

Figure 4. Issues Identified by Respondents.

Issue	What is the most important social issue regularly studied as part of the school curricula?		What is the most important social issue facing humankind?		Is there a social issue you want educators to take a position on? What is that issue?	
	Frequency of Response	Adjusted Percentage	Frequency of Response	Adjusted Percentage	Frequency of Response	Adjusted Percentage
1. Nuclear disarmament	14	6.4	88	34.8	71	36.8
2. Pollution of earth's environment	43	19.7	27	10.7	14	7.3
3. Division of the planet into areas of wealth and poverty	21	9.6	42	16.6	9	4.7
4. Alternatives to existing forms of U.S. political, social, and economic organization	36	16.5	16	6.3	5	2.6
5. Racism	12	5.5	5	2.0	8	4.1
6. Sexism	10	4.6	5	2.0	9	4.7
7. Genetic engineering	1	.5	2	.8	3	1.6
8.* Role of education in society	8	3.7	3	1.2	33	17.1
9.* Substance abuse	10	4.6	2	.8	1	.5
10.* Relation between God and humans	2	.9	2	.8	1	.5
11.* Citizenship	40	18.3	53	20.9	35	18.1
12.* U.S. history	21	9.6	7	2.8	4	2.1

\*Added by respondents.

most important social issues facing humankind were not the same as the social issues most often studied in schools. This is especially apparent on the issue of nuclear disarmament. The data reported in Figure 4 and the data that show that the significance ratings for nuclear disarmament correspond with those of fewer issues (three) than any other survey issue suggest that nuclear

disarmament is in a category by itself in terms of: (1) its perceived significance, (2) the degree to which respondents want educators to take a position on it, and (3) the degree of agreement that it is seldom included in school curricula.

It seems safe to conclude that social issues are considered important by respondents. However, in spite of their perceived significance social issues seem

to constitute an ill-defined territory that is regarded as best explored within the social studies curriculum. It would be interesting, at some point, to look more closely at the degree of content knowledge ASCD members possess about selected social issues as well as the nature and strength of the belief that social issues are primarily a content area within social studies.

## Understand Before Taking a Stand: A Response to Molnar

PAUL E. WILSON

Prior to becoming an educator five years ago, I served the nation for more than 30 years around the world at a variety of levels in both the United States and foreign governments. What I have found since coming to education is surprising and in some

instances shocking. This is why I am writing concerning the Alex Molnar article and questionnaire in the October 1982 issue.

First, I don't think the right questions were asked in the survey. Based on my association with many teachers as fellow

students, as working peers, and as personal friends, I have found that the majority pay little or no attention to social issues except in a peripheral way. They generally do not read newspapers, participate in the political process, read news journals or magazines, or discuss

social issues as part of their normal activities. Many confine their news input to the radio or TV evening news. Many others don't even do that much. This is especially true of those working on advanced degree programs—unfortunately, those who will become leaders in the education community.

The reason for their lack of knowledge—time constraints on teaching all day and attending classes in the evening or on weekends—is clear, but the result is that many who are being questioned about taking positions have no foundation on which to take such stands. Other educators may not have made an effort to understand all sides of the issues, either because they do not have the time or because they are unwilling to listen to arguments from proponents of the other side. I submit that educators who are well informed and capable of discussing all sides of an issue are in the minority.

I do not mean to attack educators and say they should not have opinions. I would suggest, however, that any organization that asks members to take a stand should make sure that the members really understand the issues. The social issues survey should have begun by asking educators what they read and how often, and whether they attend meetings that discuss issues. Do they know both sides of issues? Have they participated in the political process during the last year? Do they identify themselves with but a single issue, for example, ERA or the environment? In other words, "Who educated the educators on the social issues?"

My problem with Molnar's survey is that it is slanted. Most individuals will find every issue important and will say the issues have limited exposure in the present curriculum in most schools. Finally, most will reach the conclusion that the issues should be included in curriculum. It appears to be not really a survey, but a justification for the proposal that educators should take on social issues. I will be astounded if that doesn't turn out to be the case.

One doesn't have to look very far to find major criticism of today's education. While I don't believe we have to just "get back to the basics," we are asking for additional trouble if we decide to get tangled up in social issues. We cannot possibly do so with a nonpartisan approach, and if we start spending time on the issue of nuclear disarmament—at the expense of better reading and

math skills—we'll see how angry the public can get.

Let's concentrate on what educators are supposed to do best: educating students so they bring acquired skills to bear in analyzing social issues as individuals. □

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## For Your Information

### Environmental Concerns

*Phillip Johnson* says that readers will find useful information about environmental issues and news of environmental events in *Environmental Action* magazine. He also recommends the "Expeditions" column in *Science 83* magazine. This column features articles of interest to people who enjoy the outdoors.

In *Herbert I. London's* article, if you are interested in the educational materials he mentions, contact the Hudson Institute, New York University, 715 Broadway, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10003.

*Miriam S. Wetzel* reports that the following books and journals were very helpful in preparing lesson plans and activities:

—*Fluegelman, A., ed. The New Games Book.* New Games Foundation. New York: Doubleday, 1976.

—*Gross, P., and Railton, E. Teaching Science In An Outdoor Environment.* Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1972.

—*Santos, J. And This Our Life, Vol. I and II,* available from Nature's Classroom, Maple Rock Farm, RFD #1, Southbridge, MA 01550.

—*Van Matre, S. Sunship Earth.* American Camping Association, Bradford Woods, Marlensville, IN 46151.

### Nuclear Disarmament

During the month of April the Ground Zero Organization will sponsor an event with classroom applications entitled "Fire-breaks: A War/Peace Game." Educational materials designed to accompany participation in the game have been prepared by the Ground Zero national office. These materials include relevant background materials and instructions on how to structure a "play along" game in the classroom. Contact Ground Zero, Suite 421, 806 15th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20005. Phone: (202) 638-7402, for further information.

### Coming Up in Social Issues and the Schools

May 1983

Nuclear Disarmament

September 1983

Wealth and Poverty on Planet Earth; manuscript deadline: May 1, 1983

December/January 1984

Open—topic suggestions invited

April 1984

Open—topic suggestions invited

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