on a controversial issue through means which consciously or unconsciously preclude an adequate presentation of competing points of view” (Kelly, 1986, p. 116). Exclusive Partiality rejects the fundamental premise of inquiry in a democratic society in which the quest for truth is pursued through “critical and continuing openness to the best evidence and argumentation available” (p. 119). Teachers think for the students rather than providing students with opportunities to make their own decisions. Hence, even if the students were convinced and adopted the teacher’s position, it would be an inauthentic perspective for the students as the students themselves had not come to this point of view on their own.

The notion of using the power and authority invested in the position of teacher as a bully pulpit to advocate for a particular perspective was anathema to all the teachers in this study. However, one middle school teacher and two high school teachers did refer to the student handbook and the commitment to a school being a harassment-free zone. As one high school teacher stated:

> There are key values such as respecting differences that I hold dear. School policy states that every student has a right to an environment free of harassment. Public schools have different rules than private malls and they should. I have no problem being explicit about how important this is to me.

Treating one another with respect was non-negotiable, and these teachers stressed their commitment to these principles. One middle school teacher argued, “As a woman, certain things matter.” She felt that the harassment of girls in the culture at large and in the middle school in particular, was a serious problem. She believed that she had a moral duty to take a stand and remind students of the principles the school was trying to foster and to consider the implications of their actions. “Sometimes, I think they forget that I am a woman. They think of me as ‘the teacher.’ When I overhear them say things that I don’t think are appropriate I do not ignore it.”

**Neutral Impartiality**

Advocates of this stance believe that students should be actively involved in discussions of controversial public issues as part of their education for citizenship but believe that the best role for teachers is that of an impartial facilitator. Kelly’s (1986) refutation of this position was systematic and thorough. He argued that advocates of this position presume falsely that the power and authority of their position will overwhelm students’ ability to think for themselves when, in fact, students are subjected to a vast sea of conflicting influences. Teachers must compete, usually unsuccessfully, with values and ideas communicated in the home, peer group, church, and mass media. Teachers should be sensitive to their impact on youth, but there is no reason why this sensitivity
should overwhelm the positive role that teacher disclosure could play in the development of thoughtful reasoning skills.

However, contrary to Kelly (1986), all twelve teachers found the stance of Neutral Impartiality appealing and agreed that while problematic, the stance of Neutral Impartiality was a stance they frequently used in their own teaching. The middle school teachers were particularly committed to this position. While they recognized the potential for the stance of Committed Impartiality to be a teaching tool, every middle school teacher stressed the lack of maturity of their students as a critical reason for attempting to remain neutral during discussion and therefore adopted the stance of Neutral Impartiality. One teacher, who could have been speaking for all four middle school teachers, expressed it this way:

I think it is hard, very hard, not to express how you feel about a subject, but I consciously try not to disclose my opinion. And I think kids at this level, and maybe not at college level or high school, but these kids are really easily influenced. And I like to have the opportunity for them to think about how they feel without me influencing them.

This particular comment was made in relation to disclosing his own position on whether Thomas Jefferson was a great man or not. Even in an historical discussion, there was great reluctance to disclose. Another middle school teacher said, “I want to be the guy with the questions not the guy with the answers.” He wanted his students to feel that the classroom was a safe space to try out their fledgling perspectives.

Echoing the sentiments of the teachers who explicitly articulated their values but not their positions on issues, one high school teacher argued that Kelly (1986) had failed to consider this distinction between values and perspectives. This teacher argued:

I may implicitly express a value rather than a point of view on an issue. A commitment to equality, tolerance, and compassion for example, these things are important to me and are what I consider when making up my mind. But, I don’t see a need to make public my point of view [even though] there is probably no public controversy I wouldn’t talk about.

One could have a dynamic discussion, and through good facilitation, elicit many different perspectives from the students. The teachers who endorsed Neutral Impartiality argued that the potential extra weight of the teacher’s voice might shut down some students’ ability and willingness to continue to explore their points of view. The goal of the discussion was to encourage students to explore publicly (and this point was crucial) what they actually thought about something—the classroom environment had to be as safe and supportive as possible before students would risk their own disclosure. Teacher disclosure might risk shutting down student disclosure.

One high school teacher, who did disclose under specific circumstances, argued that neutral impartiality made it more likely that students would be exposed to diverse points of view. He argued, “If we could be sure that we had a balanced department and that every student in the school had the chance to be with teachers of diverse perspectives, then I could endorse committed impartiality [meaning disclosure]
completely.” But, the reality of scheduling and staffing made this impossible. “What if the department was all liberal or conservative and that was all the perspectives students heard?” This possibility was unacceptable to the teacher. It was better to work hard at neutral impartiality than to disclose and risk shutting down student options.

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**Committed Impartiality**

This stance entails two beliefs: “First, teachers should state rather than conceal their own views on controversial issues. Second, they should foster the pursuit of truth by insuring that competing perspectives receive a fair hearing through critical discourse” (Kelly, 1986, p. 130). The expression of personal views should “represent a positive ideal.” Teachers must own their positions, present them without rancor or intent to persuade, and carefully reveal the reasoning and support for their point of view. Kelly recognized that conditions of compulsory attendance and unequal power might lead critics to believe that teacher disclosure is equivalent to implicit advocacy and since coercion is “undeniably incompatible with impartiality,” Committed Impartiality is not just paradoxical but contradictory. Kelly challenged this conclusion on two grounds.

First, Kelly (1986) argued that simply because one was prepared to state’s one view did not mean that one abandoned rational analysis. Emotional commitment to a point of view had “the potential to animate the search for truth” rather than simply be a toxin that might lead to a shutting down of any future inquiry. The risk of emotions influencing a teacher’s disclosure was to be welcomed as a normal part of being human. Only automatons could be without emotion, and teaching should be emotion rich.

Second, to counter the criticism that while the teacher’s rational thought may not cease with disclosure, the students’ might, Kelly (1986) responded:

Teachers also possess a potent weapon of a continuing affirmation of the value of impartiality that safeguards the rational process. That norm can be authenticated in practice as teachers praise reasoned oppositional viewpoints, push students to critique teachers’ points of view, publicly engage in self-critique, or critique students who merely parrot them. In short, teachers possess a set of strategic correctives that should be able to reduce threats to rational analysis potentially precipitated by teachers’ disclosing their personal views. (p. 132)
When presented with this rationale, one high school teacher summarized the sentiment of all but three of the teachers in this study by responding, “He sounds like an academic.” The implication was that Kelly’s (1986) argument was well reasoned, thoughtful, compelling, but utterly divorced from the realities of the classroom and therefore, ultimately impractical. Kelly had stressed that by disclosing, teachers were being a personal witness and that “the idea of personal witness is meant to convey the power of personal modeling and imperative of personal integrity” (p. 132). But, the majority of teachers in this study (9 of 12) argued that the idea of personal witness could be better modeled by disclosing their values and advocating for those values rather than for a particular stance on an issue. The nine teachers who did not disclose at all argued that disclosing a commitment to a democratic value rather than disclosing a point of view on an issue was more ethical and fairer to students. Values of tolerance, slowing the rush to judgment, compassion, and thoughtfulness are habits of a democratic mind that every teacher in this study wanted to foster. They feared that bearing witness to a particular point of view would obscure the real purpose and important teaching in social studies—which was to bear witness to a set of values that would form the foundation of whatever perspective students might have. To these teachers, it was still important and possible to model a commitment to “liberty and justice for all.” How such ethical commitments played out on a particular issue was not nearly as important as making it clear to students that they still believed in, and are striving for, these ideals.

One high school teacher discussed how his struggle to bear witness to a set of values rather than to a particular perspective was tested on 9/11. One teacher stated that “visceral anger was the principal emotion he felt,” and had he actually articulated what he felt on that day, it would not have helped any of his students deepen his or her reflection or slow the rush to judgment. Hence, he decided to jettison his planned curriculum for the week and spend five days studying Islam. As a World History teacher, it was not difficult—he had the curricular resources. By challenging students to move from vengeance, “I want to kill whoever did this” to reflection “Why did this happen?” the teacher was able to engage students in a critical discussion of the biggest event of their lives. He said:

I tossed out my curriculum for a week and tried to place students’ sudden interest in Islam within a larger historical context of the history of Islam. If you value something, you are less likely to destroy it. I wanted students to value the contributions of Islam so that they did not respond to the possible impulse of retaliation without reflection.

Had he not had a commitment to remain neutral throughout discussions, he was not sure that he would have been able to sustain the inquiry.

On the other hand, there were two out of eight high school teachers who disclosed regularly, and one who did so as part of a lesson of defining diverse political perspectives. The two teachers who disclosed regularly enjoyed the give and take of a genuine argument and stressed that they tried to foster disagreement with understanding that their opinion was simply one of many in the class. One of the two who disclosed as a part of regular practice summarized her response to Kelly’s argument by saying, “I think
I like this guy.” Both disclosing teachers agreed that there were serious risks to disclosure in the form of community backlash, and without a principal’s support, it would be impossible to continue to disclose in a small community such as the one in which they lived. One teacher was originally from New York City, and she acknowledged that the give-and-take that was normal to New York urban life may have given her a “tougher shell than most of my students.” She agreed with Kelly that “my opinions are already in what I select and what I leave out” and that “teachers tend to underestimate students.” She stated that disclosing was important to her for the precise reasons that Kelly articulated; she was not going to change, and people “need to just grow up and deal with it. Discussion and arguments are what democracy is all about.”

The second teacher had been teaching at the school for over 25 years. He too found that Kelly’s (1986) arguments reflected his own beliefs, but the relationship with the community had to be nurtured. He cited an incident in which a student had been upset that her opinion was different from the one he had disclosed, and she felt that he did not like her and would, therefore, lower her grade. He held a parent-teacher meeting, showed his curriculum, explained his rationale, assured all present that grades would not be affected, and that ended the problem. But, he pointed out, “I don’t live in the community.” When asked to explain the significance of that fact, he stated that it might be awkward to see students and parents in a grocery store after a controversial discussion in which a disagreement was revealed. He found it was easier to live in a different town.

The third teacher who disclosed had a more unique approach. Generally, he leaned towards neutral impartiality, but there were two important, specific instances in which he did disclose. The first disclosure regarded a lesson in which he wanted students to understand the reasoning behind diverse perspectives. In this instance, he agreed with all of Kelly’s reasoning. The lesson involved how a liberal, moderate or conservative would likely respond to issues that were very important to teenagers: the drinking age, minimum age for a driver’s license, curfews, and the possibility for a 16-year-old voting law. After students researched the issues, a class discussion followed in which students were encouraged to take and defend a stand. He too disclosed his stance on each issue and explained why he held that stance. He felt that it was helpful for students to be able to ask him questions about why he believed what he did about the drinking age, for example. By disclosing his stance, he was able to make explicit the process whereby he determined what was most important for him, and students could deepen their understanding of the labels “liberal, moderate, and conservative” by placing him on the continuum. Given what he actually believed, he could also say, “On this topic, I hold the conservative view; on this view, I hold a liberal view. I am not simply one perspective for everything. My students can see that you can hold different perspectives that may cross traditional labels. I think that’s important.” Disclosure had a specific curricular purpose.

His second instance of disclosure concerned the topic of evolution. Evolution was included in the curriculum as part of an early unit in World History. A parent contacted him, saying he wanted a fair hearing for the belief that the world was created by a Christian God as the Bible states. After a long discussion with the parents, he decided that the debate itself would be instructive for the class; in fact, the evolution vs. creation debate belonged in social studies far more than it did in a biology class. He made his views clear that Evolution was the standard, accepted scientific theory, but he
wanted to give Creationism a fair hearing. He reflected, “The student was able to present her point of view, and other students were able to ask her questions. The discussion was respectful and thoughtful and actually, I think, helped students understand the different points of view.” The weight of this teacher’s disclosure in support of evolution was not going to threaten the student’s belief in Creationism. The student felt as strongly as he did, and thus students were going to hear strong representations of different views. These factors were critical in his decision to disclose.

**Conclusion**

Learning more about how teachers conceptualize and use discussion in particular is critical, given the pivotal role of discussion in democratic education (Avery, 2002; Banks, 1997; Parker, 2003). The fundamental conclusion from this study is that most teachers, when exposed to Kelly’s rational for Committed Impartiality, were intrigued but not convinced and generally endorsed Neutral Impartiality. The decision to disclose was rejected entirely by all the middle school teachers and five of the eight high school teachers. However, when disclosure was interpreted to mean revealing one’s values rather than solely a position on a controversial issue, teachers’ responses were more complex, less fixed, more fluid, and more sensitive to the particular needs of their students, community, or the topic under consideration.

All teachers shared a conviction that the fundamental purpose of using discussion was to enable students to try out their thinking in a safe, public forum. Inquiry, tolerance, compassion, a respect for differences, and the courage to state and defend one’s point of view were all reasons to use discussion. Fears of a possible community backlash (also identified by Hess [2005] in her work with teachers), the impact of the teacher’s expressed belief on a sensitive student, along with the desire to keep the focus on students’ thinking rather than their own, tended to move teachers towards Neutral Impartiality rather than Committed Impartiality.

Kelly’s (1986) call for Committed Impartiality asked teachers to shift their role from that of neutral facilitators to public citizens with public points of view. Yet, these teachers found that Neutral Impartiality provided some cover for those working in a content area that often undergoes the greatest public scrutiny. By taking what is perceived as the high ground of teaching, namely supporting values embedded in the nation’s mythology—justice, tolerance, freedom, liberty and justice for all—teachers committed to using discussion in their classrooms felt that they were more likely to be able to engage in discussions of controversial issues. Committed Impartiality required that teachers take and defend a stand publicly, thereby exposing them to further scrutiny while simultaneously trying to maintain the community’s trust in their ability to treat all children equally. There was little guarantee that a larger community would provide teachers the kind of safe and supportive environment they were trying to provide for their own students. School policy at the middle school and high school, as well as union regulations, supported the discussion of controversial issues and provided legal protection and support for teachers. Yet, that was not a guarantee that the parents with whom one interacted in the local community on a daily basis, at the grocery store or school events, would see it the same way. Hence, it may be that the stance of Committed Impartiality conflates the distinct roles of a politician, who publicly advocates for a particular
platform, and a public school teacher who advocates for all of his or her students with equal conviction—a distinction that these teachers wanted to preserve. These social studies teachers all took their jobs and roles in society seriously—they felt they had been entrusted by the community and the nation to educate citizens, and most understood that responsibility to mean guiding and facilitating rather than proclaiming.

In other words, Kelly (1986) may be asking teachers to risk too much. Nowhere in his article does he address the threat of community reprisal or even community isolation. How much time will a teacher have to spend defending his or her practices to the community in a school board meeting or in a small community? Is Committed Impartiality worth the risk of being shunned in a local encounter that might, in turn, risk the effectiveness of the teacher with a student? If disclosure means risking such events, why do it when maintaining Neutral Impartiality can still create a rich classroom environment for discussion and disagreement? Taking a risk to become the object of penetrating public scrutiny in order to be more rationally coherent may well be a Pyrrhic victory these teachers of history and civics do not want.

On a different note, participation in the study had a positive impact on the two pre-service, social studies teachers who participated in the planning and data collection stages. By reviewing the literature on discussion, preparing the graphic organizer of Kelly’s (1986) perspectives, and conducting interviews with experienced educators, the pre-service teachers deepened their understanding of the role of discussion in social studies education and developed deeper rationales for why they might disclose, or not, during discussion. Reflective practice was fostered through participation in research.

**Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research**

While the particular purpose of this study was to deepen understanding of one school district’s secondary social studies teachers’ response to the call for Committed Impartiality, the participant pool was still limited; therefore, it cannot be generalized to the population of secondary social studies teachers. Further research might investigate what teachers in other school districts in the same state believe, particularly whether the anonymity of a large, urban school enables teachers to disclose more often than teachers in a rural setting. Is the fear of community reprisal lessened by the sheer size of the school and community? Is there a geographic explanation for disclosure?

There is also no data presented here on what these teachers actually do in their classrooms. Do they perform in the manner that they stated in the interview? Further research needs to be done on observations that take place over an extended period of time in each of these classrooms. Previous research by Larson (1997), Hess (2002, 2005), and Parker (2001) has deepened understanding of what teachers say they do—more evidence is needed to reveal what teachers actually do. Further planning is currently underway to undertake such field research in the classrooms of the teachers interviewed for this study.

Finally, there is no data from the study on what students actually think about their teachers’ position on disclosure. Are teachers underestimating students’ ability to separate teacher disclosure from teacher grading? Do students want their teachers to disclose? Would we find middle school students asking for teachers not to disclose and seniors in high school calling for Committed Impartiality? What about college students? What about the community’s wishes? Surveys and interviews of adult community
members, school administrators, and school-board members might well inform the discussion. Answers to these questions might help shed light on the impact of teacher practices on student learning and provide support for or against Kelly’s (1986) call for teacher disclosure.
References


