

- Discriminate between source materials such as *Mein Kampf* and textbooks. Any document is admissible to

a learning situation. The question of its relationship to the course or unit should be determined.

Preparing Teachers for Controversial Issues

J. MARTIN KLOTSCHÉ

Schools should develop persons eager for truth and teachers should be capable of encouraging and guiding students in their approach to it, according to J. Martin Klotsche, President, State Teachers College, Milwaukee, Wisconsin.

ONE fact seems to have emerged clearly out of the present world confusion. It is that we are engaged in a decisive struggle between those who want to remain free and those who are determined regardless of cost to enslave the human spirit.

This is not the first time in history that man has been confronted with this problem. Yet the effort now being conducted by the Communists, in ruthlessness and singleness of purpose, is without equal in the annals of history. For in the communist world the state has intruded into every phase of human life and in so doing has destroyed creativeness, eliminated criticism, penalized idiosyncrasy, with a resulting enfeeblement of the intellect that should be of real concern to all of us. It is the issue of freedom versus dogma, then, which should have top priority in the war in which we are presently engaged.

Now in dealing with the ideological threat offered by the communist world, we can proceed in one of several different ways. Sensing the danger of this threat to our own way of life, we can emulate the Soviets by resorting to the

same tactics that they use. Needless to say, there are persons in America today who in their mistaken zeal would fasten upon all of us the very evils that they abhor in our adversaries. Yet these same persons would attempt to defend their behavior behind the label of Americanism. There is perhaps no more insidious way than this for making respectable ideas which otherwise we would abhor.

Certainly in becoming aware of the tactics of the opposition we should not become so hypnotized by their actions that unconsciously we imitate them. Let us admit that the fundamental problem of our age is the preservation of democracy and of our free institutions. But let us also candidly state that we shall not solve this problem by resorting to the same tactics that are employed by the Communists, who assume that they are omnipotent, omniscient and guiltless and thus can turn falsehood into truth and ignorance into virtue.

Freedom to Inquire

But there is another way of dealing with the problem at hand. One of the

great virtues in American education, as contrasted with education in the totalitarian world, lies in its cultivation of independent thought and of critical inquiry. I suspect that curiosity is one of the most common characteristics of man. Certainly the child at an early age finds the need for satisfying this curiosity in many different ways. And I am inclined to think that one of the severest criticisms that can be made of parents and teachers is their tendency to look upon such curiosity as an annoyance and an unwarranted infringement upon the freedom of the adult. In fact, in all areas of human behavior we seem inclined to view as suspect any person who insists upon enjoying his individual freedom to a maximum degree by expressing ideas considered unorthodox, provocative, unpopular or a little bit different from those commonly expressed.

Yet some of the most important discoveries in recent years were made possible because man was free to move into uncharted areas unhampered by restrictions and limitations imposed upon him by others. Certainly we should refrain from making people fearful of holding beliefs that are different from those held by others, or of being pressed into the position of being more cautious about expressing their ideas. Such restraints if allowed to persist will in fact make smaller and smaller the area in which the mind can operate and will thus discourage us from facing the very problems that must be faced if our democracy is to survive. "A state which dwarfs men," John Stuart Mill contended, "in order that they may be more docile instruments in its hands even for beneficial purposes, will find

that with small men no great thing can really be accomplished."

Informed and Intelligent Opinion

Implications of these comments as they bear on the education of teachers to face controversial issues should be clear. The liberation of the mind and the cultivation of independent thought and critical inquiry thus become paramount tasks of education. It is the freeing of the mind, and not its shackling, that has made and will continue to make progress possible.

Our free institutions depend upon an informed and an intelligent opinion. An opinion can be neither informed nor intelligent if, during the process of its formulation, it has been deprived of the knowledge of the nonconformist and of the dissenter. Obviously we cannot have the freedom that we cherish if we limit this freedom only to those who agree with us.

Writing more than one hundred years ago on matters of education, Malthus contended that, "the principal argument which I have heard advanced against the system of national education in England is that the common people would be put in a capacity to read such works as those of Paine, and that the consequences would probably be fatal to government. But on this subject I agree most cordially with Adam Smith in thinking that an instructed and well-informed people would be much less likely to be led away by inflammatory writings and much better able to detect the false declamation of interested and ambitious demagogues, than an ignorant people. One or two readers in a parish are sufficient to circulate any quantity of sedition; and if these be

gained to the democratic side, they will probably have the power of doing much more mischief, by selecting the passages best suited to their hearers, and choosing the moments when their oratory is most likely to have the most effect, than if each individual in the parish had been in the capacity to read and judge of the whole work himself; and at the same time to read and judge of the opposing arguments, which we may suppose would also reach him."

One of the greatest responsibilities, then, in preparing prospective teachers to face controversy is to teach them to keep their thinking flexible. This can be done by examining all possible alternatives, treating each one logically before deciding which one is preferable; and in the process examining critically the content of one's own beliefs and subjecting these to a process of continuous verification.

Teachers should realize that there is a scientific way of looking at the world of which they are a part. Every problem which we face calls for a certain amount of explanation, logical inquiry, suspended judgment, preliminary trial and a synthesis subject to continuous change. Thus science and its methods should not be reserved exclusively for the scientists, since its processes can affect beneficially the lives of all of us. "Science," James Harvey Robinson wrote, "is not confined to stars, chemicals, physical forces, rocks, plants and animals as is often assumed. There is a scientific way of looking at ourselves—our thoughts, feelings, habits and customs. Science in short includes all the careful and critical knowledge we have about anything of which we can know something."

Persons Eager for Truth

Our first responsibility is to send out into the world persons eager for the truth and capable of devising the ways and means of attaining it. Yet the mere search for truth is not enough. Even an orderly mind can leave a person uncertain about the objectives and purposes of life. It is imperative, therefore, that we teach young people not only how to attain truth but how to face boldly and with imagination the controversial issues of the day. For some it is no doubt easier not to undertake such risks by simply looking out upon the confusions of the world without becoming a part of them. There is an attraction in the ivory tower of the classroom, for, as Robert Lynd has pointed out in *Knowledge for What?*, ivory-towered people work "in a long, leisurely world in which the hands of a clock crawl slowly over a vast dial; to him precise penetration of the unknown seems too grand an enterprise to be hurried and one simply works ahead within study walls relatively soundproofed against the clamorous urgencies of the world outside."

Actually our responsibilities as teachers do not end in the classroom. We must help young people to face boldly and with conviction the issues at hand no matter what the controversy may be. Intelligence comes from two words—*inter* meaning *between* and *legere* meaning *to choose*. Intelligence, then, means ability to choose—to choose between something that is good as against something that is evil, to select something that may be permanently valuable as against something of only transitory worth. Yet in a society that is

becoming more and more preoccupied with fear we find it increasingly difficult to make such intelligent choices. We seem to be devoting more and more of our energies to mobilizing our anxieties and less and less to developing our potentialities. And if we continue to persist in such practices we shall gradually narrow our intellectual horizons until we may all emerge as mental midgets.

Ways of Accomplishing Change

As I have studied the history of the development of our own civilization over the years I have been impressed again and again with the fact that in those areas in which we have been successful (and there have been areas in which we have failed), this success has been because we have not been afraid to face the issues and to make necessary adjustments and modifications when the occasion called for them. As a matter of fact, the great achievement of free societies throughout the world is that they have found ways of accomplishing change steadily without disregarding the dignity of the human being.

Achievement has never been synonymous with absence of change or with immobility. To assume that it has is

an illusion, for there is nothing static in this world, as Dr. Fosdick recently pointed out in a *New York Times* article entitled, "We Must Not Be Afraid of Change." He stated that the future belongs not to rigid absolutes, but to things that can grow—that the beliefs to which we subscribe must constantly be re-expressed and restated in a contemporary idiom.

It is most important that prospective teachers learn to re-express their beliefs in an idiom meaningful for the present world. We are engaged at the present time in a war for survival. It is a war which in the long run will not necessarily be won by soldiers and generals, important though it is that we now throw the preponderance of our military power on the side of law and order.

But in the long pull of history we shall be judged not only by our advancing armies but also by the ideas which we advance. And for teachers there is no better weapon than that of ideas. For only through the advancement of ideas that are better and more dynamic than are the ideas of our adversaries can we hope to save our free institutions and in time to extend the horizons of freedom to that part of the world not yet free.

Copyright © 1951 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. All rights reserved.