THE ROLE OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN MORAL EDUCATION: APPROACHES AND ATTITUDES OF CHRISTIAN SCHOOL EDUCATORS

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Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College of the Oklahoma State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of DOCTOR OF EDUCATION
July, 2000
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There are many persons whose encouragement has served as motivation for me throughout this project. Dr. Wen-Song Hwu was one of the first individuals I met on the Oklahoma State University campus and from the beginning extended his assistance and friendship. I appreciate the involvement of Dr. Kathryn Castle, Dr. Charles Edgley, and Dr. William Segall on my committee. They permitted me the freedom to pursue a project of great personal interest to me, one that emerged from my own pedagogical experiences.

The accountability and emotional support provided by colleagues at Mid-America Bible College and Warner Christian Academy were invaluable. I am thankful that they were not only co-workers but friends as well.

The bond of family love has served as encouragement to me in many ways. I thank my wife Sonja and children - Zachary, Megan, Abigail, and Emily. They have taught me the value of perseverance, stability, and joy. It is to them and to the God we know and love that I dedicate this project.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The teacher who wishes to be more than a functionary cannot escape the value problem or the difficult matter of moral choice.
Greene, 1973, p. 181

Students need to realize that the very survival of our form of democracy depends on how each of them behaves - on how willing each of them is to listen to the views and ideas of others, no matter how disagreeable these may be.
Levitt & Longstreet, 1993, p. 147

"What to teach?" This question remains a perennial problem for curriculum developers. What knowledge, or whose knowledge, will ascend to the curriculum summit? As theorists consider this question, they too must consider what will be of most value to the student and to society. Some have proposed that the focus of the curriculum, especially social studies and language arts, should be controversial knowledge.

This idea is certainly not new. Since the turn of the twentieth century, many social studies teachers have considered issues-oriented topics their curriculum model of choice (Parker, McDaniel, & Valencia, 1991). As progressives sought to educate for a democratic society, Dewey and his followers favored the study of controversial material (Nicholls, Nelson, & Gleaves, 1995). And,
presently, controversy can be found in the curriculum of globalism, multiculturalism, and AIDS education.

Trading the security of facts-based content for controversy may invite friction among students, teachers, parents, and the community. It may seem to be too great a risk for many teachers, but proponents cite valuable reasons for taking the risk. Singh (1989) maintains that the aim of teaching controversial moral and social issues is "to create in pupils respect for the rights and feelings of others and to develop a sense of personal morality which takes into account the concern for others" (p. 234). Other advocates claim that placing issues at the center of the curriculum will yield insights into the process of government (Passe, 1991) and will assist students in thinking and reasoning about questions cloaked in uncertainty (Kupperman, 1985).

The avoidance of controversy in the curriculum may be due in large part to the risks that teachers face. Levitt and Longstreet (1993) reported that the risk remains considerable, even to the point of losing employment. Other excuses were documented by Nicholls et al. (1995): "...some teachers told us that their students' lives were chaotic and that, in school, the students needed order, facts and 'basic' skills" (p. 254). Some teachers claim that they have no time for such topics because they are too busy attending to misbehavior. Passe (1991) asserts that if these teachers were to invest time in the open
discussion of controversial issues, misbehavior would reduce as students learn how to deal with conflictual situations.

Fear of conservative activist parents causes some teachers to shy away from controversy. But not all parents are in opposition. Sullivan (1987) recorded parents' responses to a literature unit that tackled sensitive issues. The parents had been well informed of the unit's content and how the content would be implemented. Overall, their comments were positive. One parent wrote, "Since our children are confronted with these problems every day, I certainly approve of discussion on these topics" (p. 876). Others, however, are not as supportive.

Schukar (1993) outlines some of the criticisms from conservative Christian groups targeted at global education: Phyllis Schlafly, president of Eagle Forum, believes that global education censors content about American history, eliminates patriotism, promotes moral equivalence, imposes particular world views, and "brainwashes teachers to use techniques of indoctrination" (p. 53). Eric Buehrer of Citizens for Excellence in Education further argues that global education crowds out the study of western civilization, teaches no absolutes, resocializes students into social liberalism, and preaches a new religion based on eastern mysticism (Schukar, 1993).

Undoubtedly, there are those who color the study of issues in such a way as to indoctrinate young students towards a particular political or religious view, but does
that possibility justify the disregard of controversial issues in the curriculum? "To deny the role of controversial issues in education," Schukar (1993) argues, "is to deny students a quality and essential education" (p. 57). While E. D. Hirsch emphasizes the study of noncontroversial facts (in Nicholls et al., 1995), others risk focusing on friction. They contend that cultural literacy is not the memorization of a narrow knowledge base, but it is "understanding controversy or cultural conflict" (Nicholls & Nelson, 1992).

Statement of the Problem

Voices from various political persuasions have agreed in recent years that there is an urgent need for moral education. As young people participate in criminal activity at a more noticeable level, voices that are normally at odds are agreeing that schools must immediately teach values. This apparent agreement is rife with many questions that must be addressed. What do these various voices, or world views, mean when they refer to moral education? How do they intend to address controversial values in moral education? And will this moral education be one of indoctrination?

The Issue of Moral Education

Moral education pervades every school's curriculum. Contemporary character educators such as Wynne (1998) and Etzioni (1998) agree that everything schools do affects
moral education. "There's nothing new about teachers and educational support personnel teaching values," declared NEA President Bob Chase (1998), "What is new is the urgency" (p. 2).

Others are less enthusiastic about the school's role in moral education. "Schools can be effective moral teachers when they represent communities that are morally homogeneous. The trouble is, American society is no longer a morally homogeneous community" (Carlin, 1996, p. 8).

Pulliam and Van Patten (1995) describe emerging values in conflict in contemporary American society: "The peer subculture of American adolescents is unconcerned with older traditional belief systems. Rock and roll music, experimentation with drugs, and permissive attitudes toward sex dominate the interests of teenagers" (p. 37).

The Role of Controversial Issues

Is it possible to teach morality without addressing issues that are controversial? Some curriculum theorists (Kupferman, 1985; Sockett, 1992) perceive moral education and an issues-centered curriculum as inseparable, that to teach values is essentially to address controversy.

Unfortunately, to stress some values in a school community means that other values will be underemphasized; to take a strong stand on an issue may mean sacrificing some dialogue, let alone displeaseing some people; to make a rule firm and clear guarantees that someone will plea for an exception.

Moreover, true moral growth occurs in individuals only
through what Kohlberg called 'disequilibrium,' the
tension and turmoil created when one value begins to
impinge upon and come into conflict with another. As
much as we may crave the calm which clarity and order
seem to promise, a moral community must live with a
certain degree of tension and conflict, for true moral
growth occurs most fruitfully where there has been one
value clashing against another, where understanding
issues comes out of opposing viewpoints, and where the
uneasiness of community life has been experienced and
lived through (Heischman, 1996).

Levitt and Longstreet (1993) distinguish between "the
safest of civic values" and "authentic values" (p. 142).
Teachers are reluctant to address authentic values that
have real meaning for students because of the risk involved
in dealing with controversy. Levitt and Longstreet (1993)
suggest that efforts to cling only to the safe values in
avoidance of authentic values provide a counterfeit
education:

If we are to deal authentically with our crisis in
civic values, then [authentic values] must be
confronted, regardless of the level of controversy
that may be invoked and no matter how negative the
reactions of parents may be (p. 142).

van Manen (1991) agrees that schools which avoid
controversy are being "pedagogically unrealistic" (p. 58).
The atmosphere of a school, he suggests, should be safe
enough for dissent - like a family. Schools should "tolerate questioning, protest, dissent. . . . To live as a young person is to live with difficulty. In fact, all adults do well to remain sensitive to childhood's problems and difficulties" (p. 58).

Gerzon (1997) interprets the exodus of students from public schools to home schooling and private schooling as a result of public schools not including enough controversy into the curriculum. Avoiding controversy has made education monolithic. Dissenting and minority viewpoints were marginalized and were either pushed underground into private schools, the swelling home-schooling movement, or other anti-public school advocacy organizations. The message from the education establishment to their customers all too often boiled down to: 'Love it or leave it.' Not surprisingly, many have left (Gerzon, 1997, p. 8).

The Problem of Indoctrination

If controversial issues are at the core of the curriculum, what stance should the teacher take? Should teachers make known their opinions or keep them to themselves? It would be absurd for teachers to attempt to be neutral on every issue, but regarding most controversial issues, many, like Kupperman (1985), believe that it would be improper and offensive for the teacher to impose a particular point of view. Cole (1981) also believes that the teacher's role is not to expound his or her own ideas but to help children with their developmental needs.
Singh (1989) defines the practice of the teacher’s deliberate withholding of her or his own opinion on controversial issues as "procedural neutrality." Advocates of procedural neutrality argue that it is the best means of avoiding indoctrination of students while still developing their rationality. Though some believe this approach to be the only responsible and professional stance to adopt, Singh points out that it is highly problematic and even unacceptable when teaching controversial moral issues relating to racial or sexual discrimination.

Is teaching a neutral or an intentional act? If it is intentional, what then is the teacher’s role? Is it that of change agent, transmitter, facilitator, or another role?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to seek to understand the specific problems that Christian school educators face as they address controversial issues in the moral education curriculum and to discover how some of these teachers choose to approach such issues. What are their attitudes about the role of controversy? How does this affect their instruction? Do they assume a neutral or intentional role? How do they avoid indoctrination, or do they avoid it? How do religious teachers define indoctrination? Do they struggle with integrity as they endeavor to commensurate their instructional duties with their religious convictions? What role do they believe controversial
issues play in students' moral development?

The following questions posed by Sackett (1992) were instrumental in guiding this study:

What do teachers do by way of moral education in their classrooms?
What are the ways teachers generally confront such issues as racial prejudice and sexism?
What do their strategies look like?
To what extent are teachers more or less influenced by their religious persuasions when they teach?
To what extent do state mandates or local community values inhibit moral training?
To what extent do teachers feel their integrity is compromised by any conflict between their world view in moral terms and the practices of the schools in which they work (p. 569)?

Interviews were conducted with Christian school educators with the purpose of understanding their perceptions and approaches as they struggle with controversial issues and their own religious convictions.

Definitions for the Study

Moral Education

Throughout this study the term "moral education" will be used in a comprehensive or universal sense, meaning all educational efforts to develop character, morality, virtues, or values in students. The study assumes that moral education is pervasive throughout all educational
Controversial Issues

The following definition offered by Nichols and Nelson (1992) will be adopted for this study: "By controversial knowledge we mean knowledge about which there is acknowledged uncertainty and disagreement, though not necessarily acrimonious disagreement" (p. 224).

Indoctrination

Whitehead's (1994) definition of indoctrination will function as the one for this study: Indoctrination is a system of manipulation of consciousness. This manipulation of consciousness takes the form of the inculcation and indoctrination of certain ideologies and values in young minds. The very terms 'inculcation' and 'indoctrination' suggest a system of teaching by frequent repetitions or admonitions meant to imbue students with a partisan and sectarian opinion, point of view, or principle. . . . (p. 15)
While communication is simply a transfer of information, indoctrination offers no option or alternative point of view (p. 61).

Intentionality

Intentionality differs from indoctrination. It may encompass indoctrination at times, but in other instances the intention may be not to indoctrinate. Intentionality simply implies an aim, plan, or direction the teacher proposes to accomplish.
Neutrality

Neutrality will refer to the act of a teacher to remain silent on controversial issues or to acknowledge all views on the issue as equally valuable with no attempt to sway students to a particular notion.

Christian School Educators

For the purposes of this study, references to Christian school educators will apply to a select group of teachers serving in member schools of the Association of Christian Schools International in the state of Florida.

Organization of the Study

Thus far, the problem of how controversial issues are dealt with in the moral education curriculum has been addressed. Chapter two will review the literature of major historical discourses and contemporary theories; special attention will be given to the influences of Dewey, Piaget, and Kohlberg, as well as select contemporary theories categorized as those for the purpose of transformation and those for transmission. Chapter three will outline the methodology used for gathering the data and for interpreting it. The interview results will be reported in chapter four, organizing the data thematically. Finally, chapter five will summarize the study, draw conclusions, and offer recommendations for further study.
The teacher who embraces the difficult matter of moral choice is thrust face to face with students in a classroom. At some level she has already addressed a fundamental ethical question, for she has chosen the task of empowering others.

Ayers, 1993, p. 21

Before exploring the perspectives and practices of Christian school educators regarding the role of controversial issues in the moral education curriculum, a context is needed. Historical and contemporary philosophical discourses abound with themes addressing what it means to be moral and how one becomes moral. Central to these arguments has been the issue of whether controversial issues have a place in moral education and, if they do, what is that role? The following literature review will trace the issue historically, philosophically, and practically.

Historical Theories Regarding the Role of Controversial Issues in Moral Education

Early Philosophical Perspectives

Ancient Greek philosophers discussed what methods of education would best help a person to become moral (Gutek,
The professional educators of the time, the Sophists, concentrated on developing clever debaters who were capable of persuading others. They claimed that what was considered morally right or wrong was up to the individual; therefore, there were no absolute standards of morality. In contrast, Socrates believed that moral truth could be known. Unlike the Sophists' debate method of teaching, he developed the Socratic method which used a series of questions, answers, and concrete examples with the goal of causing students to think critically about their opinions. Socrates was charged with corrupting the youth of Athens and was eventually sentenced to death.

Socrates' student, Plato, taught that virtue resulted from conforming to the ideas of the Absolute Mind. Therefore, it was not as valuable to discuss students' opinions as Socrates had. Plato was an opponent of the Sophists, viewing them as cultural relativists and criticizing them for accepting too many possible answers as representing the truth. Aristotle, Plato's pupil, believed that what made a person good was his or her ability to reason well.

Of course, there have been many perspectives regarding moral education and the role of controversy since ancient Greece, but perhaps the Puritan culture has had the most profound impact on American education. New England Puritans were not tolerant of any violation of their social norms. Pulliam and Van Patten (1995) list specific values that were ingrained in the Puritan culture:
postponing immediate gratification, neatness, punctuality, responsibility for one's own work, honesty, patriotism and loyalty, striving for personal achievement, competition, repression of aggression and overt sexual expression, respect for the rights and property of others, obeying rules and regulations (p. 36).

These values were considered absolute and were not debatable in Puritan schools. Indoctrination was an inherent component of Puritan education as expressed in the 1647 Old Deluder Satan Act establishing schools for the express purpose of teaching children how to read the Bible (Ryan & Kilpatrick, 1996).

The Puritan influence continued throughout the 1800s. Whereas the Puritans focused on transmitting Christian virtues, the public school movement of the 1830s shifted to the transmission of civic virtues (Fineman, 1994).

The Twentieth Century: Problem Posing and the Progressives

Early American education, then, approached controversial issues by transmitting a particular set of values, by indoctrinating Christian values or civic virtues. It was not common to introduce controversy and debate on values until the 20th century. Kidder (1991) attributes this phenomenon to the theories of Freud and Marx, "overlaid with a misconstruction of Einsteinian relativity that presumed there were no longer any universal principles" (p. 30).
Parker (1996) identifies Harold Rugg as one of the first American educators to encourage a curriculum focusing on turbulence. Rugg (1921) proposed a problem-centered curriculum to educate for democracy. He especially believed that the study of history should directly address current problems.

It was primarily John Dewey's (1910) publication of *How We Think* that greatly popularized and explicated the problem-solving process.

Learning actually begins when a difficulty or problem creates a barrier and prevents an activity from continuing. The problem must be genuine - not imposed from outside by the teacher - and must be defined by the learner. . . . The problem provides motivation, the driving force or interest required for thinking. (Dewey, in Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995, p. 232).

Highly influenced by the theories of Dewey, the Progressive Education Association promoted the idea of a problem posing curriculum during its 36-year existence from 1919 to 1955. In addition to encouraging the centrality of problems in education, it advanced the concept of the teacher's role as that of a guide, not a taskmaster. The association denounced many of the principles of traditional education, advocating an education for transformation - which is a theme that would be repeated later by critical theorists and those for an emancipatory education (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995).

Dewey and the progressives also recognized the
significance of moral education. As a pragmatist, he perceived values not as universal and absolute but as tentative, based on the community's definition and derived from human experience (Gutek, 1997). Although Dewey's theories have made a great impact on how conflict is dealt with in moral education, he has had and continues to have many critics of his pragmatic value system.

To those who saw Western civilization as derived from and resting on the universals of Judeo-Christian culture, Dewey's philosophy encouraged a dangerous relativism. Regardless of changing time and circumstances, there were certain truths that would be forever valid and certain values that would be universally applicable. For them, good and bad and right and wrong were not dependent on changing circumstances and situations but were the moral standards that schools would perennially convey to the young each generation (Gutek, 1997, p. 327).

George Knight (1989), a Christian school advocate, voices the concern that Dewey's pragmatic values are too relativistic, making humanity responsible for truth and removing foundational absolute values on which society needs to lean. His argument is against a values system based upon defining the ethically good as that which works.

Despite the criticism of his contemporaries and later detractors, Dewey's theory of an education for democracy
Making Sense of Controversy: Piaget and the Constructivists

Jean Piaget (1965), better known for his stage theory of cognitive development, presented a theory for moral reasoning which later was expanded upon by Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan. Piaget's theory proposes that young children, or any people whose moral reasoning has not completely developed, are bound in their moral reasoning by their reverence for rules as fixed and uncompromising and as having been passed down by an authority figure. Older children, those of approximately eleven years of age or older, are perceived as seeing rules as conditional, flexible, and changeable by the children themselves. These two stages Piaget referred to respectively as moral realism and moral relativism. Moral realism is the condition of regarding right and wrong as absolute, leaving no room for discussion of controversy. Moral relativism, on the other hand, is an awareness of multiple perspectives of right and wrong.

Piaget's theory is compatible with Dewey's in that it recognizes the significance of society in developing an understanding of morality. In The Moral Judgment of the Child, Piaget (1965) draws from Durkheim in the discussion of society's role.

Society, according to Durkheim's followers, is the only source of morality (p. 327).

Each individual expresses the common morality in his own way; each understands it, envisages it from a
different angle; perhaps no one mind is completely adequate to the morality of its own time (Durkheim, in Piaget, 1965, p. 350).

There can be no complete moral autonomy except by cooperation (Piaget, 1965, p. 353).

Just as the priest is the interpreter of God, so he - the teacher - is the interpreter of the great moral ideas of his time and his country (Durkheim, in Piaget, 1965, p. 358).

The assumption that autonomous individuals must interact with other members of society to construct a common morality for a particular time and place implies that controversial issues are to be welcomed in the process of moral development. Therefore, the same critics of Dewey's relativism reject Piaget's notion that values are to be constructed by individual students based upon their interaction with society.

A recent Piagetian constructivist, Alfie Kohn, set off a series of intense responses to his Phi Delta Kappan article "How Not to Teach Values: A Critical Look at Character Education" (1997). In this article, he sharply criticizes the current character education movement for neglecting to permit students to reflect on complex issues, to recast them in light of their own experiences and questions, to figure out for themselves - and with one another - what kind of person one ought to be, which traditions are worth
keeping, and how to proceed when two basic values seem to be in conflict (p. 435).

One year after the publication of Kohn's controversial article, he responded to the onslaught of negative reviews written about it. His argument was then stated even more forcefully than it had been before. This time he emphasized the values of skepticism over obedience, construction of values over their internalization, and intrinsic control over extrinsic control. He posited that the role of the student should be that of a legislator - a moral philosopher (Kohn, 1998).

In Piaget's theory, as in Dewey's, controversial issues are welcome as a means to assist in the development or construction of personal value systems and moral thinking. It was not, however, Piaget's name that eventually became popularly connected with the idea of intentionally introducing controversial moral issues into the curriculum. It was Lawrence Kohlberg, expanding Piaget's theory, who became permanently associated with the practice of asking students to discuss moral dilemmas, considering multiple options to them and why one would choose a particular option.

Kohlberg's Influence

Until the late 1950s and early 1960s, many textbooks emphasized the teaching of specific value traits (Risinger, 1992). Smith (1989) perceives that the public schools began to neglect the responsibility of moral education by the 1960s for fear of accusations of indoctrination or
imposition of religion; thereby, "many children of the '60s and '70s grew up believing that there are no universal values" (p. 32). During the 1960s, enrollment in college ethics courses reduced drastically until applied ethics courses became popular in the late '60s in which moral delimmas were commonly addressed (Sommers, 1993). The moral dilemma method of ethics instruction was popularized by the moral developmental stage theory of Lawrence Kohlberg and later spawned the controversial values clarification curriculum. Consequently, Kohlberg is credited by some as having provided educators with a tool for moral instruction while others accuse him of destroying the foundation of moral guidance in schools.

Kohlberg was a constructivist, building on Piaget's moral stage theory. Sockett (1992) also identifies Kohlberg as a phenomonologist and a structuralist. As a phenomonologist, Kohlberg concentrated on lived experience as it is interpreted by the actor: "the moral quality of the behavior is determined by the interpretation" (p. 548). As a structuralist, he followed Piaget's concern with the form of the actor's thinking rather than its content.

The choice endorsed by a subject - steal, don't steal - is called the content of his moral judgment in the situation. His reasoning about the choice defines the structure of his moral judgment. This reasoning centers on the following ten universal moral values or issues of concern to persons in these moral dilemmas:
punishment, property, roles and concerns of affection, roles and concerns of authority, law, life, liberty, distributive justice, truth, and sex (Kohlberg, 1976, pp. 204-205).

Kohlberg appealed to the rational tradition of Immanuel Kant, claiming that moral individuals make judgments based on universal principles. He distinguished principles from rules in that rules are the grounds for conventional morality, prescriptions for moral action. Principles, then, are universal guides such as Kant’s categorical imperative to respect all humanity (Kohlberg, 1976).

Moral reasoning and moral dilemmas. Kohlberg (1976) identified three major approaches to moral education: developmental, character education, and values clarification. He asserted that the developmental approach avoided problems inherent in character education and values clarification. The chief problem in character education was its indoctrinative imposition of the teacher’s values on the child, a "bag of virtues" approach (p. 209). Values clarification, though seen as having been popularized by Kohlberg, was criticized by him for making self-awareness of one’s values an end in itself. "If this program is systematically followed, students will themselves become relativists, believing there is no ‘right’ moral answer" (p. 210).

The developmental, or moral dilemma, approach is similar to values clarification in that it too opposes
indoctrination and utilizes Socratic peer discussions of value dilemmas. The crucial difference, Kohlberg (1976) noted, was in the purpose for doing so. The aim of the developmental approach is to stimulate movement to the next stage of moral reasoning. He explored change in moral judgment by using intense discussion among peers in a classroom setting. His intent was to expose children to judgments one stage above their own.

Using the moral dilemma method, some investigators have found that 63% of children do move up one stage (Singh, 1989). Others found that a variable in the success of the moral dilemma approach is whether teachers communicate their own moral reactions (Perry, 1996); students advanced the most in classrooms with teachers who made public their own responses to questions under debate and who permitted values to be judged as acceptable or unacceptable.

Despite the apparent success of the moral dilemma approach to moral instruction, many educators and parents oppose it because of its neutral approach to controversial issues (Herbert, 1996). Kilpatrick (1992), a character education proponent and author of widely-read Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right From Wrong, points out that Kohlberg himself retracted his support of the neutral dilemma method:

In 1978, writing in The Humanist, Kohlberg said: 'The educator must be a socializer, teaching value content
and behavior, and not only a Socratic or Rogerian process-facilitator of development. . . . I no longer hold these negative views of indoctrinative moral education and I believe that the concepts guiding moral education must be partly 'indoctrinative.' This is true, by necessity, in a world in which children engage in stealing, cheating and aggression.' (p. 92)

**Values clarification.** Although commonly attributed to Kohlberg, values clarification was actually conceived by psychologist Louis Raths and his colleagues in their 1966 book *Values and Teaching* (Smith, 1989). The quick popularity of the approach was due chiefly to the societal milieu to which it was introduced (Sockett, 1992). The dynamic youth culture of the 1960s openly challenged traditional establishments and practices. Controversies — such as the Vietnam protests, the feminist movement, and the sexual revolution — were broadcast over the media and became the topics of typical conversation as had never been before. "All society seemed embroiled in unresolved disputes" (Sockett, 1992, p. 545). Values clarification, then, matched the turmoil of the times in the procedures it devised for assisting children to sort out what they valued.

The process of values clarification instruction involves the teacher facilitating experiences which bring students to choosing their own values, prizing them, and acting on their chosen values. In order to have a choice, there must be alternatives presented in a neutral fashion.
as not to coerce students into choosing values that they do not truly appreciate. Teachers benefitted from the practice of neutrality by being able to resist parental criticism of indoctrinating their children on social issues; the children were choosing for themselves and responsibility for their choices could not be placed on the teachers (Sockett, 1992).

Values clarification is rarely practiced today, yet it remains a target of much criticism - especially from conservative character educators who promote an indoctrinative approach (Herbert, 1996; Kohn, 1997).

Critics of moral reasoning and values clarification. Since the conservative resurgence of the 1980s, there has been much criticism of approaches that rely on discussion of controversial issues and on neutrality on the part of the teacher. Attacks have targeted Kohlberg’s moral dilemma approach and values clarification.

According to Sommers (1993), there are serious flaws with using moral dilemmas in hopes of developing character in students. The characters in moral dilemmas lack moral personality, existing outside of typical real-life situations. They are not obviously heroes or villains, and there is no obvious right or wrong, vice or virtue. Dilemma ethics is criticized as having minimized "basic ethics" or reliance on "plain moral facts" (Sommers, 1993, p. 11).

Citing Plato for support, Kilpatrick (1992) maintains
that moral dilemmas are not age-appropriate for children. "Plato maintained that [the Socratic method] was to be reserved for mature men over the age of thirty. One great precaution is not to let [students] taste of arguments while they are young - the danger being that they would develop a taste for arguments rather than a taste for truth" (Kilpatrick, 1992, pp. 88-89).

The harshest criticism from conservatives about moral education has been reserved for the values clarification (VC) process. Some of the major concerns are as follows:

Values become mere preferences.

VC is a form of client-centered therapy derived from Carl Rogers.

Because religion is usually taught to children and not chosen by them, it is ruled out as a value (Sockett, 1992).

Teachers maintain a passive, neutral position which leads students to believe that there is no right or wrong (Smith, 1989).

Children are led to believe that their individual opinions of what is right or wrong are satisfactory.

There is no moral guideline for conduct or thought (Nelson, Carlson, & Polonsky, 1996).

Students may harm themselves in their search for their own values (Sommers, 1993).

VC teaches that there are no absolutes.

The individual becomes the source for all ethical wisdom (Noebel, 1991).
Select Contemporary Theories Regarding
the Role of Controversial Issues in Moral Education

In contemporary literature, the definition of what constitutes a moral person continues to be a controversial matter. Within the issue of moral education lies the more specific question of how or whether teachers should use controversial issues. Several contemporary theories address the argument, some more directly than others. This section of the literature review has divided the contemporary theories into two categories: those for the purpose of transformation and those for the purpose of transmission.

Theories for Transformation

Theories for transformation are those that find their roots in the "free, open, child-centered, humanistic, and socially oriented movement" (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995). They are grounded in the work of John Dewey, A.S. Neill, the social reconstructionists, and humanist-existential authors. Transformation theorists stress critique (Parker, 1996) and oppose transmission approaches because they are "alarmed at what they see as a wave of simplistic nostalgia gaining force in the country. In their view, it is a bullying reformation designed to mold moral automatons incapable of genuine judgment or citizenship" (Herbert, 1996). Select transformational theories will include postmodernism, multiculturalism, and critical pedagogy.

Postmodern educational theory. Postmodernism has been
described as an antimodernist position - deconstructing and rejecting modern values such as universal truths (Burbules & Rice, 1991; Elkind, 1997). It is significant to the present study in that postmodern discourse addresses issues of morality, indoctrination, controversy, and dialogue across differences.

There is no single morality according to postmodernists (Burbules & Rice, 1991). The term "metanarrative" is used by Jean-Francois Lyotard (1992), a leading postmodern theorist, to represent hegemonic moral frameworks which are used as instruments to manipulate and to control marginalized social groups. Therefore, any educational program established for the purpose of indoctrinating a particular moral code would be rejected by postmodern theorists.

While explicating Lyotard's perspective that all pedagogy equates to oppression, Marshall (1995) points out that Lyotard advocated "apedagogy" (p. 186) - a nonmanipulative, reciprocal relationship of mutuality between teacher and student. Any form of pedagogy is perceived as restrictive, "a ploy to discourage further investigation or to allow investigation only on one's terms" (Burbules & Rice, 1991, p. 394).

Acknowledging that this position might incite a fear of instability in the minds of traditionalists, Doll (1993) assures skeptics that the collapse of traditional values leads to a new kind of order, not necessarily disruptive in nature, but chaotic, nevertheless. Postmodernism embraces
chaos in its form of complexity theory, and, in so doing, invites controversy into the curriculum: "There needs to be just enough perturbation, disturbance, disequilibrium, or dissipation built in so that self-organization will be encouraged" (Doll, 1993, p. 284). Reminiscent of Piaget, Doll sees disequilibrium as a requirement for the making of meaning. "The curriculum needs . . . to be filled with enough ambiguity, challenge, and perturbation to invite the learner to enter into dialogue with [it]" (p. 287).

Dialogue across differences is a prominent concept in postmodern educational theory. The purpose of dialogue in a postmodern framework is not to eliminate differences or to acquire Truth, but to understand a multiplicity of voices in an effort to enhance a sense of community, personal development, and moral conduct (Burbules & Rice, 1991). The success of dialogue across differences depends on the following communicative virtues as identified by Burbules and Rice (1991):

tolerance, patience, respect for differences, a willingness to listen, the inclination to admit that one may be mistaken, the ability to reinterpret or translate one's own concerns in a way that makes them comprehensible to others, the self-imposition of restraint in order that others may 'have a turn' to speak, and the disposition to express one's self honestly and sincerely (p. 411).

Perhaps the strongest critics of the postmodern
worldview are Christian fundamentalists. Christian authors (Colson, 1994; Shin, 1994; Tapia, 1994) decry postmodern thought as detrimental to spiritual, political, and social institutions. Shin (1994) fears that the relativism promoted by postmodernism may invite despotic dictatorships, political oppression, moral decline, and social disintegration. Colson's (1994) greatest fear is that Christianity's ability to effectively proselytize may be diminished. "If there is no truth, then we cannot persuade one another by rational arguments. All that is left is power: Whatever group has the most power imposes its opinions on everyone else. . . . All principles are preferences - and only preferences" (p. 80). While Tapia (1994) acknowledges these concerns, he notes that the Christian community can enhance its proselytizing efforts by adapting its evangelistic methods to fit a postmodern social mind. He challenges churches to stop telling people what to believe, but rather to "create a discussion with provocative questions that will engage them" (p. 21).

Overall, the postmodern and the fundamentalist-Christian worldviews appear to be incommensurable. German contemporary critical theorist Jurgen Habermas (in Taylor, 1994) stresses the incommensurability of the fundamentalist Christianity and postmodern thought: "In multicultural societies, the national constitution can tolerate only forms of life articulated within the medium of . . . non-fundamentalist traditions" (p. 133).

Multicultural education. The discourse of
multiculturalism is relevant to the present study in that it addresses cultural and social conflict and how these might be dealt with in the moral education curriculum. The aim of multicultural education is to "create in pupils a respect for the rights and feelings of others and to develop a sense of personal morality which takes into account the concern for others" (Singh, 1989, p. 234). It does not avoid or minimize cultural conflict but openly attends to clashes in current events, identifying sources of conflict and suggesting positive solutions (Biehler & Snowman, 1997).

Multiculturalism emerged in the United States as a continuation of the racial debates and protests of the 1960s (Martusewicz & Reynolds, 1994). African-Americans in particular began to reject the notion that they must conform to "white" ways of thinking, knowing, and valuing. Molefi Kete Asante, leader of the Afrocentric education movement, explained that pedagogy must change for African-Americans because they think differently than Europeans do (in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). Concerns regarding curriculum content confronted the dominance of Eurocentric viewpoints in social studies texts and the one-sided victor's perspective in history (Willis, 1993). As the feminist movement advanced during the 1970s, multiculturalism was perceived as an alternative to patriarchal principles in schools and society (Giroux, 1992).
More is written about the process and attitude necessary for a successful multicultural curriculum than about what content is required. Bhikhu Parekh sees multicultural education as (1) permitting "communities" their own spaces in which to grow at their own pace, (2) creating spaces for these communities to interact, and (3) creating a "consensual culture" in which each community recognizes its own identity (in Giroux, 1992). Feminist author bell hooks also refers to the building of "community" in order to create a climate of openness and intellectual rigor (1994). A pervasive theme throughout the literature is the requirement of dialogue: "A multicultural perspective requires dialogue between people with different points of view, acknowledgment of different experiences, and respect for diverse opinions. It creates space for alternative voices, not just on the periphery but in the center" (Singer, 1994, p. 286).

**Critical pedagogy.** Critical pedagogy is yet another model of transformational education. It too espouses the idea that controversy should be central to the curriculum. Reminiscent of John Dewey, critical pedagogy promotes problem posing, discussions revolving around issues drawn from learners' real-life experiences. The central tenant is that education has value only insofar as it helps students liberate themselves from the social conditions that oppress them (Peyton & Crandall, 1995).

Brazilian educator Paulo Freire has denounced traditional education as an imposition of one man's choice
upon another (1970b). He criticizes education for having as its primary aim to reproduce the dominant ideology rather than to generate a critical consciousness (Freire, 1973; Freire & Macedo, 1987). Freire (1973) indicates the inadequacy of traditional education in that it does not permit an open exchange of ideas, debate or discussion of themes; rather, it dictates and lectures to students, and - instead of working with them - it works on them.

Behaviorism, the dominant model for traditional teaching, is repudiated by Freire (1970a) because it negates men as machines and fails to acknowledge the dialectic relationship between individuals and the world. The act of memorizing is valued over that of knowing, resulting in a sterile, bureaucratic operation.

Purpel and Shapiro (1995) also criticize behaviorism. They assert that behaviorism causes the student-teacher relationship to become manipulative. It "attempts to instill in the young an attitude of passivity and unthinking docility" (p. 102). Democracy relies upon the engagement of citizens as they act upon their opinion. Yet, our educational system denies students opportunities to express their opinions or to act on them. John Goodlad's research (in Shor, 1992) showed that barely 5% of instructional time in most schools is designed to create students' anticipation of needing to respond; not even 1% required some kind of open response involving reasoning or even an opinion from students. If this is the case, then
whose opinions occupy the remaining 99% of school time, and what does this communicate to students?

The term "banking system of education" was introduced by Freire in his 1970 book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. The banking approach to learning is rooted in the notion that students consume information as it is fed to them by the instructor. Students are then expected to memorize and store what was fed to them. The student's role in the banking system is that of a passive consumer rather than an active participant. There is little or no responsibility on the student's part to contribute to learning in the classroom. Furthermore, the banking system assumes a dichotomy between individuals and the world. It separates them from interacting with the world or with others. As an alternative to "banking pedagogy," Freire presented a "problem-posing" curriculum whereby students become aware of problems they encounter and how they might respond to these problems. Community, reflection, and conscientization are vital elements in Freire's teaching methodology. According to author and professor Gloria Watkins, Freire builds a sense of community among his students by creating an atmosphere of shared commitment and by valuing each individual voice (hooks, 1994). This produces a climate of openness and intellectual rigor.

Reflection is another critical component of Freire's pedagogy. Students are encouraged to unite theory with practice to create a new social order (Freire, 1970b). Freire emphasizes that true reflection always leads to
action. He uses the term "praxis" to refer to this type of reflection. Praxis requires both reflection and action on the part of the learner. Shor (1992) refers to this as "reflexive teaching" whereby the teacher re-presents to the students what they have said so that they then can reflect further and more deeply on those thoughts.

In addition to community and reflection, Freire values conscientization. Conscientization is a "process in which people acting as knowing subjects – not as recipients – achieve a deepening awareness of their socio-cultural reality, how it shapes their lives, and how they can transform that reality" (Freire, 1970a, p. 27). In order for conscientization to exist, dehumanizing structures in society must be denounced. Otherwise, these oppressive structures will continue to act upon individuals as objects, rendering them powerless. Conscientization is an awareness that people themselves can be knowers and actors as they solve their own problems. Reliance on others to solve those problems is dehumanizing and oppressive.

Some educational environments may claim to offer students choice and voice, but in reality it is an illusion. Somehow students are fooled to believe that they are deciding and being heard when they are actually being manipulated; others are doing the thinking and deciding for them. Freire (1973) equates this manipulative illusion to an act of violence. Freire (1970a, 1970b) refers to this type of an environment as a "culture of silence," where
individuals are prohibited from creatively participating in societal transformation. He parallels the position of students in this type of environment with that of colonies under European imperialism. Colonization instituted a "culture of silence" whereby colonies were mere objects not to be heard but to be used. However, "every human being, no matter how 'ignorant' or submerged in the 'culture of silence' he may be, is capable of looking critically at his world in a dialogical encounter with others" (1970b, p. 13).

**Conclusion.** Many of the transformational curriculum theorists cross discourse lines. Their emphases may be different, but their commonalities lie in their rejection of indoctrination as a means of moral education. They define morality less in terms of prescriptive guidelines for living and more in the context of communication and understanding diversity. Controversy in the curriculum is seen as an opportunity to address issues of oppression and marginalization and to create ways for the disenfranchised to be emancipated.

**Theories for Transmission**

While theories for transformation stress critique, transmission theorists stress socialization and oppose the transformation approaches as the cause of today's moral confusion (Parker, 1996). They call for the "rediscovery of firmness, regimentation, deference and piety to counter our culture's decline" (Herbert, 1996). Jacques Barzun (in Pulliam & Van Patten, 1995) has said, "Nonsense is at the
heart of those proposals that would replace definable subject matter with vague activities copied from life or with courses organized around problems or attitudes" (p. 180). Select theories for transmission will include literature from character education and the Christian school movement.

**Character education.** In his 1996 state of the union address, President Clinton urged American schools to perform character education (Ryan and Kilpatrick, 1996). He was joined in his effort by many who usually find themselves on opposing sides of political, social, and religious issues. Supporters of character education are motivated by a common concern with the increase in juvenile crime rates, and they are strengthened by statistics reporting reduced pregnancy and dropout rates, along with fewer fights and suspensions, after character education programs have taken effect (Stephens, 1997).

The character education movement started during the 1980s conservative political resurgence, reacting to efforts in moral education that were contrary to conservative ideals. By the early 1990s, a large number of states passed legislation requiring the implementation of a prescriptive character education curriculum (Ryan, 1996). Fueling the movement were several popular authors whose works gained national attention. Two of the most outstanding were William Kilpatrick’s (1992) *Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong* and William Bennett’s (1993) *The Book of Virtues* which appeared on *The New York Times*
best-sellers list for sixty-two straight weeks (Ryan, 1996).

Bennett (1993) addresses the issues of moral education and the role of controversial issues. He defines moral education as "the training of heart and mind toward the good. . . . It involves rules and precepts - the 'dos' and 'don'ts' of life with others - as well as explicit instruction, exhortation, and training" (p. 11). The formation of character is a prior activity, he claims, to the discussion of difficult ethical controversies like nuclear war, abortion, creationism, or euthanasia. Bennett recommends that tough controversial issues such as the ones listed above not be dealt with until senior high school or after.

Ryan and Cooper (1998) define character education as "the effort to help the young acquire a moral compass - that is, a sense of right and wrong and the enduring habits necessary to live a good life. [It] involves helping the child to know the good, love the good, and do the good" (p. 422). The movement does not deny accusations that it is indoctrinative in nature, rather it embraces indoctrination of values as one of its chief methods (Ryan, 1996).

In describing the contemporary character education movement, Ryan (1996) outlines five things that it is not: (1) it is not the teaching of students about various views currently held on unsettled social and political topics; (2) it is not particularly concerned with stages of
cognitive moral development; (3) it is not moral reasoning; (4) it is not the same as the democratic schools movement; and (5) it is not the subject of a special course or class. These distinctions are made to differentiate themselves from programs claiming to be character education but not prescribing the same values that conservative character educators teach. One such curriculum is called Facing History and Ourselves (FHAO). FHAO fosters critical analysis of controversial issues to educate students about the meaning of human dignity, morality, law, citizenship, and human behavior. Conservative groups, such as Phyllis Schlafly's Eagle Forum, campaigned against FHAO as a promoter of moral relativism (Greene, 1996).

Character educators are disturbed that programs such as FHAO are so concerned with social morality that they ignore private morality altogether (Sommers, 1993). Kilpatrick (1992) identified curricula relying upon decision making, moral reasoning, dilemma methods, or values clarification as fads which not only fail to encourage virtuous behavior but actively undermine it, "leaving children morally confused and adrift" (p. 15). "The proper emphasis at the outset is to teach the . . . basic qualities of honesty and hard work and decency, justice, caring, loyalty, friendship and so on. And to save other issues for later on down the road" (Rosenblatt, 1995, p. 38). Ryan (1996) does not disregard moral reasoning altogether but fears that if it stands alone, it will fail to bring students into moral maturity.
One of the most common challenges to prescriptive character education programs is in deciding which values or whose values will be indoctrinated. The difficulty of this task is compounded in the United States where there is such diversity of cultural backgrounds and where freedom of thought and expression are encouraged. Ryan and Cooper (1998) attempt to resolve this issue by recommending the teaching of civic virtues necessary for life in a democratic country: respect for the rights of others, courage, tolerance, kindness, and concern for the underprivileged. Smith (1989) addresses the problem by offering the Constitution as the source for core values: compassion, courtesy, freedom of thought and action, honesty, human worth and dignity, respect for others' rights, responsible citizenship, and tolerance. C.S. Lewis (1947) offers what he calls a tao of moral principles, having existed in all enduring civilizations.

It is the Nature, it is the Way, the road. It is the Way which things everlastingly emerge, stilly and tranquilly, into space and time. It is always the Way which every man [sic] should tread in imitation of that cosmic and supercosmic progression, conforming all activities to that great exemplar. . . . This conception in all its forms, Platonic, Aristotelian, Christian, and Oriental alike, I shall henceforth refer to . . . as 'the Tao' (pp. 28-29).

From Lewis's Tao emerges a collection of principles
that he bases on multicultural wisdom: human kindness, loyalty to parents, responsibility to posterity, rights and responsibilities of marriage, honesty, assistance to the less fortunate, and property rights (Lewis, 1947).

In an attempt to address the problem of defining universal virtues, a group of educators and philosophers met in the mountains of Colorado in 1992 to produce what character educators call the Aspen Declaration. It listed six core elements of character that should be inculcated by all "youth-influencing institutions:" trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship (Fineman, 1994, p. 30). An overwhelming majority of Americans, regardless of religion, class, or racial background, support the teaching of such universal values (Etzioni, 1998; Ryan & Cooper, 1998).

Some are troubled that the character education movement is simply a cloak for religion to be taught in public schools (Ryan & Kilpatrick, 1996). Major spokespersons for the character education movement are also outspoken about their religious faith. While there are Protestant and Jewish proponents, the most prominent authors in the movement are Roman Catholic – William Bennett, William Kilpatrick, Thomas Lickona, and Kevin Ryan (Lickona, 1998). Although they make no attempts to hide their religious affiliation, they make it clear that religion is not a necessary element of character education programs. This brings criticism from others in the religious community who believe that "character education
without the worship of God is worthless" (Fineman, 1994, p. 30).

The role of controversy is not completely eliminated in the discourse of character educators. Greer (1998) recommends that "students with other backgrounds should be drawn out to discuss virtues in their cultures" but only after a foundation of "the best that Western thought has provided" has been established (p. 46). In rare circumstances when controversial issues are addressed only in the secondary curriculum, Cage (1997) suggests that students be engaged in serious research and activities involving speakers with opposing viewpoints. "If all controversy is taken out of the curriculum, it doesn’t prepare kids to deal with the complex ethical questions that all of us face as adults" (Cage, 1997, p. 16).

Character education uses pedagogical practices that resemble Ralph Tyler’s (1949) rationale and Skinnerian behaviorism. Wynn (1998) outlines steps in developing a character education curriculum that clearly reflect the influence of Tyler and Skinner:

(1) Identify and list the virtues and relevant behavior traits.
(2) Establish those virtues and traits as goals for students and faculty.
(3) Provide occasions for students to practice traits and virtues.
(4) Praise students for desirable behavior.
(5) Enforce unpleasant consequences for undesirable traits.

(6) Integrate these activities through curriculum and ceremonies.

(7) Develop faculty who support such policies (p. 444).

Competition is evident in the implementation of character education programs. Students compete among themselves individually to receive recognition for having displayed particular virtues, and classrooms compete for awards for displaying the most patriotism, service, etc. These incentives are woven throughout programs integrating assertive discipline techniques and behavior modification (Smith, 1989).

If character education seems to rely heavily on methods for transmission, Wynne (1998) makes no apologies for that. He clarifies that character educators intend such words as "instill in, transmit to, and habit formation" (p. 444) to describe the process of character development and mature moral decision making. And Perry Glanzer (1998), Education Policy Analyst for James Dobson’s Focus on the Family, agrees that behavioral methodologies are necessary in character education: "In our moral lives we cannot think long and critically about every action. Most of our behavior stems from habit. It is those habits of behavior that we need to develop if we are to sustain our moral lives in the flurry of life" (p. 438). Glanzer (1998), unlike most character education proponents, does
address diversity within communities and the need for character education programs to acknowledge and to respond to this diversity. His suggestion is that communities allow their diverse visions of virtue to be critiqued by students in hopes that as they explore various perspectives, they will discard elements of their own worldviews for the truth they discover.

Other methods implemented in character education include the following: modeling virtuous behavior, studying heros and heroines in literature and history, directly studying the virtues themselves, providing community service, and cultivating school rituals (Ryan & Cooper, 1998). Because values issues permeate all subject matter, character education curriculum programs are not intended to be taught as separate ethics courses but are designed to be integrated in all subjects, especially history and literature (Ryan & Cooper, 1998). Engaging students in discussion is a method of instruction recommended by the Character Education Institute. Quoting an Institute document, Kohn (1997) criticizes the directions to teachers regarding how they should lead discussions:

Since the lessons have been designed to logically guide the students to the right answers, the teacher should allow the students to draw their own conclusions. However, if the students draw the wrong conclusion, the teacher is instructed to tell them why
their conclusion is wrong. (p. 433-434).

Critics of Character Education are concerned for a number of reasons. Nelson, Carlson, and Polonsky (1996) see that character education is too closely tied with the back-to-basics movement, both movements relying much too heavily on indoctrination and regurgitation of one supposedly right set of knowledge, and both devaluing diversity and independence as they pursue conformity and obedience. There are also fears that character education programs have political intentions. While most of the values promoted are unobjectionable, some of them conjure up notions that political conservatism is actually the order of the day. Kohn (1997) questions the actual motive behind stressing virtues such as respect, responsibility, and citizenship. Both the political left and right have their concerns about character education. Organizations like Concerned Women for America and Citizens for Excellence in Education display hostility toward character education because they believe that public education cannot be trusted with moral issues (Rosenblatt, 1995). These people believe that if parents want attention to moral values, they ought to put their children in private school (Ryan & Cooper, 1998).

Christian school philosophy. Moral education is a major pillar in the philosophic foundation of Christian schools, pervading every aspect of the curriculum (Knight, 1989). As Christian school literature addresses moral education, it also discusses moral reasoning,
indoctrination, and the role of controversial issues in the Christian school curriculum.

According to Paul Kienel (1986), a prominent figure in the contemporary Christian school movement, the objectives of moral education in the Christian school are "to develop the mind of Christ toward godliness and sin, to teach the students how to overcome sin, and to encourage the development of self-discipline and responsibility in the student based on respect for and submission to God and all other authority" (p. 75). Whereas other worldviews develop values from nature, society, or the individual, the Christian school's source of values is the Bible (Knight, 1989).

David Noebel (1991), a Christian philosopher, expounds on the worldview that is the basis for Christian school ethics. He confronts moral reasoning as ethical relativism where "no absolute moral code exists, and therefore man [sic] must adjust his ethical standards in each situation according to his own judgments" (p. 200). Noebel is concerned that such a system of relativism produces intolerance towards those who do espouse some form of absolute ethical standard such as the Bible and that it ignores the realization that when students are asked to make a moral judgment, they in essence are always being asked to refer to some standard on which to base their judgments. "Without a standard, there could be no justice; without an ethical absolute, there could be no morality"
In response to the idea that Martin Luther King, Jr., Ghandi, and other civil rights leaders may have developed a new morality by their ethical judgments, Noebel quotes C.S. Lewis who wrote that "The human mind has no more power of inventing a new moral value than of imagining a new primary colour, or, indeed, of creating a new sun and a new sky for it to move in" (in Noebel, 1991, p. 239).

Without an absolute standard, Christian school advocates do not believe that it is possible for students successfully to make moral judgments.

If there is no absolute moral standard, then one cannot say in a final sense that anything is right or wrong. By absolute we mean that which always applies, that which must be an absolute if there are to be real values. If there is no absolute beyond man's ideas, then there is no final appeal to judge between individuals and groups whose moral judgments conflict. We are merely left with conflicting opinions" (Schaeffer, 1976, p. 145).

Is there no place at all, then, for relativism in the Christian worldview of ethics? Knight (1989) teaches a "limited relativism" (p. 174) where relativism is limited by laws, allowing for "relativity in different situations, historical periods, and cultures while maintaining the absolute elements of God's unchanging character and moral law" (p. 175).

Critics of Christian education argue that the teaching of absolute truth is indoctrination and is an illustration
of the extent to which Christian schools are closed to intellectual dialogue and pursuits. Recently, however, Christian school authors have begun to respond to this charge while not apologizing for their indoctrinative approaches. Black (1995) writes of the need to teach students to discern truth. Braley (1995) challenges Christian school teachers to go beyond the facts and concepts to helping students begin to think and reason independently. Guillermin and Beck (1995) differentiate Christian ethical reasoning from values clarification: Christian ethical reasoning is teaching students to think with truth as a goal while values clarification does not teach students how to think but to base moral decisions on feelings rather than truth.

"God commands that we indoctrinate our children" (Braley, 1986, p. 106), writes one Christian school administrator before he goes on to explain that our methods of indoctrination should not rely too heavily upon the "pouring-in" approaches of lecture and drill which tend to instill values only for materialistic purposes. Dependency upon the teacher as a disseminator of God's truth is an acceptable role until students "mature in their knowledge of Biblical morality, [when] they can make moral judgments independent of their teachers" (Gangel, 1986).

There is not much literature available on the role of controversial issues in the Christian school curriculum. Most references to controversial issues are similar to
those of the Character education discourse which places them in the context of the values clarification debate. Christians historically have fought the inclusion of controversial issues in the public schools, and the Christian schools promote themselves as an educational environment in which controversial issues are left to the family. Christian parents have brought suit against public schools in various parts of the country asking that their children not be required to participate in discussions involving controversial issues (Eisner, 1992; Greene, 1996; Venezky, 1992). Phyllis Shlafly, president of politically conservative activist group Eagle Forum, argued in her popular book Child Abuse in the Classroom that "requiring students to think about controversial, conflictual subject matter is not in the best interests of adolescents" (in Greene, 1996, p. 216).

Conclusion

A review of contemporary discourse evidences a distinct difference in the role of controversial issues between theories that stress transformation and those that stress transmission. Transformational theories embrace controversy as a means to promote critical thinking and action while theories for transmission either give controversy a minor role or none at all. When transmission theorists do address controversy, it is usually with the approach that the authority figure has a fixed answer that the student is expected to accept.
Approaches to Dealing with Controversy

Attitudes

Studies conducted to discover attitudes and practices of teachers as they deal with controversy express varying results. Franklin (1972) questioned 1,370 teachers of which the majority responded that they were not willing to engage in discussion of conflict in the classroom. Of the 337 teachers that Engel (1993) surveyed, 75% reported spending up to 25% of classroom time discussing issues such as abortion, abuse, drugs, gangs, racism, suicide, and teen sex; issues they would not discuss with students, however, included controversy over religion and school policy. Especially regarding sex education, teachers were much less supportive of programs that deal with such controversial issues as homosexuality and safe sex practices (Sockett, 1992). There are two primary fears that teachers have reported as keeping them from addressing controversial issues in classroom discussions. The first is the fear that young students will not be able to understand the more serious controversies of life. The second is that young people might accept wrong beliefs if they open their minds to new ideas (Hunt & Metcalf, 1968). In their evaluation of these fears, Hunt and Metcalf (1968) respond that young minds are actually more likely than adult minds to profit from reflective study of deeply controversial issues. If postponed until adulthood, such study never is likely to occur (p. 112).
The fear that students will accept wrong beliefs, they claim, is actually only a fear that they will open their minds to different ideas. "The aim of reflection is never to destroy a belief, but to evaluate it in light of the best evidence and logic" (Hunt & Metcalf, 1968).

Teachers who advocated an issues-centered approach to education were asked to list its defining characteristics. The five most common characteristics mentioned were as follows: use of reflective questions, use of open-ended questions, emphasis on examination of social practices, use of issues reflecting both personal and public components, and centering the curriculum on the diversity of opinions (Schott, 1996).

A study of 128 African-American students (Nicholls, Nelson, & Gleaves, 1995) asked them to compare collaborative inquiry about controversial topics with individual memorization of noncontroversial facts. Younger students saw the remembering of facts as slightly fairer than collaborative inquiry about controversial matters. As grade level increased, so did tendency to see collaborative inquiry as fairer. By middle school, the preference for collaborative inquiry into controversial topics was especially strong.

The Social Science Education Consortium (1996) encourages preservice teachers to prepare how they will deal with controversy, especially in the history curriculum. Geise (1996) and Hill (1996), both authors connected with the Consortium, see advantages to students
when controversy is intentionally interjected into the curriculum.

Teaching that emphasizes facts and the textbook puts students in a passive role and conveys the impression that history is a settled story. The avoidance of controversy makes the story told rather unreal, if not downright suspect (Geise, 1996, p. 302). The investigation of issues can motivate learners; humans are often intrigued by conflict and diverse interpretations and points of view. When subject matter is framed by real-world issues and real data, the student may see its relevance and be less inclined to ask: Why are we studying this? (Hill, 1996, p. 263).

Schukar (1993), a proponent of global education, encourages preservice teachers to prepare to deal with controversial global issues by recognizing their own biases and world views that they bring into the educational setting. Schukar further contends that, once preservice teachers assess their own perspectives, they must balance their own views with contending views. To achieve this, a familiarization of multiple perspectives and comparative approaches is necessary during the teacher preparation program.

Content

The question of appropriate content is a common theme throughout the literature. Content for issues-centered
curricula can be drawn from pervasive human problems revolving around values such as justice, equality, freedom, democracy, and human rights; real problems are preferred to the contrived problems presented in the values clarification curriculum (Nelson, Carlson, & Polonsky, 1996). Artificial moral dilemmas are not as effective as issues that occur in the real world and that have both perennial personal and global implications (Hill, 1996). Some specific topics listed by Hunt and Metcalf (1968) include race and minority-group relations, social class, economics, sex, courtship and marriage, religion and morality, and national and patriotic beliefs. The most relevant topics are those that are local (Passe, 1991) and those that have primary documents available for study (Risinger, 1992).

Methods

Various methods have been evaluated and several recommended as means to present the issues in an effective manner. The use of simple classroom discussion has been reviewed in its many forms. Kupperman (1985) recommends that, as controversy is interjected into the curriculum, students should be required to personalize the issue by openly discussing whether they themselves would want to be treated in the way a particular action or policy treats people — to evaluate whether the likely consequence of an action or policy involves more harm than good. Levitt and Longstreet (1993) support a less guided sort of discussion open to all constitutionally-protected speech where at
least two sides of every issue are presented and where students are not punished in any way for what they or their parents might communicate about the issue.

In addition to discussion, debate is a common method of interjecting controversy. It is valued especially by cooperative learning theorists and is held by them as important for intellectual development (Sockett, 1992). Constructivist teachers also value debate as it allows students to process the content actively, putting it into their own words, and identifying implications which might affect them (Brophy, 1995).

Bibliotherapy, a more specific method of dealing with controversy, purposes to address issues which have already made an impact on students’ lives. Bibliotherapy is typically conducted with students individually; an issue is presented in the context of a story with follow-up questions which help students deal with their own emotions about the issue and to gain skill in making decisions regarding this issue in their lives. Typical bibliotherapy topics might address sexual abuse and divorce. Parents are usually involved with the therapy and encouraged to continue it at home (Sullivan, 1987).

**Teacher Neutrality**

Carl Rogers, perhaps, is credited with promoting non-directive teaching more so than any other one individual. For the purposes of this study, this approach will be referred to as teacher neutrality. Rogers used the phrase
"unconditional positive regard" (quoted in Kilpatrick, 1992, p. 35) to refer to a therapist’s response to opinions and actions of a client. In education this has translated into a nonjudgment of students’ values. In Why Johnny Can’t Tell Right from Wrong Kilpatrick (1992) comments on this nondirective approach to addressing controversial issues:

One problem with the nondirective technique is that it can never be truly nondirective. . . . Certain topics seem more fruitful than others to the therapist, and those are the ones he chooses to reinforce. . . . Clients usually develop a sense of what the therapist is interested in, and that is the sort of material that tends to come up (p. 58).

Kilpatrick (1992) also points out that Abraham Maslow, as well as Carl Rogers himself, had misgivings about the nondirective approach stating that it especially should not be used with children. Referring to one of his own curriculum programs which had been implemented in a Catholic school, Rogers dubbed it a "failure" and a "crazy plan" (quoted in Kilpatrick, 1992, p. 35).

While blanket neutrality is rarely espoused, there are many, especially in constructivist camps, who believe that neutrality with certain controversial issues is the most responsible approach. Kohn (1997), who promotes a constructivist Character Education approach, agrees with the transmission theorists regarding the use of literature, but he disagrees with the type of literature used and the
methods of instruction that traditional Character educators utilize.

Rather than employ literature to indoctrinate or induce mere conformity, we can use it to spur reflection. . . . Discussion of stories should be open-ended rather than relentlessly didactic. Instead of announcing, 'This man is a hero,' teachers may involve the students in deciding who - if anyone - is heroic in a given story (Kohn, 1997, p. 437). Rosenblatt (1995) is another who is outspoken about the teacher's need to remain neutral regarding certain controversial issues.

The teacher's own bias will always be a factor. Some people split on this issue and think that the educator, in assuming a neutral position in the classroom, teaches a bad moral lesson - that the hottest fires of hell are reserved for those who seek to preserve moral neutrality in the face of a crisis. And yet there's an issue of accountability. The teacher has to avoid using the classroom to influence either side of the controversial question because there are parents out there and constituencies out there who do not want the classroom used to promote one or another position on certain issues (p. 38).

Kupperman (1985) agrees that while it would be absurd for a school to remain neutral on every issue of value, that it is improper and offensive for schools to impose one point
of view when addressing controversial value issues.

Philosophically, existentialists in practice also tend toward neutrality in order to allow students to create their own essence, to choose what they will become, to experience the totality of freedom. Therefore, existentialist educators may not tell students that their choices are right or wrong (Pulliam & Van Patten, 1996).

How do teachers and students perceive neutrality as a method of instruction? Liu’s (1996) study of teachers’ attitudes and perspectives regarding controversial issues revealed that overwhelmingly teachers supported an issues-centered approach in which teachers simply stated the facts and remained neutral themselves. In studying student conceptions, Nicholls and Nelson (1992) found that students agreed with teachers on this matter - that it is right for teachers to present various positions, but that they should never favor their own positions on controversial matters.

Teacher Intentionality

Traditional Character Education programs openly discuss the need for intentionality. Opponents counter that traditional attempts toward intentionality are actually methods of indoctrination. A brief review of the literature will show that both transmission and transformation theorists address the need for intentionality; they do argue, however, over where the line is drawn between intentionality and indoctrination.

Risking accusations that they may border on indoctrination, institutions adopt policies regarding
controversial values that declare their commitment to intentionality. The Character Education Partnership adopted eleven principles, one of which declares, "Effective character education requires an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life" (Lickona, 1998, p. 450). Indeed, traditional Character Educators assert that schools by their very nature cannot be morally neutral: "They are moral cauldrons of rewards and punishments, winners and losers, and a continuing parade of issues calling out to be labeled 'right' or 'wrong'" (Ryan & Kilpatrick, 1996, p. 20). While most educational institutions have policies encouraging a cautious neutrality when dealing with controversial issues in the classroom, the Utah State Office of Education (1981) holds a policy that teachers "need not be neutral, but must be fair - not indoctrinators" (p. 2).

When issues of racial, sexual, or other forms of discrimination based on religion or culture are the topic of study, how intentional should the teacher be? Singh (1989) holds that neutrality in discrimination issues can be harmful and in a different way becomes indoctrination itself when it is left to chance that students might learn to act justly and fairly towards other people, races, and sexes.

To allow them to decide what is right or wrong, good and bad is to inculcate in them the conceit of being
able to know and judge anything and everything by
one's own 'criteria'; by one's own puny intellect and
of not needing to defer to anything or anyone. . . .
Teachers should make clear not only what their own
position is, but also what the position of the
community is as well (Singh, 1989, p. 233).
Max van Manen (1991) discusses the fine line between
intentionality and indoctrination in *The Tact of Teaching.*
It is tyranny, he maintains, whenever the pedagogical
relationship contains extremes in the level of adult
direction. Both too much adult direction and too little,
permissiveness and neglect, are tyranny. "It is tyranny to
abandon children to the sole influence of peers and of the
culture at large" (van Manen, 1991, p. 60). Even
nonjudgmental teaching is characterized by a certain
intentionality, and teachers who do attempt to completely
step out of the pedagogical relationship are not sincerely
practicing what van Manen (1991) calls the tact of
teaching.

According to Raywid (1995), whatever the teacher's
intent - to be neutral or intentional, the teacher remains
the "arbiter of meaning" (p. 82) within the classroom. The
teacher stipulates the designation not only of words but
also of gestures and actions. Teachers cannot waive the
power innate in their position. "It seems to me that the
hands-off posture is not really as neutral as it professes
to be. You have to be dead to be value neutral" (Sommers,
1993, p. 11). Because values and ideology pervade the
educational enterprise, much of the literature expresses this perspective - that neutrality is false; there is always an intention whether its methodology borders on indoctrination or not (Lincoln, 1992; Sockett, 1992).
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Hermeneutic phenomenological research edifies the personal insight, contributing to one's thoughtfulness and one's ability to act toward others, children or adults, with tact or tactfulness.

van Manen, 1990, p. 7

How is compelled by why; practice is driven by purpose. If the purpose is to understand, a research methodology must be chosen which will promote meaning-making and comprehension of a particular experience, practice, or phenomenon. For this reason, hermeneutic phenomenological research methods are applied to this study.

As previously stated, the purpose of this study is to seek to understand the specific problems that Christian school educators face as they address controversial issues in the moral education curriculum and to discover how some of these teachers choose to approach such issues. Attitudes, definitions, perspectives, intentions—all are under scrutiny in this type of study. Granted, these constructs could be measured by some type of paper and pencil assessment. Studies have been completed which measure what percentage of teachers spend a certain amount of instructional time on controversial issues. The issues
have been identified and the frequency of each issue discussed in class has been tabulated. This study is not interested in such pursuits. As referenced in the review of literature, the quantitative research on this topic is helpful; it does assist the interested educator in knowing which topics are being addressed, to what degree, and by what various methods. And although teachers' attitudes are revealed to some degree in the quantitative research, it does not disclose the emotions of the teachers as they struggle with their own convictions. Hermeneutic phenomenological research is best suited to accomplish this task.

Hermeneutic Phenomenological Research:
Definition and Purpose
Max van Manen (1990) describes hermeneutic phenomenology as a human science which studies persons and the essences of their lived experiences. It uses interpretive description to explain a particular aspect of the lifeworld while acknowledging the complexity of lived life. The word phenomenology is derived from the Greek word *phenomenon* which means "to show itself" (Ray, 1994, p. 118). It is the meaning of an experience that is intended to be shown as it is described in the language of the participant. The data of hermeneutic phenomenological research is not statistical but narrative in nature. The researcher collects and analyzes extensive narrative data
for the purpose of acquiring a greater understanding of a particular situation (Gay, 1996) which ultimately contributes "to one's thoughtfulness and one's ability to act toward others, children or adults, with tact or tactfulness" (van Manen, 1990, p. 7).

Research Design

"Indeed it has been said that the method of phenomenology and hermeneutics is that there is no method" (van Manen, 1990, p. 30). While it may appear that phenomenological research is non-methodical, it is actually emergent in nature. McMillan and Schumacher (1989) describe what they call a circular research design that is incremental, dependent on prior information. Specific procedures are identified by the researcher during the collection and analysis of data rather than having been specified ahead of time. Being a constructivist manner of research, phenomenology requires a level of spontaneity in research design; however, a guideline or level of research commitment prior to the study adds a measure of security for the researcher and a measure of credibility for the reader.

Morse (1994) offers a list of three conditions necessary for achieving maximum comprehension in a phenomenological study:

First, the researcher should enter the setting as a 'stranger'. . . . The second condition for obtaining optimal comprehension is that the researcher must be
capable of passively learning - of absorbing nonjudgmentally and with concentrated effort - everything remotely relevant to the topic of interest. . . . The third essential condition is that the participants must be willing to tolerate intrusion and to share their world with the researcher (pp. 27-28).

Morse's three conditions for optimal comprehension were strived for throughout this study's data collection and analysis. In addition, the six research activities presented by Max van Manen (1990) were heeded as well; it is a "dynamic interplay" (p. 31) among these six research activities that is the essence of hermeneutic phenomenological research:

(1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world; (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it; (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon; (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting; (5) maintaining a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon; (6) balancing the research process by considering parts and whole (p. 31).

While details of the research design emerged during the process, Morse's three conditions and van Manen's six research activities were used as guides for the study. Furthermore, plans for sampling, data collection, and data
analysis and interpretation were committed to prior to the commencement of fieldwork.

**Sampling of Participants**

While random sampling is a characteristic of quantitative research, Gay (1996) points out that sampling for qualitative research is purposeful. Data sources are chosen because it is believed that they will be rich sources of information needed for the study.

Purposefulness, convenience, and practicality were all considerations in the sampling for this study. It was necessary to sample teachers of Christian schools in order to obtain the researcher’s desired information. Teachers in member schools of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) were selected because this is the largest worldwide association of Christian schools, and all these schools have adopted a particular philosophical framework that makes them somewhat homogeneous — as opposed to investigating a variety of religious schools that may be Catholic, Jewish, Lutheran, Mennonite, etc. Florida schools were chosen for convenience’s sake as this is the residence of the researcher. And, finally, practicality played a role in every sampling decision. Cooperation of the participating teachers remains a factor in the sampling process as well as the willingness of the researcher to travel the distance necessary to conduct the interview.

Gay (1996) also emphasizes that complete understanding of the studied behavior will not occur if the context, or
the site of the behavior, is not understood beforehand. In chapter two of this study, a review of the literature representing Christian school philosophy is presented to assist in the understanding of the context. These schools may have been established for the explicit purpose of avoiding controversial issues in the curriculum. They may have written policies on how teachers are to respond when a controversial topic is brought up in class discussion. All of these schools focus strongly on the moral development of their students. Understanding the data of this study is enhanced when the philosophical foundation of Christian schools is also understood.

Thirteen teachers, representing four schools, were interviewed initially for one hour or more each.

Data Collection

Nature of the Data

The data of this study are the thoughts of teachers regarding their experiences, intentions, practices, and motives of dealing with controversial issues in the moral education curriculum. Data includes policies developed by the Christian school regarding their expectations or guidelines relating to moral education and the treatment of controversial issues.

Phenomenological studies relying on others' experiences gather the data usually by interviews or documents written by the participants themselves. The goal
in data collection was to capture the "richness and complexity of behavior that occurs in natural settings from the participants’ perspective" (McMillan & Schumacher, 1989, p. 42). This study relied on face-to-face, open-ended long interviews with 13 teachers from four Christian schools. As the study progressed, follow-up telephone interviews were necessary for clarity. Written accounts of selected experiences also were requested of participants who expressed a desire to share more information than time allowed in the interview session.

The Interview Process

In accordance with the interview suggestions of McMillan and Schumacher (1989), interviews were in-depth and minimally-structured. A general interview guide was used with a list of questions. Some questions were emphasized with some participants more than with others, and additional probing questions were interjected as needed. Participants were encouraged to talk in detail about their areas of interest pertaining to the study.

Questions sought to discover how the participants felt about their efforts in moral education and the role controversial issues play in the curriculum. Questions also attempted to uncover beliefs and meanings attached to the practices of these teachers.

The Interview Guide

Below is a guide which was used by the interviewer in each session. However, the researcher digressed from the guide for the purpose of probing:
Regarding moral education.
(1) Describe your moral education curriculum.
(2) How is it implemented?
(3) What is the intent of your moral education curriculum?

Regarding the role of controversy.
(4) Have controversial issues arisen within the moral education curriculum? If so, describe the situation.
(5) How did you address the situation?
(6) What role do you believe controversial issues play in the moral development of your students?

Regarding intentionality, neutrality, and indoctrination.
(7) When controversial issues arise, what stance have you taken?
(8) Why have you taken this stance?
(9) Do you believe the stances you have taken in the past were the best ones for the students' moral development? Why or why not?
(10) In what instances have you chosen to remain neutral? Why have you done so?
(11) What does indoctrination mean to you?
(12) Do you practice indoctrination? Why or why not?
(13) How might you summarize your beliefs regarding the discussion we have had on moral education, controversial issues, and the intent of the teacher?
The above interview guide, as well as the following participant consent form has been approved by the Oklahoma State University Institutional Review Board on March 12, 1999.

Consent Form

I, ________________, hereby authorize Samuel J. Smith to interview me regarding my attitudes, motives, practices, etc., regarding the role of controversial issues in the moral education curriculum of my classroom.

Procedure - Participants understand that they will be asked to participate in an oral face-to-face interview. Participants may at times be asked to write out any particular experiences that they believe would pertain to the study. For the sake of clarifying data, the researcher might contact the participant by phone in the future. Participants will also have an opportunity to review all data they have contributed to the study to verify its accuracy and correct representation.

Duration of Participation - Initially, participation will begin with the oral interview of approximately one hour in length. Within six weeks, a short follow-up telephone call might follow to clarify data. Within three months, participants will have an opportunity to review the data.

Confidentiality - Participants' names will not be disclosed to anyone other than the researcher. Care
will be taken not to identify participants in any way that would jeopardize confidentiality.

Possible Benefits - It is believed that the data gathered by this study will benefit many audiences concerned about moral education. Not much research has been done regarding the intent and approach of Christian school educators as they address controversial issues in the classroom. The goal of this study is an increased understanding by all interested parties.

This interview is conducted as part of a dissertation study entitled "The Role of Controversial Issues in the Moral Education Curriculum: Attitudes and Practices of Christian School Educators."

I understand that participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty after notifying the researcher.

I may contact Samuel J. Smith at telephone number 904/767-5451. I may also contact Gay Clarkson, IRB Executive Secretary, 305 Whitehurst, Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, OK 74078; telephone number: 405/744-5700.

I have read and fully understand the consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy has been given to me.
Date:_________ Time:_______

Participant
Signature:_________________________________

I certify that I have personally explained all elements of this form to the participant before requesting the participant to sign it.
Researcher
Signature:_________________________________

Recording the Data

Frequent, extensive note-taking is usually necessary in this type of research (Gay, 1996; Morse, 1994); however, for the purpose of encouraging continuous, uninterrupted dialogue, note-taking was minimized and audio tape-recording was utilized. The interviews were transcribed to enhance analysis. At the conclusion of the study, cassette tapes were erased and destroyed.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Research data was analyzed for the purpose of enhancing understanding of the phenomenon under study. Morse (1994) and van Manen (1990) was used as guides in the process of data analysis.

Personal Reflection

Chapter four of this study will begin with a personal reflection of the researcher's experiences, feelings, and beliefs about moral education, the role of controversial issues in moral education, and indoctrination. This will assist in identifying any biases the researcher might hold.
It will also assist the reader in her or his own interpretation of the study.

**Decontextualizing Data**

In order to implement the inductive reasoning necessary for phenomenological research, a decontextualization of the data must occur. Morse (1994) refers to this process as sorting and sifting. The data are removed from their contexts of persons and instances and are isolated into individual descriptions.

The data of this study underwent an interparticipant analysis and a categorical analysis. The interparticipant analysis involved the comparison of transcripts from several participants while the categorical analysis will entail a sorting by commonalities.

**Theme Identification**

After the data was categorically analyzed, a coding sorted the information for the purpose of uncovering underlying meanings in the text. Themes emerged as metaphorical references, idiomatic phrases, and descriptive words were highlighted. According to van Manen (1990), themes formulate as the data is simplified and the phenomenon’s meaning is captured.

**Recontextualizing Data**

Morse (1994) points out that theory is the most important product of qualitative research. While this study does not intend to recommend a best practice based upon any given theory, it does seek to understand the
practices and attitudes of Christian school educators regarding the role of controversial issues in moral education. The research is recontextualized when it is found to be of value to others, and it is believed that the results of this study will interest and inform many audiences. Teachers, administrators, and parents of students in Christian schools will gain an understanding of what might be occurring in the moral education curriculum and why. Public school and private school audiences alike may be informed by the data and, thereby, understand the implications of controversial issues in their own arenas. They may be challenged in some way by the data to evaluate their own decisions about moral education curriculum. Once the data become applicable in such a way, it is then recontextualized or viewed as having "transferability" (Leininger, 1994).

Research Credibility

Because all qualitative researchers do not observe, interview, or study documents alike, the qualitative research process is personalistic. Reliability, therefore, is more difficultly evidenced in phenomenological research. Its reliability is dependent upon factors that must be made explicit in the design of the study. McMillan and Schumacher (1989) identify external and internal reliability factors to consider.

External Reliability

The following descriptions of external factors are
intended to increase reliability by explicating the research design to the reader.

**Role of the researcher.** In order to identify possible researcher bias and to increase reliability, information regarding the role of the researcher and his status within the group of participants is necessary. First person pronouns will be used here for ease of writing.

I served as the sole researcher for this project. I initially contacted administrators of Christian schools to request documents outlining their moral education curriculum and their policies regarding the handling of controversial issues in classroom instruction. At that time, I also requested permission to interview teachers. I then contacted each teacher to arrange a face-to-face interview time. If clarity was needed after the interview, telephone conversations were made to probe further.

My status within the group of participants is that I am presently serving as the headmaster of a Christian school accredited by the Association of Christian Schools International. I did not interview teachers at my own school nor use documents governing the school in which I am employed. Having taught elementary and middle school grades in Christian schools, I believe that I had a certain immediate rapport with participants; however, my present status as an administrator might have hindered interaction to some extent. Personal reflection regarding the research topic will be included in chapter four to further explicate
possible researcher bias.

**Informant selection.** Teachers were selected who teach various grade levels and subjects in elementary and secondary classrooms. Teachers serving in member schools of the Association of Christian Schools International were selected as participants because all member schools in ACSI are required to hire only teachers who claim to adhere to a Christian worldview. A degree of reliability of the study depends upon all participants claiming to adhere to a Christian worldview, although it is understood that opinions differ about controversial issues among persons in this category.

**Social context.** Eight of the interviews occurred on the campuses of the schools where the teachers taught. The remaining five were conducted at an ACSI teacher convention center in Orlando, Florida.

**Data collection and analysis.** The external reliability factors regarding data collection and analysis have been carefully described above including interviewing methods, data recording, and the analytical premises informing the study.

**Internal Reliability**

The following strategies as outlined by McMillan and Schumacher (1989) were used to reduce threats to internal reliability:

**Low-inference descriptors.** This was the principal method for establishing internal validity. Interviews were audio-recorded. Transcripts were verbatim, and
descriptions were precisely taken from field notes.

**Participant researcher.** Prior to final analysis, corroboration with the informant occurred regarding what had been observed and recorded. At this time, interpretations of the participant’s meanings were discussed. This increased the reliability of the study by including the participant as a researcher himself or herself. The participants’ voices became richer and their own ideas were re-presented to them to re-think and to re-examine.

**Validity**

Efforts to increase reliability also assisted in assuring that validity occurred. In addition to those measures, the following actions were also taken to enhance validity:

**Lengthy data collection period.** Considering the practical constraints to this study, data collection and analysis were extended only over a period of approximately six months. This provided opportunities for continual data analysis and ensured a better match between researcher interpretations and participant reality.

**Disciplined subjectivity.** Being mindful that "the ‘goodness’ of the data depends on the ‘goodness’ of the researcher," the researcher will submitted all phases of the process to self-monitored rigorous questioning and reevaluation.
Conclusion

While much of the research design emerged during the process, the guidelines outlined in this chapter served to provide a level of security and structure to the researcher and provides a degree of confidence to the reader that the results are reliable and valid.
"Why can't a woman have a right to choose what she does with her own body? I'm tired of Christians masquerading their political agendas as spiritual ones and making me feel like I can't be a Christian if I support a woman's right to have an abortion!" A student spoke these words in my freshman Bible college composition class and with them ostracized himself from the class for the remainder of the semester. Although the social issue that day was abortion, another pedagogical question lingered on my mind thereafter, demanding that I explore it to gain a better understanding of the dynamics that occur in a Christian school setting when controversial issues arise.

As an educator, I sensed a professional obligation to respect all opinions, to encourage critical thinking, and not to impose my personal beliefs on students. As a Christian in a Christian educational institution, I desired to transfer to that student what I perceived to be the truth based upon biblical interpretation. In this instance, however, I chose to practice procedural neutrality. The result was that many of the other students in the class spoke out openly against him, not changing his mind but building a social wall between them and him that
seemed to get higher as the semester continued.

Was what I did right? Should I have been more coercive by presenting my own opinion and the reasoning behind it? Was I the diplomatic negotiator that I should have been? How could I have fostered a better cooperation among the students while still permitting them to explore such a heated topic? The above experience and many others like it have led to my desire to pursue this study. While previous chapters have explored the available literature regarding moral education, controversial issues, and teachers' intentions, this chapter will report the results of my own interactions with thirteen Christian school educators from four different schools who teach various grade levels and subject areas. Seven of the teachers were female and six were male. Their years of teaching experience ranged from three to 27 years with an average of 11 years. Their present teaching assignments were distributed as follows: primary elementary, 3; upper elementary, 2; middle school, 3; and high school, 6. All thirteen were Anglo-American.

Eight of the teachers were interviewed on the campuses of their schools. Five of them were interviewed at a convention center in Orlando, Florida, during a convention of 1,800 Christian school educators. The final interview was conducted with a group of three male high school teachers. This was a unique session in that the participants interacted with each other, responding to one
another's answers either in agreement or disagreement. The
dynamics of this session lessened the influence and control
of the researcher as the participants seemed to guide the
discussion more on their own.

Each initial interview was approximately one hour in
length. The cassette tapes were transcribed and mailed to
the participants requesting written reflective comments or
clarifications. Follow-up conversations with three of the
participants were conducted for the same purpose. In the
follow-up writings and conversations, the participants
confirmed their original statements but took the
opportunity to re-present them in a clearer, more succinct
fashion.

Categorical Analysis

The three broad categories that will first be examined
are those of moral education, the role of controversy, and
the teacher's role.

The Moral Education Curriculum

Description. Upon initially being asked about their
moral education curriculum, five of the thirteen teachers
immediately named publishers who distribute either Bible
class courses or biblically-based character building
textbooks. The three publishers named were A Beka Book
Publishers - a subsidiary of Pensacola Christian College,
Bob Jones University Press, and Association of Christian
Schools International (ACSI) - ACSI also serves as the
accrediting agency for the institutions.
Most other references were made to the Bible as the foundation for the moral curriculum. It was referred to as the "stand-alone truth," "the moral measure of our lives," and "the bottom line for any moral education curriculum." While those who mentioned packaged curricula were identifying moral education strictly within a Bible class context, those who mentioned the Bible as their source for moral education spoke in terms of interdisciplinary integration of biblical principles throughout various subject areas: history, physical education, science, and math.

Three of the male high school teachers described their moral education curriculum as a list of rules and expectations that they enforce in the classroom. They explained how they communicate the standards and the actions they take once the guidelines have been violated.

"My life" was the response given by one who emphasized that his moral education curriculum is an informal process of serving as a "good moral example."

**Implementation.** A variety of responses were given as to how the curriculum is implemented. Bible class was mentioned again along with descriptions of how the integration process is conducted throughout the subjects with Scriptural principles being integrated when appropriate. Class discussion and application were reported as common means of implementation with application involving the selection of Bible verses that would comment
directly or indirectly on a particular moral issue.

Teachers commented regularly on their awareness that moral education was pervasive and that they believed it occurs more in an informal series of interactions with students than it does in any particular class or program.

**Intent.** Above all, the primary intent of the Christian school’s moral education curriculum as voiced by these teachers was that students be converted to Christianity if they are not already Christians upon coming to the school. This was expounded upon in many ways: teachers’ intents are that students "love the Lord and His Word," "see the consequences of obeying or not obeying God and how that affects their lives and others’ lives," "listen to God," and "live godly lives." Teachers spoke of their desire that students have a "personal relationship with God."

One teacher spoke of her primary intent as that of developing an awareness of diversity in her students, that all people are "created differently with a purpose by God." The individualistic nature of the teachers’ intentions were expressed in references to God’s plan for individual students and that part of their moral development is in finding their places in God’s plan.

A final intent that was consistently voiced related to the desire to see students develop a "general sense of right and wrong." This was couched generally in terms dealing with the goal of developing decision-making skills, Christian character, and ownership of convictions.
Our goal in the moral education is to create an ownership of the convictions that the Scripture teaches we should have. It’s not enough just to say, ‘Here’s the standard; you’ve got to live it.’ Because we can’t on our own. Without the cross, we have no hope. So, the power by which we live our lives is in the cross. To get a kid to own the convictions we’re talking about would be the ultimate goal.

**Controversial Issues in Moral Education**

The *presence of controversy*. Two teachers, a second grade teacher in her ninth year and a middle school math teacher in her 18th year, claimed that controversial issues have never arisen in their classrooms at all. Later, the second grade teacher commented that daily issues of students getting along with one another have indeed been controversial and that the issue of students’ parents going through divorce have been controversial. Also after being probed, the middle school teacher identified the school dress code as a regular topic of controversy among her students.

Listed from most frequently mentioned to least frequently mentioned are the following controversial issues: (1) abortion; (2) various forms of sexual expression—premarital sex, masturbation, and oral sex; (3) entertainment—music, videos, and television; (4) various distinctive denominational church doctrines; (5) the scandals surrounding President Bill Clinton’s
administration; (6) homosexuality; (7) evolution versus creation; (8) New Age beliefs and practices; (9) divorce; (10) violence in schools; (11) AIDS; (12) school dress code regulations; (13) roles of men and women in society and specifically in marriage; and (14) slavery.

The teacher's response to controversy. While many cautioned that students might introduce controversial issues for the sole purpose of getting teachers off task, all teachers interviewed stated that they would normally proceed cautiously to address the issue in class. Five of the thirteen said that they would "just tell them what the Bible has to say about it." Three of the others also would refer to biblical references only after giving students time to discuss their own beliefs together. Whether referencing the Bible initially or waiting until the end of the discussion period, the intent appears to be to settle the issue by drawing upon a final authority. The others reported that they would encourage students to talk, that they would hit the issue "head on, no holds barred," and that they would attempt to present real-life examples for students to examine.

I try to let them talk about it. And then let's go to Scripture and see what we can find in the Bible that speaks about this issue. And sometimes that may take a day or two, and I encourage them to try and seek out passages of Scripture that will speak to that issue. It's not something that I want to push aside because if it is a concern to them, then I think it has value.
And I don’t tell kids that they can’t speak about something like that if I don’t agree with them. That’s something that we need to talk about. So, I encourage kids to talk whether I have the same opinion or not.

**The role of controversial issues.** All 13 teachers unanimously agreed that controversial issues play a significant role in the moral development of their students; however, their reasons for this were extremely varied. Two of them put qualifiers on their positive responses: "... if the students have a good Bible background" and "... if they’re guided." Others reported that the inclusion of controversial issues in the curriculum fosters student thinking, helps them to understand why others believe what they believe, and assists them in developing their own values and morals. It also provides opportunities for students to practice articulating their reasoning in a safe environment before possibly having to defend their beliefs in a hostile environment.

**The Teacher’s Role**

**The teacher’s initial stance.** Depending on what the issue is and whether there is a clear biblical mandate connected with the issue, about a third of the interviewed teachers would directly turn to Scripture to respond to a controversial issue in the class. "If according to God’s Word I can see where I can become dogmatic on something, I
will be dogmatic on it." The others claimed that they try to attempt to remain neutral until invited by the students to give an opinion. Several expressed a measure of frustration with this procedure; below is an example of the reasoning one teacher articulated:

That's a hard one because sometimes your first reaction as a young teacher would be to jump at the side of that which is right automatically. And that's the easy way to go, but as a teacher there is a responsibility we have to maintain an objectivity at least for as long a period as possible to get the kids to be able to share, because I think if you side one way or the other quickly - I know I'm speaking from a teacher's standpoint here - then you're forcing the kids either to an adversarial position or the position where they just agree with you and nothing gets discussed. So I will eventually share with them what I think. But initially, I'm trying to get them to come to me with 'Well, what do you think about that? What is your position on that? Why do you think it's wrong? And what about these issues? Have you considered these things in relation to what you are saying?' Teachers who can do that not only create lively discussion but I think also position a kid to be equipped to make those hard calls.

The teacher's justification. There were two types of justifications offered for the stances that teachers take when controversial issues arise. Those teachers who had
said that they were likely first to present to the students what the Bible had to say regarding a particular issue offered justifications such as "It works" and "It's the truth." In the group interview one teacher commented, "That's the whole purpose of a Christian school teacher, to direct the students to a Christ-like behavior. And Christ-like behavior is not the world's behavior. You can't be stepping on the fence expecting to have both worlds." "He brings up the fence," a second teacher continued, "I think a line has been drawn, and you have to be on either side of it. There is no straddling of the line any longer. 'Let your yea be yea and your nay be nay.'"

Another type of justification was offered for those teachers who maintained that they would attempt neutrality until questioned about their opinion by students. These teachers said they did so in order to foster thinking in their students and so that they would remain open to the teacher's instruction and would not be alienated.

One teacher who had previously commented that he typically played the "devil's advocate" with students gave his justification as wanting to prepare students to be articulate "in the market" and to prepare them to take whatever "abuse" might come as a result of their viewpoints.

**Teacher Self-evaluations.** Self-evaluations of whether teachers' stances were always for the students' best moral development produced mixed results. Nearly half the
respondents gave confident affirmations that they believed their stances in dealing with controversial matters were always for the students' best moral development.

One teacher expounded, "I try not to ever say, 'This is right and this is wrong because this is what I believe.' I don't do that. I use the Bible. So that doesn't ever really make you doubt what you've done." A teacher who had earlier said that his moral education curriculum was his life explained,

Paul said that he wished everybody was like him. And I always thought that was pretty cocky and egotistical, and yet I can truthfully say that if people had my beliefs and morals, that I would have no trouble with that. It's not cockiness, but I believe that what I believe is right, and I hope the kids will see that.

Those who evaluated themselves as not always having taken the best stance for their students' moral development addressed the issue of alienating their students or of undermining parental authority. "If the discussion causes them to doubt something that their parents have taught them and gives Satan a wedge to use against - their parents are ultimately responsible for them, and even the best intentions, if it causes them and gives them some iota of rationalization to disobey or disrespect their parents, I have been wrong." This particular teacher made regular reference to parental authority throughout the interview. She repeatedly described the Christian school as a place
where parents would not be undermined. In her school, at least one parent must sign a statement that he or she is a Christian. This concern might not be as strong in Christian schools that make no such requirement.

Other negative self-evaluations communicated a self-awareness of behavior that possibly could offend students and thereby alienating them altogether. "There have been times when I've been very opinionated and maybe not tactful with students."

I can tend to be pretty sharp. I have to watch how I say things, not necessarily what I say, but the tone of voice. And having been around as long as I have - the idea that I'm throwing my weight around like 'Who are you, you little pipsqueak?'

"Now, what's good and what's best are two different things, and sometimes our good is the enemy of God's best. So, whenever I'm trying to push what's best, at times I alienate the children."

**Neutrality and intentionality.** Only two of the thirteen teachers clearly stated that they do not remain neutral when controversial issues arise. Of those who gave examples of times when they considered themselves as practicing neutrality, most of them, in fact, were not neutral based on their own accounts of the situations. They interpreted their tactfulness as neutrality believing that consideration for students' opinions, whether the teacher agreed or not, was the measure of neutrality. This
can be seen in the following teacher's statement:

She could see that I wasn't buying it, but I chose to pretty much remain neutral on it and not -- and she did comment to me later. She said, 'I know you don't believe what I said, but at least you didn't put me down like Mrs. So-and-so did.' So I remain neutral in that way.

Another teacher, in claiming to remain neutral at times, said that she would tell her students,

'If you want to know my reasoning, I'll give you my scriptures. Then you can think about it, pray about it, and when you come to the age where you are not under the authority of your parents, then you can make up your own mind. But make sure you base your decisions on truthful ideas.'

By far, the most commonly mentioned issues on which teachers felt an obligation to remain neutral were those relating to denominational doctrines. Many participants described their schools as inter-denominational or non-denominational as they explained why it would be crucial for them to remain neutral on such issues. Other issues mentioned on which teachers prefer to remain neutral were as follows: music, movies, presidential sex scandals, divorce, women working outside the home, Santa Claus, Easter Bunny, and the Tooth Fairy.

Roman Catholic doctrines were cited often as being those that would surface in class and that would require that the teacher remain neutral. One teacher explained
that he would remain neutral only if a Roman Catholic student were in the classroom; otherwise, he would teach what he believed to be wrong about the doctrine. This is similar to what another teacher stated about homosexuality; she would remain neutral if she knew that a student in the class had a homosexual relative but would otherwise clearly speak out against homosexuality.

A common response in dealing with denominational differences is that teachers regularly refer students to their pastors or their parents to discuss such issues.

**Indoctrination.** For most, it was difficult for them to render their definition of the term indoctrination. They struggled with the negative connotations of the word while believing that it is something that they themselves do in the Christian school. Some explained that indoctrination is wrong except in the case of significant teachings such as salvation by Christ alone. Others identified it as always wrong while a few saw nothing wrong with indoctrination as long as it is based on the truth of the Bible.

A few images were offered to describe the associations connected with the word "indoctrination."

My immediate reaction is to think of somebody joining the military, and the first they do is sit you down, and you’re probably going to listen to an hour lecture. You stand in line . . . . You’re told what the rules are. You’re told how you should behave . . .
There's no grey area. There's no room for you to question. You do it, and you do it with no questions. "I'm thinking of the Communists, the Cold War."

Each student is a basket. When you put them into the river . . . , they're full of water. They are in an indoctrination process in the Christian school receiving all about the lordship of Jesus Christ. We are submersing them in that indoctrinating process.

As difficult as it was for the participants to offer a definition of indoctrination, it is just as difficult to clearly summarize the variety of mixed thoughts and feelings in each response. A verbatim transcript may be found in the appendix, but below are select words and phrases from their definitions: "not thinking," "spitting out rote," "training," "forcing," "steering," "submersing," "instill," "habit," "manipulate," "infuse," "pigeonhole," "to bury into the mind," "investing."

Two elementary teachers expressed no negative connotations in their definitions as they described indoctrination as "teaching philosophy" and as "what you are taught about the Bible."

Answers became even more complex when participants were asked whether they themselves practiced indoctrination. Eight responded positively with the remaining five answering negatively. Two of the negative respondents offered alternative terms for what they attempted to accomplish instead of indoctrination; one stated that he was "investing" in his students, the other
that he was "discipling" them.

In the eight responses of those who acknowledged that they did indeed practice indoctrination there seemed to be a sense that they had no other option, that indoctrination was a means they had to use especially in matters of spiritual issues such as salvation.

I would only [indoctrinate] with Scriptural things when it comes to salvation. Other lesser things I would be very careful not to do that. Obviously, you want to see people go to heaven. I’m not pushy-pushy, but I don’t back down. I don’t waiver. I’m not tolerant of other ideas. ‘This is what God says, and this is the way it has got to be in this particular instance. It’s black and white.’ And I say, ‘If you’ve got a problem with me, then go to the Lord because He is the one who said it. I’m just passing the message on.’

Conclusion

Considering the homogeneity of the participants, it is interesting to note the variety of responses especially in the category relating to teacher intent. The moral education curriculum was described as a published curriculum, a process of biblical integration, the establishment and communication of rules, and the informal living out of the teacher’s life before the students. Intentions of the curriculum were to bring about the salvation of non-Christian students, to promote an
understanding of diverse views, and to develop a general sense of right and wrong.

Participants unanimously acknowledged the pervasive nature of controversial issues and said that it is common for them to turn to Scripture to find solutions to share with their students. Based on their reports, it is just as likely that the teacher will permit a discussion of the topic exploring the various beliefs relating to the issue at hand. The participating teachers also unanimously acknowledged the significant role of controversial issues as they foster student thinking, assist them in understanding others, and provide opportunities for students to articulate their beliefs.

Teachers justified their use of the Bible as the final authority in controversial matters by their belief and the belief of their school that the Bible is the only source of all truth. Those who attempted neutrality justified their actions by claiming that their goal was to promote student thinking. Self-evaluations revealed that nearly half of the teachers believed that at one time or another they had alienated students by inappropriately communicating their convictions in an overly strong manner. When issues prove to be extremely sensitive in nature, especially those relating to denominational doctrines, teachers typically remain neutral and refer inquisitive students to their pastors or parents. In matters of eternal salvation, teachers feel compelled to use indoctrinative measures despite the negative connotations that they themselves
identify with the practice.

**Interparticipant Analysis**

As the categorical analysis above intended to survey the topics discussed by all thirteen teachers, the interparticipant analysis will summarize and compare each individual interview.

**Teacher #1**

Teacher #1 is a female teacher from school "A" who teaches 7th and 8th grade math, and has taught for 18 years. She describes herself as a deliverer of truth to the students. Pointing out that her subject area is math, she does not see that controversy is inherent or natural in her classes. Because ACSI requires the incorporation of Biblical principles, she makes efforts to "bring in," "tie in," "throw in," and "instill in" scriptural truths but considers them non-controversial.

Teacher #1 tells a lengthy story of an informal interaction she had with a student at a basketball game. A student made a statement about the school dress code with which she disagreed and "before I could say anything" another student opposed the first student with an argument similar to that of the teacher's. Throughout the interview, teacher #1 referred to this strategy of addressing controversy. "Generally always there is one who is strong enough to take what I would consider, well, my side of the issue. And I try to encourage that . . . ." She
recognizes her tendency to be "sharp" and a temptation to perceive students who disagree with her as "little pipsqueak[s]."

Teacher #1 expresses appreciation towards the school administration for "weeding out" those students who might promote controversy. School "A" is a discipleship-oriented school rather than an evangelical outreach, meaning that school "A" attempts to develop Christian students from Christian homes as opposed to proselytizing those who are not already Christians. Teacher #1 perceives this condition as eliminating much of the moral controversy that might occur otherwise.

Without hesitation, teacher #1 unapologetically declares her role as an indoctrinator although she sites images of Communism and the Cold War in her definition of "indoctrination."

Teacher #2

Teacher #2 is also a female from school "A." She has taught for 12 years and is a 6th grade language arts and science teacher. It is significant that Teacher #2 sends her own teenage daughter to public school. References are made repeatedly throughout the discussion that this arrangement has made her daughter a stronger person morally with a superior understanding of moral issues because her daughter has had to face opposing sides of an issue at school to what Teacher #2 teaches her daughter at home.

Teacher #2 defines indoctrination as "Not thinking . . . Spitting out rote." However, she confidently states
that she clearly indoctrinates her own daughter at home but only wishes that she could indoctrinate her students at school. It is her fear of "irate parents" that keeps her from attempting to indoctrinate her own students on all controversial issues except for issues of "the infallibility of the Scriptures and the attributes of God and the blood atonement of Jesus." Because the school "A's" published mission statement and statement of faith will support the teacher, she has no insecurities about directly teaching these issues as "things that we don't argue about."

As with many of the other interviewed teachers, teacher #2 makes strong statements that are clearly antithetical to other strong statements she makes. For instance, while claiming that she would avoid voicing her opinion on certain controversial moral issues "because there are parents who would chew me alive who don't believe that," she relates two incidents that are incompatible with such a supposedly neutral stance. The first instance is that of her complete censorship of a school-adopted science textbook because it taught theistic evolution instead of a six-day Genesis account of creation. The second instance was "an argu-- a discussion" that she participated in with her six graders over whether humans are mammals or not.

I know how to direct the discussion. I had kids in my class that were crying for me because I was in the
minority. Some of these little girls were just, tears were coming down their faces because 'these children are arguing with Ms. [Teacher #2].' . . . it was good because I got them to think.

Teacher #3

Teacher #3 is a male teacher at school "A" with nine years of experience who teaches 7th and 8th grade history. He acknowledges the pervasive nature of moral education and of controversy and discusses at length the significance of the teacher's role in moral development. While clearly intentional in his desire to convert students to Christianity, he frequently referenced the importance of student choice, the need for students to "exhaust their thoughts," and the dangers of coercion. "They need room to reach the decision themselves."

As with most other participants in this study, Teacher #3 refuses to remain neutral on issues that are clearly explained in the Bible. When he is aware of a Biblical mandate regarding an issue, that is either where the discussion immediately turns or that is where it concludes after a thorough discussion of various perspectives. When there is no Biblical mandate, Teacher #3 considers "age appropriateness" before deciding whether to express his own views or to remain silent on the issue.

Teacher #4

Teacher #4 is a female middle school physical education and pre-algebra teacher at school "A." Moral education is evidently an area that she has thought
carefully about and has applied much effort in conducting in a systematic way. Her primary method of moral education is to evaluate professional athletes and their success as public role models. The first athlete is selected by her. She develops a bulletin board which displays the positive character traits exhibited by the athlete. The bulletin board serves as an instructional tool to lead discussion of the values and of the athlete. All other athletes and values are selected by the students who also develop the bulletin boards.

As with Teacher #3, Teacher #4 also spoke frequently of student choice. She repeatedly used the phrase "something that they see of value" when she was referring to character traits that were discussed in her class. Student discourse was frequently referred to as not just an instructional mode but as a vital element in the process of moral development.

On the issue of teacher intentionality or neutrality, Teacher #4 told brief stories of her interactions with students surrounding the topics of Dennis Rodman and of the White House sex scandal. Upon being asked her opinion by students, she asked the class’s permission to share her opinion.

As with the other teachers, Teacher #4 also references the Bible. She refers to it as a basis for her personal belief. "They like to talk to you about them, and they like to get your reasoning defined. And they've got to
find that you have some basis for that. And that’s where
the Bible comes in."

**Teacher #5**

Teacher #5 is a male teacher of high school Bible,
personal fitness, and team sports at school "A." This is
his fourth year of teaching.

Teacher #5 is the only teacher who presents the Bible
as something that can be open to critical evaluation by the
students. The Bible is referenced often in his curriculum
including the topics of family, dating, and marriage.
However, Teacher #5 asks students "to reason out, 'Why is
this biblical? Why would God say this?'" For all other
teachers in this study, the Bible was used as a final
authority to settle the controversial matter. Teacher #5’s
introduction of Scripture is used to complicate the
reasoning process rather than to put an end to it.

Teacher #5 also describes his role as that of a play
actor at times. He takes on the role of devil’s advocate
with the intent of challenging the student to better
articulate an argument he or she may be presenting. "The
challenge to me is that I don’t position myself to make the
child think that I am antithetical to him, that I disagree
with him." Teacher #5 seems to be desiring to create a
boot camp type experience. His perception is that his
students are generally homogeneous in their worldview
and, therefore, need some artificial controversy to provide
them with an opportunity to practice their apologetic
skills. At other times, he may intentionally play the
role of a moderate when he in reality is self-proclaimedly extreme on the particular issue at hand. His purpose for this facade is to avoid alienating students who would reject his teaching if they identified it as extremist. On the other hand, he believes that teenagers desire to be extreme in their own right, and he wants to leave that position for them by not taking it himself.

In the end, Teacher #5 reveals to his students his true beliefs. And while he describes indoctrination as "to infuse . . . . to bury into the mind . . . . to pigeonhole kids into one thought process," he confesses that he indoctrinates and justifies it in that "if I don't, somebody's going to." Also, he points out that the indoctrination is conducted openly and with the support of the school and the parents. "I would call it investing more than anything else."

**Teacher #6**

Teacher #6 is a female second grade teacher of seven years at school "B." Her model for moral education is clearly Skinnerian behavior modification, a Christianized version of conservative character education. Students earn points and increase their rank in the "Lords army" as they learn definitions of virtues and as they display them. "They start out in boot camp and hopefully get to be a four star general by the end of the year." "Army money" is rewarded and can be redeemed for items in the treasure
chest. Points can also be lost if the student portrays an undesirable trait in class.

"It is the duty of a teacher in a Christian school to indoctrinate the children . . . because that’s the purpose of the school." As with other teachers in this study, Teacher #6 notes that the school does not hide its intent to enrolled families and that teachers are assisting parents. Teacher #6 also is not alone in her belief that if the process is carried out "with gentleness" that it is acceptable to indoctrinate, "forcing your opinion on someone else and not really wanting them to think for themselves" - her own definition.

**Teacher #7**

Teacher #7 is a female fifth grade teacher of five years at school "B." She succinctly and clearly communicates her approach of turning to the Bible upon any instance of moral controversy. When the Bible addresses a particular issue, neutrality is not an option for her as she communicates clearly to the students that this is not her opinion but that it is a directive from the Bible.

**Teacher #8**

Teacher #8 is a male high school math and computer teacher in his 21st year at school "B." He describes his moral education as "my life." He repeatedly speaks of teachers as role models and examples. Like Teacher #4, he waits until students invite him to offer his opinion on issues and will do so at the end of the discussion. Saving one’s opinion until the end may be interpreted as either an
effort towards courtesy or a way of getting in the final word of an argument in a supposedly tactful way.

Teacher #8 sees the moral instructor as a discipler who lives out the curriculum rather than an indoctrinator who delivers the curriculum to the student. Interestingly enough, Teacher #8 is the only research participant who made no mention whatsoever of the Bible.

Teacher #9

Teacher #9 is a female middle and high school history and Bible teacher with 17 years experience at school "C." She stresses the significance of questioning students about their stand on particular issues. Her questions challenge them to consider the implications of their choices and how those choices will affect them spiritually. She attends to her body language as students discuss controversial issues and attempts not to display an expression of shock at anything they might say.

Teacher #9 would only consider using an indoctrinative method "when it comes to salvation." "Sometimes you can word things to help them realize, to try and push them the right direction when you know it's the right thing."

Teacher #10

Teacher #10 is a female second grade teacher with nine years of experience at school "C." She held strictly to the concept that teachers should remain not only neutral but completely uninvolved in controversial issues that arise unless the students were unable to discuss the issue
in a civil manner. At the point where students could not properly discuss the controversy is when she believed she should enter as a mediator or as a judge, whichever the situation called for. "We shouldn’t condemn another person because he has an opinion that’s different from ours. But we do need at least to let them air their concerns." To this teacher, indoctrination is simply the teaching of philosophy, and she believes that she clearly teaches philosophy to her second graders.

**Teachers T11, T12, and T13**

These three teachers were interviewed together. Their individual responses influenced the others as the discourse would build and digress based on a particular comment made by another participant. Such discourse made for rich discussion but causes it to be difficult to report individual responses. Usually, the three would agree with the first spokesman’s comment and simply add a few illustrations or examples. All three of these teachers are male high school teachers at school "D." Their subject areas are English, science, and history with years of experience being ten, four, and three, respectively.

These three are the only interviewees who described their moral education curriculum as their set of rules and guidelines for student conduct. They perceived its implementation as the communication of those standards and the delivery of consequences if the standards are violated.

Similar to other teachers in the study, all three of these teachers explained that their first response to
controversial issues is to consult the Bible in order to communicate to the students what it might convey about the topic. They agreed, however, that they would avoid discussions revolving around denominational doctrinal issues because of the variety of interpretations among the students' families. The English teacher relayed a story of his own experience as a Christian school student when he was a seventh grader and of how he had voiced a doctrinal position in class that was contrary to the school's belief. The teacher had called him a "wolf in sheep's clothing . . . . Because that left a lasting impression on me about how critical one can be in their dogma, I never could be that way as a teacher."

After grappling with the term "indoctrination," all three decided that, despite the negative connotations, there were positive ways of conducting indoctrination and that they themselves did so. The science teacher viewed instructing and indoctrinating as synonymous activities. "I think you don't have a choice. Every single time you teach, you are indoctrinating."

Conclusion

Upon facing controversial issues in the moral education curriculum, Christian school educators perceive their role in a variety of ways. The following categories were developed from the participants' descriptions, stories, and beliefs.

Recruiter of mercenary soldiers. The recruiter of
mercenary soldiers solicits the assistance of a student who holds the same beliefs as she does. She then encourages that student in a variety of ways to verbalize the argument that she would rather not risk verbalizing herself.

**Censor.** The censor removes the controversial material before students have the opportunity to be exposed to it; thereby, avoiding the controversy altogether.

**Herald of truth.** The herald of truth sees his role as that of messenger of the proclamation to those who may be unaware of the expectations held by the Author of the message.

**Facilitator.** The facilitator creates an environment conducive to discussion. She values the opinions of students and encourages their expression.

**Spiritual boot camp drill sergeant.** The spiritual boot camp drill sergeant intentionally creates a militaristically rigorous environment. Students are rewarded and punished until they perform as automatons on demand. An artificially adversarial environment is created to prepare them for the day when students will face a true adversary and will need to defend themselves.

**Selective indoctrinator.** For the selective indoctrinator there are certain issues whereby the ends justifies the means. If salvation or righteous conduct appears to be the result, indoctrination is an appropriate means to arrive at this end. For all other matters, it is inappropriate.
Document Analysis

Each participating school was requested to submit documents that might communicate to parents the school’s moral education curriculum and any statements relating to the school’s approach to controversial issues. Since many teachers who unapologetically claimed to indoctrinate stated that they did so with the support of parents and the school, it is helpful to evaluate what is communicated by the schools to their enrolling families.

School "A"

School "A" is not affiliated with a sponsoring church. It is made up of a "group of parents who constitute a non-denominational community Christian school . . . . Families from more that one hundred churches entrust their children to [School "A"] being confident that they are instructed in a manner which complements the values taught at home and in the church." With such a heterogeniously denominational body of families, teachers at School "A" are cautious to enter into controversial issues that relate to opposing denominational teachings. This could disturb their support base for the school. Therefore, transdenominational principles are core elements of the curriculum.

While the school’s documents do not support a teacher who may openly teach a controversial denominational doctrine, it clearly supports them as they choose to refer to the Bible as the final say on any matter controversial. As stated in School "A’s" statement of faith: "We believe .
the very words of the original Scriptures are infallible and inerrant and that they are our final and absolute authority in every area of life and knowledge." Parents are required to sign that they are in agreement with the school's statement of faith. This enrollment procedure removes much controversy that might be present otherwise; it also provides teachers with the assurance that if they are in alignment with biblical principles, that they may openly teach that perspective of a controversial issue. If teachers are unsure of biblical support, they are more likely to remain neutral.

Promotional materials of School "A" refers to "character-building" as "an essential part of molding a young life." The clarity of the intentionality as expressed in School "A's" promotional material is paralleled by the intentionality voiced by the teachers. The teachers know what issues can acceptably be addressed with intentionality and which ones should be approached with neutrality.

School "B"

School "B's" promotional materials state that "We are forbidden by God to even hear words which cause us to depart from God's words or ways" and that "We must guard our minds and the minds of our children from the philosophies and the ways of the world." These statements provide support to the teachers for censoring out of the curriculum issues that might be in opposition to biblical teaching.
School "C"

School "C" states in its enrollment packet that "Explicit Scriptures are taught without demanding specific student alliance to traditionally controversial denominational beliefs which are rightfully the province of the local church." Teachers were consistent with this statement as they reported that they preferred to refer their students to their parents or their pastors regarding controversial denominational matters and that they preferred to be neutral on those types of issues.

School "D"

School "D" makes no direct reference in its initial materials to parents regarding its moral education or how controversial issues are addressed. It does state that "[School 'D'] is interested in attracting students . . . who are amenable to Christian instruction" and that their mission is to work "in harmony with Christian homes and local churches." The first page of School "D's" initial communication to enrolling parents lists student standards. It should be noted that the group of three teachers from this school all described their moral education curriculum as their class rules.

Conclusion

The documents promoting these four schools do communicate to some extent the moral education curriculum and how these schools perceive the role of controversial issues. Also, based on the self-reports of the teachers,
they are knowledgeable of the schools’ philosophies and do attempt to carry them out as outlined.

**Thematic Analysis**

Two pairs of themes are apparent throughout the responses of the thirteen teachers participating in this study - themes that illustrate the struggles that teachers face as they address controversial issues while attempting to develop morality. Institutional loyalty and critical thinking constitute the first pair. Selective indoctrination and sensitivity to possible student alienation constitute the second.

**Institutional Loyalty Versus Critical Thinking**

On one hand, controversial issues are valued for their ability to promote critical thinking and lively discourse. Teachers realize that disequilibrium is necessary to bring about serious cognitive consideration of a matter and that evaluation of a controversial matter can lead to positive moral action on the student’s part. On the other hand, however, teachers struggle with their own personal convictions and the mandate from school and home to promote institutional loyalty to family, church, government authority, and biblical absolutes.

When should the Christian school teacher promote critical thinking? In matters where there is clearly a biblical mandate or a school policy, Christian school teachers prefer to directly teach the mandate and possibly discuss the benefits of following the mandate. In matters
where there is no biblical or institutional mandate, it may be professional suicide for the teacher either to permit open discussion while remaining neutral or to share with students his or her own personal convictions. The risks of facing the retribution of parents or school cause Christian teachers often to limit the promotion of critical thinking as it relates to controversial moral issues.

**Selective Indoctrination Versus Sensitivity to Student Alienation**

Christian school teachers express positive feelings about indoctrinating selectively. While struggling with the negative connotations related to the word itself, teachers believe that it is imperative and unavoidable that they indoctrinate students in the way of eternal salvation and in moral absolutes as expressed in scripture. These are the only issues in which they are comfortable using such a tactic. In all other instances it is perceived as inappropriate.

Another theme expressed in the data reveals that although teachers are compelled to indoctrinate on certain issues, they are keenly aware that students might become alienated because of these tactics. They acknowledge that their success as teachers depends upon their ability to maintain a positive relationship with students and that some coercive instructional strategies might very well alienate a number of students, thereby hindering the pedagogical relationship.
Based upon the documents published by the schools and distributed to enrolling parents, students and parents in these schools should expect a measure of indoctrination of select issues. Parents not interested in submitting their children to that type of instruction are free to choose not to enroll. Therefore, the teachers' fear of alienating students is more present with issues outside the realm of biblical mandates and eternal salvation.

Teachers may be less neutral than they claim to be at times. While trying not to alienate students, they may be resorting to strategies that may seem less coercive but are quite manipulative nevertheless. The characterizations mentioned earlier in this chapter illustrate some of these strategies that may be less offensive to students but that are extremely manipulative. One such example is that of the "recruiter of mercenary soldiers." To solicit, encourage, and reward those who openly voice the opinions of the teacher while the teacher appears to be neutral is a disingenuous manner of relating to students.

Another artificial relationship with students is the one in which the teacher chooses to play a role, such as devil's advocate, without clarifying with the students that it is a role play. This characterization mentioned earlier in the chapter was called the "spiritual boot camp drill sergeant" because of the intent of the teacher to strengthen students in their arguments before they faced true opposition.

A secret means of manipulation is to censor out
controversial material before students have an opportunity to be exposed to it. This constitutes what has been referred to as the null curriculum - that which is intentionally not taught.

Conclusion

Overwhelmingly, the 13 respondents claimed to value the role of controversial issues in promoting students’ moral development. They had difficulty in explaining how they made room for them in the curriculum or how they permitted them to be explored by students in a meaningful way. The most difficult issues to address are those dealing with contradictory denominational doctrines. In denominational matters, teachers remain neutral; in some schools, they do so by school policy.

The themes of loyalty, critical thinking, selective indoctrination, and student alienation were prevalent in the participants’ responses. Teachers sensed a moral obligation to promote loyalty of students to their parents, church, governmental authority figures, and to biblical absolutes. While not promoting a critical analysis of the Bible, teachers did desire to promote critical thinking of the values held by parents, church, and government based on biblical standards. Also, the theme of selective indoctrination seemed to compete with the theme of the teachers’ awareness of possible student alienation.
Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

And though all the winds of doctrine were let loose to play upon the earth, so Truth be in the field, we do injuriously by licensing and prohibiting to misdoubt her strength. Let her and Falsehood grapple; who ever knew Truth put to the worse, in a free and open encounter?

John Milton, quoted in Whitehead, 1994, p. 258

This study set out to explore the specific problems that Christian school educators face as they address controversial issues in the moral education curriculum and to discover how some of these teachers choose to approach such issues. The intent was to listen to the voices of these teachers in order to better understand what they experience as they attempt to fulfill their professional and spiritual obligations. They expressed a variety of perspectives about their moral goals for students, the role of controversy in the moral development of their students, and their own roles as teachers.

Summary

The data supplied by the teachers in this study contain many anecdotes, opinions, and directives. To summarize the content of the transcripts would be less
meaningful than to consider the recurring themes prevalent throughout their conversation.

The first notable theme is that of loyalty. To be loyal is to be true to or faithful to another entity. In this case the objects of the teachers' loyalties were family, church, government, and biblical absolutes. By far, the greatest loyalty for these teachers is to biblical absolutes. If the Bible directly or indirectly addresses a controversial issue, the principle is presented as the final authority on the matter. If there is no biblical mention of the issue, teachers overwhelmingly prefer to refer the matter to parents and pastors while remaining neutral themselves. And when controversial issues revolve around governmental figures, teachers cite biblical defense for continuing loyal prayer support and submission to governmental authority.

A seemingly competing theme is that of critical thinking. Teachers acknowledge the value of controversial issues in that they "get students to think." Because of the political climate of the Christian school, however, teachers may not welcome the controversial issues into the curriculum. Fiscal control of most Christian schools is based in homes and churches. Parents' tuition and church support are what feed the Christian school budget. To encourage critical thinking of principles or doctrines taught in the students' homes and churches could bring the demise of the teacher.

Selective indoctrination is yet another theme present
in the data. Despite negative connotations and definitions provided by the participants of indoctrination, they overwhelmingly acknowledged their practice of selective indoctrination. This is compatible with the literature of character educators who embrace indoctrination of values as one of their chief methods. Participants in the study repeatedly stated that indoctrination was justified for two prominent reasons: (1) others indoctrinate, and (2) the eternal salvation of students depended upon it. Therefore, specifically in the area of eternal salvation, indoctrination was considered an acceptable practice.

Finally, the theme of student alienation was evident throughout the data. Realizing that coercive techniques might bring about a rejection by the students, teachers spoke regularly of their caution not to "push away" or "alienate" students, especially in matters dealing with types of entertainment and different denominational doctrines.

Conclusions

The contemporary Christian school movement is still fairly young. Schools were established by churches and parent associations that agreed upon basic founding principles. The monolithic nature of Christian schools may be challenged in the future by political efforts such as Florida Governor Jeb Bush’s Opportunity Scholarships program which went into effect for the 1999-2000 school
year. This voucher program pays tuition for students to attend private schools. Participating private schools are not permitted to reject Opportunity Scholarship students and are not permitted to teach religious dogma to those unwilling to submit themselves to it. If the program continues, it could change the type of moral education curriculum offered in the Christian schools. It could also change the dynamics of the teacher-student relationship. What is now so confidently taught in what is self-described as an indoctrinative manner, may not be permitted in the future.

The spread of the parents' rights movement may also have an impact on the moral education of the Christian school. Presently, the parents' rights movement is a conservative effort active in the public schools to censor issues of a controversial nature out of the curriculum for their own students. It may, however, spread to the Christian school with parents claiming the right not to have their children proselytized or indoctrinated.

Considering society's shift to a postmodern worldview which devalues metanarratives of dogmatic absolutes, the Christian school community should evaluate how it can remain true to its mission as it faces a more skeptical constituency. In the new millennium, controversy will not be minimized but will increase as a multitude of voices are given freedom of expression via the technology of the internet. Christian school students will become more exposed to controversy, especially as Christian schools
advance in online technology. How will Christian schools respond to this new element? They may have no other option but to explore all aspects of the issues as it becomes more difficult to censor undesirable content.

Dialogue is encouraged among Christian school parents, teachers, and administrators about the manner in which controversy will be addressed. Inservice opportunities also may provide collaboration among teachers for them to gain new strategies to deal with controversial issues.

Recommendations

Recommendations for Christian School Moral Education Curriculum

It is recommended that Christian school moral education curriculum elude all manner of manipulation, indoctrination, and other disingenuous techniques when addressing controversial issues. This does not require instructors to be neutral on every issue but to avoid attempts to influence students' values through means that may appear to involve trickery.

With its heavy reliance on Skinnerian behaviorism, the recent character education movement may not provide the best model for Christian schools. Behavioristic techniques are not commensurate with Christian principles that humankind is created in the image of God with the ability to reason, to choose, and to evaluate. Therefore, curriculum for the Christian school should, in an age-
appropriate manner, appeal to the students’ ability to reason through conflicting values.

Upon describing their moral education curriculum and the controversial issues therein, participants in this study acknowledged individual moral issues to the neglect of social moral issues, such as poverty, violence, injustice, environmental abuse, and racism. While Christian schools may require students to participate in service projects relating to these issues, the participants in this study did not identify such issues as significant in their moral education. Jesus’ own teachings frequently addressed these issues; therefore, they should be demarginalized in the Christian school curriculum.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

As the contemporary Christian school movement matures, it is imperative that research data be shared with the professional community. This particular study endeavors to develop an understanding of the role of controversial issues in the moral education curriculum as perceived by Christian school educators. Other studies are recommended for future exploration. Further studies are needed to observe Christian school teachers as they address controversial issues; do they implement what they claim to? How do students perceive the role of the teacher when controversial issues arise? Would parents of Christian school students agree that there are certain issues they desire their students to be indoctrinated in? What is the difference between the Christian school’s intended moral
education curriculum and its enacted curriculum?
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