

Revisiting Academic Freedom in Social Studies: A Special Issue on the Freedom to Teach and to Learn

Nancy C. Patterson and Jack L. Nelson

This special issue continues the important role that NCSS and its members have in highlighting one of the core interests of social studies education—academic freedom. Our profession takes seriously the need to advocate, support, and enhance the freedom necessary for teachers and students to fully engage in education. Our society's current situation requires that we take this freedom even more seriously as the twenty-first century unfolds. Threats and restrictions abound; teacher and student freedoms are in jeopardy. Academic freedom is worthy of a revisit on a regular basis.

Articles in this issue show a roller-coaster context for academic freedom in our schools and in social studies courses. The authors describe the history of and rationale for academic freedom, give an overview of its status in the courts—both for teachers and students—and consider the nature and implications of teacher decision-making. These scholars thus entertain the questions of why academic freedom is important, how it has stood in the past, where it stands at present, and what we can do to continue to avail ourselves of its benefits.

The issue begins with three articles that remind us of the rationale for academic freedom. The grounds for advocating for academic freedom are outlined by Co-editor Jack L. Nelson and Carole Hahn. James Daly shows how teacher education involves all of us, and how it should improve in this area. Former special issue editor Todd Clark offers his perspective on the need to keep this issue alive. Noted attorneys Michael D. Simpson and Robert M. O'Neil present a continuing and

somewhat disheartening dilemma in laws and court decisions for teachers and students, albeit with a glimmer of hope. Three authors consider the daily decisions teachers must make in regard to their academic freedom. Nancy C. Patterson documents struggles teachers have with self-censorship. Diana Hess, using personal reflection, suggests a new way for teachers to approach their rights. Anna Ochoa-Becker offers a brief case study and some guideposts for reflection about classroom decisions and academic freedom. This special issue closes with a Resource Kit that offers further ideas for teachers. 🌐

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