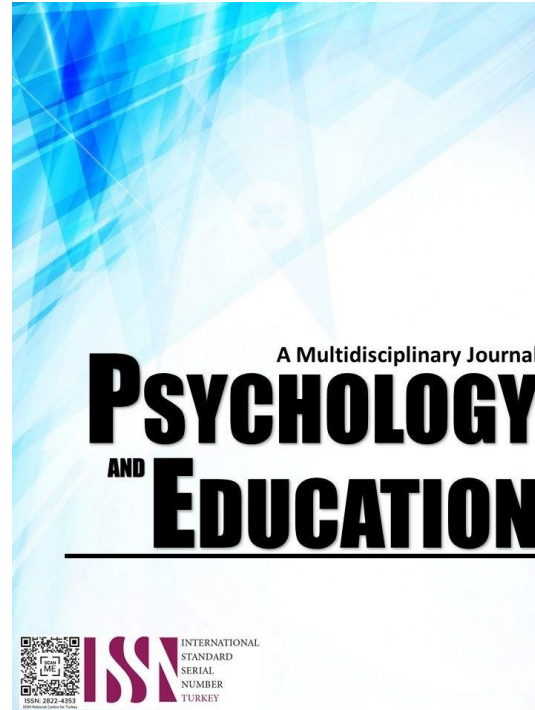


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Lived Experiences of Secondary Social Studies Teachers in Teaching Controversial Public Issues (CPIs)

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Abstract

This study explored the crucial importance of teaching controversial public issues in, acknowledging the prevalent occurrence of differing opinions among students about numerous issues facing society. Using a transcendental phenomenological method, this research explored the complex experiences of secondary social studies teachers as they navigated these controversial issues in public schools. The study illuminated the lived experiences of five *Kontemporaryong Isyu* teachers through and in-depth interview. These teachers were under the jurisdiction of the Schools Division Office of Caloocan City. The findings emphasized several important themes, such as the importance of thorough training for teachers, the need for curriculum to address current societal issues, the autonomy given to teachers in choosing topics and teaching methods, the use of learner-centered teaching approaches, and the difficulties faced in effectively engaging students. Additionally, the study emphasized the crucial need for teachers to promote democratic values, such as equity and reverence, to encourage substantial discussions and analytical reasoning among pupils. These observations had implications for secondary Social Studies teachers and Social Studies Administrators, highlighting the importance of continuous professional growth and the establishment of supportive educational settings that promoted the development of well-informed citizens and encouraged students to engage in critical thinking.

Keywords: *Controversial Public Issues (CPIs), democratic education, democratic attitudes, Kontemporaryong Isyu*

Introduction

The Philippines experienced various socio-political controversies in 2023, encompassing issues such as government transparency, red-tagging, human rights violations, and press freedom (Arao, 2024). These issues often ignite passionate discussions, revealing Filipino society's diverse perspectives and values. Some learners at the time of the study were passionate about controversial issues, especially politics and governance, human rights, gender, and religion. Their perspectives are ubiquitous on social media, particularly in the comment section of news websites, where they assert their stand and throw inflammatory remarks at those with opposite insights.

The subject area that deals with these controversial issues is *Araling Panlipunan*, especially at the Grade 10 level, where the focus is contemporary issues in the Philippines (DepEd, 2014). Students studying Grade 10 Social Studies receive extensive instruction that prepares them to be capable and significant societal contributors. This is accomplished by starting the process of creating solutions to real-world concerns or problems. While these are the goals of *Kontemporaryong Isyu*, there are times when certain controversial public issues lead to heated discussions due to conflicting views among learners. This conflict in the class is inevitable as the class is a microcosm of society, which brings together different views (Valente et al., 2020). Consequently, secondary Social Studies teachers may experience challenges in managing learners with various perspectives, resulting in debates among them in their eagerness to express their opinions and defend their positions. Since it is impossible to eliminate the diversity of views and their consequent conflicts (Manesis et al., 2019), Social Studies teachers need training to acquire the necessary skills and attitudes to manage conflicting views among learners and educate them to discuss controversial public issues democratically (Loomis, 2019).

One scholar who offers a framework for the democratic discussions of controversial issues in society, as experienced by the learners, is John Dewey. Dewey, in his seminal work "Democracy and Education," believes that the primary objective of an educator is to grant children greater autonomy to investigate their environment. Teachers are crucial when choosing and guiding experiences and are responsible for setting up a democratic environment (Hassen, 2023). Dewey is also against indoctrination in education as he believes education should focus on cultivating intellectual independence, initiative, and inventiveness (Kettler, 2020).

While it is interesting to study how Social Studies teachers teach controversial public issues through a democratic framework, most literature is about characterizing controversial public issues and analyzing the attitudes of teachers toward controversial public issues. Little study has been done to examine the lived experiences of secondary Social Studies teachers in teaching controversial public issues. Therefore, the researcher's objective is to explore the lived experiences of secondary social studies teachers in guiding the learners in the discussion of controversial public issues in connection to the framework given by Dewey, whether they provided autonomy to the learners or provided a democratic environment that allowed everyone to express his or her opinions.

Research Questions

This study explored the lived experiences of secondary Social Studies teachers teaching controversial public issues (CPIs). Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of secondary Social Studies teachers in teaching controversial public issues?

2. How do secondary Social Studies teachers teach controversial public issues to secondary students?
3. How do these secondary Social Studies teachers address the difficulty in teaching controversial public issues in secondary social studies curricula?

Literature Review

Definition of Controversial Public Issues

One of the most accepted definitions of controversial public issues was given by Hess (2009), defining them as issues or problems that concern the public and cause significant disagreement. It was expanded by Pace (2022), citing Stradling et al. (1984), who defined it as problems and disputes that divide society and for which significant groups within society offer conflicting explanations and solutions.

Woolley (2020) added to these definitions and pointed out the contentious nature of controversial public issues because they involve different individuals who can hold rationally deduced and heartfelt opinions that contrast significantly with those of others. Aside from being contentious, controversial public issues are also complicated as there are no clear answers because they are issues on which people often hold strong views based on their own experiences, interests, values, and personal context (Oxfam, 2023).

Overall, the common elements in the definitions of controversial public issues cited are the disagreement among people and the importance of the CPIs that connect to value, political, and social issues, in which the stances of the different sides are mainly based on reason and valid knowledge.

Democratic Education

Democratic education is a philosophy of education that originated from John Dewey. Teaching controversial public issues (CPIs) is effective if the class is perceived to have a democratic space. For this to work, Dewey asserted that students must have firsthand encounters with democracy as a way of living within a heterogeneous educational community. He also conceived a school as a miniature representation of the broader democratic society, where students and teachers engage in reciprocal learning through equal interaction. However, teachers are responsible for establishing a learning environment that fosters the continual development of students (Kira, 2019).

Dewey contended that in a democratic school environment, everyone in the educational system, from the teacher to the high school principal, should possess a degree of influence in the educational decision-making process (Feng, 2019).

Kettler (2020) pointed out that Dewey was against a curriculum that aimed to indoctrinate students. On the other hand, he supported a curriculum that promotes open discussion and thoughtful consideration, allowing students to develop logical and ethical stances on controversial public issues freely.

According to Lind (2023), Dewey pushed for amicable cooperation. It is a habit to regard people with different opinions as individuals from whom we might gain knowledge. In response to this, several writers have attempted to identify behaviors that promote a democratic education; Jim Garrison explored the practice of thoughtful listening, which involves the willingness to challenge and reshape our societal norms through open and inclusive conversations that transcend our differences. Lucretia Hubler-Larimore examined the practice of expressing one's thoughts and opinions in educational settings, such as classrooms and schools. Kathy Hytten proposed using habituation in experiments, pluralism, and fallibilism. This further emphasized the strong relationship between democracy and rational decision-making (Lind, 2023).

In essence, democratic education is about imparting knowledge and nurturing active citizens capable of engaging in democratic processes and contributing positively to society. It is a dynamic approach emphasizing critical thinking, open dialogue, and cooperative learning within a diverse community.

The Teaching of Controversial Public Issues

Teaching controversial public issues (CPIs) is of utmost importance because of the inevitable conflict that arises between the perspectives of learners on various problems as they relate to the society in which they belong. Hung (2019) argued that CPIs help to develop democratic values and political tolerance within and for a democratic society, including enhancing students' ability to engage in higher-order thinking and interpersonal skills. This is supported by Kuş and Öztürk (2019) by providing numerous justifications for why there is a need to teach CPIs to public school students. The primary reasons for this thinking are their civic responsibilities in a diverse democracy, enhancing their capacity for analytical thinking, and improving their ability to communicate effectively with others.

In addition, facilitating open discussions on controversial public issues is associated with higher political efficacy, interest, tolerance, and knowledge levels. Incorporating diverse viewpoints is essential in fostering media literacy, civic reasoning, and discourse and cultivating critical thinking and other competencies necessary for active participation in a democratic society (Pace, 2021).

The main point of teaching CPI is that students gain life-relevant knowledge and develop a broader perspective on controversial issues. Teachers are also encouraged to consider a variety of viewpoints when teaching controversial issues. In addition, students are granted opportunities to engage in substantive dialogue with their classmates, wherein all perspectives are valued and ideas are exchanged.

Knowledge and the ability to engage in civil discourse are essential for their active participation in our democracy (Chimezie, 2023).

In synthesis, teaching controversial public issues is an essential component of democratic education since it provides students with the required knowledge, skills, and attitudes to engage in democratic society actively. CPI allows students to negotiate the difficulties of modern life and contribute effectively to positive social change by promoting critical thinking, civic involvement, and inclusive dialogue.

Controversial Public Issues in the Philippines

The contemporary issues in the Philippines align well with civic competence requirements. Considering the citizens' current circumstances, the first quarter establishes a livelihood program. The second quarter focuses on promoting greater political engagement within society. In the third quarter, students are expected to arrange a symposium that explores human rights and the society's obligation to uphold them. Lastly, the fourth quarter centers around a student-led case study that examines issues or challenges in the field of education. Grade 10 Social Studies provides comprehensive training to students, equipping them with the necessary skills to become competent and influential members of society. This is achieved using real-world issues or problems as the foundation for developing solutions. A deep understanding of society and the nation enables students to connect with their surroundings and ultimately develop into critical thinkers who can effectively address societal issues and difficulties (Reyes, 2017; DepEd, 2014).

Teaching Approaches to Controversial Public Issues

As a result of the difficulty involved in teaching controversial public issues (CPIs), there are a great deal of different teaching strategies that can be incorporated during classroom discussions of CPIs. The National Council on Social Science (2016) recommended a critical inquiry method for teaching controversial public issues. This method exposes students to diverse ideas, even those that may diverge from their perspectives. Similarly, Pace (2022) introduced a teaching approach called "contained risk-taking" for teaching controversial public issues. It actively addresses potential risks while promoting the teaching of controversial topics through inquiry and discussion.

Misco (2018) suggested that one important factor affecting how controversial public issues are discussed in the classroom is how much of an open climate students need to consider opposing viewpoints. In connection to this, Alven (2024) proposed that educators may use deliberative discussions within the classroom, thereby assisting learners in developing the capacity to accept opposing points of view, comprehend intricate matters through diverse lenses, and articulate their insights and expertise about significant controversial issues.

According to Sloan (2021), to introduce controversial issues, teachers can start by providing a general text and demonstrating summary abilities to the entire class while also including relevant contextual information. Furthermore, the class can use the Circle of Viewpoints Visible Thinking routine developed by Harvard's Project Zero. This routine invites students to contemplate several views by imagining the inquiries that different stakeholders may pose.

Active learning is one approach to teaching controversial public issues. Establishing a disruptive pedagogy in which more time is spent on discussion, debate, critique, and the formation of well-informed opinions rather than on facts in and of themselves is an exceptionally effective strategy. This can be accomplished by integrating practical experiences and using hands-on activities (Goodenough et al., 2023).

In synthesis, scholars' array of teaching strategies underscores the complexity of teaching CPIs and the importance of adopting diverse approaches to promote meaningful engagement and understanding among students. By incorporating these strategies, educators can create inclusive classroom environments where students feel empowered to explore controversial issues, consider multiple viewpoints, and develop critical thinking skills essential for informed citizenship.

Challenges in Teaching Controversial Public Issues

Teaching controversial public issues can be as complex for teachers as they worry about maintaining emotional control, mainly when the topic contains multiple points of view (LeMay, 2019).

A social studies teacher may also find it challenging to teach controversial public issues because of the persistent tensions between various racial, socioeconomic, and religious groups in schools, probably made worse by the chaotic sociopolitical environment (Pace, 2016).

Another challenge Flensner and Von der Lippe (2019) raised is the classroom of disagreement, where students will inevitably have different points of view that could conflict. Similar to this is the concept of classroom in turmoil, or incidents where teachers "are confronted with remarks that are confrontational." by students or in the context of hotly debated conversations or polarizing incidents (Alstein, 2019).

Overall, the difficulties related to teaching controversial public issues highlight the significance of equipping educators with the support and resources required to handle complex topics proficiently. Effective techniques for handling emotional reactions, resolving conflicts in the classroom, and fostering productive discussions are crucial for establishing inclusive educational settings where students can actively participate in contentious subjects while valuing a range of viewpoints.

Addressing The Challenges in Teaching Controversial Public Issues

According to Jofre and Stein (2019), to address controversial public issues in the classroom, teachers should ideally possess knowledge of their students' living environments and interests, enabling them to discern their motivations and areas of interest. Establishing a secure educational setting is imperative, where students are encouraged to openly voice their opinions and embrace ideological diversity. The teacher should articulate their stance on the argument and reveal its underlying reasoning.

Wansink et al. (2023) argued that students must demonstrate a willingness to participate fully in classroom discussions of controversial issues by expressing their own opinions and attentively considering the viewpoints of other students to gain advantages.

Teachers and students must guarantee that the discourse maintains respect and accuracy. Maintaining this delicate equilibrium might prove challenging in situations where strong emotions overshadow information (Lintner, 2018).

Loomis (2019) stated that the effectiveness of discussions about controversial issues is enhanced when educators have undergone training on cultivating a positive and respectful environment and facilitating substantive classroom discourse. Effectively instructing CPIs requires a significant investment of time, deliberate practice, and comprehensive instruction. Engaging in this undertaking should not be approached casually since mishandling it can have grave consequences for both students and teachers.

To sum up, when dealing with controversial public issues, teachers must establish a nurturing atmosphere, encourage active engagement, and open conversation, uphold respect and accuracy in conversations, and get training to effectively guide meaningful classroom discourse. By implementing these strategies, teachers can create a setting in which students are encouraged to actively analyze intricate social matters, while simultaneously promoting empathy and admiration for one another.

Methodology

Research Design

The present study employed a qualitative research design to investigate the problem statements of this study. The qualitative research design used to explore the experiences of secondary Social Studies teachers was phenomenology, specifically the transcendental phenomenology of Edmund Husserl as it focused on understanding the individual's lived experiences within the world (Neubauer et al., 2019). This design asserts that knowledge rests on inner evidence that appears in consciousness. This study illustrated the complex nature of controversial public issues by examining the experiences of secondary Social Studies teachers in teaching them.

Participants

The study's sample consisted of five (5) secondary Social Studies teachers who taught controversial public issues, as recommended by Cresswell (1998) for a phenomenological study involving a minimum of five (5) participants. These participants were selected using purposive sampling. The researcher purposely selected five (5) participants who taught Grade 10 *Araling Panlipunan-Kontemporaryong Isyu* to secondary public school students. The selection focused on the public schools under the Schools Division Office of Caloocan City, a government unit under the Department of Education that implemented the Grade 10 Social Studies standard curriculum.

Instruments

To delve into the lived experiences of these teachers in handling controversial public issues, the researcher employed a variety of data collection methods, ensuring comprehensive coverage and triangulation of information. These methods included interviews, observation, and journaling, with the researcher acting as the primary instrument (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Each method was strategically chosen to provide detailed accounts and validate the participants' narratives.

For interviews, a semi-structured approach was adopted, utilizing open-ended questions aligned with predetermined thematic frameworks to maintain organization and flexibility (George, 2022). Probing questions were employed to elicit detailed responses, enhance understanding, and clarify nuances in the teachers' experiences (Patton, 2015). Additionally, an observation checklist developed by Creswell (2016) was used to guide systematic observations, ensuring thorough documentation and consideration of critical aspects during fieldwork. Throughout the study, journaling played a crucial role in recording and synthesizing the participants' experiences, particularly insights gleaned from interviews and observations. This meticulous documentation adhered to established protocols to maintain rigor and integrity in data collection.

Data Analysis

This qualitative study employed a transcendental phenomenological approach to describe the lived experiences of secondary social studies teachers in teaching controversial public issues. Therefore, the data analysis relied on the methodology established by Moustakas (1994). It started with bracketing, a process where preconceived beliefs and opinions concerning the phenomenon were identified (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher did this by consciously putting aside preconceived notions and opening to new ideas, experiences, perspectives, and individuals to gain a new perspective. The researcher concentrated on actively listening, observing, and interacting with the data before engaging in reflection. The researcher also outlined his experience and ensured it did not affect the data

analysis. The researcher reread the research questions and focused on thinking about those questions while conducting the data analysis. After the bracketing, the next is horizontalization which is a process of identifying and listing significant statements in each transcript (Moustakas, 1994). The researcher did this by analyzing the participants' interviews and seeking significant statements from them. At first, every statement was considered to have the same level of importance. Overlapping statements were eliminated. Significant statements were consistently coded and categorized to provide a more precise description of the phenomena. The participants' significant statements, which were coded and categorized, were utilized to determine themes. Common themes were identified to enhance the detailed and comprehensive study of the phenomena. Textural description represents the meaning and essence of the experience. The participants' responses were based on their experiences describing teaching controversial public issues to secondary public schools. The structural description was used to take the participants' varying responses and unify them into structural themes so that they represented the essence of the experience. It was applied to analyze the data where there were responses, codes of the responses, categories, themes, and universal structure. For the essence, the researcher synthesized the texture and structure into expression.

Trustworthiness

This phenomenological research adopted Lincoln and Guba's (1985) concept of trustworthiness, which used the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability to parallel conventional assessment criteria of validity and reliability. These trustworthiness criteria were defined and described as how the researcher attempted to conduct a trustworthy qualitative data analysis. The researcher assured the credibility of the qualitative data by selecting appropriate research participants, prolonged engagement with them, examining referential adequacy to check preliminary findings and interpretation against raw data, and providing an external check by an expert in the social science field on the research process of the researcher. Data was also triangulated by collecting information from multiple sources such as interviews, observation checklists, and journals. To achieve dependability, the researcher ensured the research process was traceable, clearly documented, and by inquiry audit of an outside reviewer. Confirmability was done by the researcher by bracketing out his experience and avoiding influencing the participants in answering the interview guide questions. Transferability was ensured by providing a detailed description of the concept and people to be studied that informed and resonated with readers. This study ensured authenticity by using the data analysis's interview transcripts, observation, and journal notes to accurately describe the lived experiences of the social studies teachers teaching CPIs.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured the participants were informed and safe for research subjects. Regarding ethical issues, the researcher protected the identity of all research participants. Pseudonyms were given to protect their identity further. So, in the analysis of data, the researcher also used pseudonyms. For confidentiality, data from interviews were stored on a password-protected laptop, and no data from the interviews were shared with others as they were protected by data privacy laws. In interviewing the participants, they were informed of the nature of the topic. The researcher also demonstrated respect and inclusivity to all participants' beliefs and experiences. The researcher also honestly collected the data when he travelled to the study setting. Falsifying of data was never done by the researcher because of his interest in promoting integrity in conducting research.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the outcome of the qualitative analysis of the research questions answers. The results are presented based on the emergent themes and categories.

Theme 1. Teacher's Training

This theme explored the complex area of teacher preparation in the context of CPI instruction, acknowledging its crucial role in preparing teachers to address CPIs successfully. This research highlighted the importance of systematic preparation in creating an environment that promoted constructive discourse and critical thinking. It is divided into two categories: school-based training and higher-level training.

Category 1: School-based training

The training was important for dealing with a challenging task like teaching controversial public issues (CPIs) that may result in conflicts among learners. It enabled teachers to acquire the necessary skills and attitude to do so effectively and efficiently. Teachers who underwent training are equipped to teach CPIs appropriately. School-based training was provided by the *Araling Panlipunan* Head Teacher or Master Teacher, who conducted seminars and workshops to provide skills and attitudes that prepared *Kontemporaryong Isyu* teachers to effectively teach CPIs. The researcher interviewed the participants regarding the training they received in preparation for teaching CPIs. Four of the five participants expressed that they underwent school-based training on teaching CPIs. P3 said,

"I have trainings in our school for the subject *Araling Panlipunan* 10 which is contemporary issue." (L110-L111)

Similar to this was the experience of P5, as he quoted,

"I experienced some seminars and training in school in controversial topics" (L198)

P4 mentioned “learning action cell,” a kind of training provided by her Head Teacher to enhance her skills in teaching CPIs. She mentioned,

“I think yearly meron kaming mga LAC sessions na pinoprovide ng department heads naming yung topic related sa grade level and subject na tinuturo naming.” (L155-156)

These experiences showed that teachers did not lack the training provided by their instructional leaders to ensure they could teach CPIs effectively. Loomis (2019) amplified this, stating that discussions about controversial issues were enhanced when educators trained to cultivate a positive and respectful environment and facilitate substantive classroom discourse.

This category underscored the vital need for training to equip teachers with the skills and personality traits to teach proficiently about controversial public issues (CPIs). By organizing seminars, workshops, and learning action cells, *Araling Panlipunan* administrators trained teachers, enabling them to teach CPIs effectively.

Category 2: Higher-level training

Higher-level training was provided by the Division Office and Regional Office of the Department of Education. The school principal or head teacher selected teachers to be trained to teach CPIs. This training was considered higher as most trainers were supervisors and experts in social studies. Two participants mentioned that they experienced this kind of training. P1 said,

“I already experienced that, specifically the two regional seminars I have attended. It's about the implementation of K-12 in economics. They followed by regional training for the K-12 contemporary issue.” (L10-L12)

P2 shared a similar experience with P1. He mentioned,

“The training that I have attended pertaining to the controversial public issues is the regional training for the contemporary issues. I also had gender sensitivity seminar in the Division of Caloocan City.” (L56-L59)

These trainings provided advanced skills and attitudes to these participants, which enabled them to teach CPIs using a method aligned with democratic practices. These experiences were important, according to Loomis (2019), as he proposed that training was essential so that teachers could establish a democratic classroom that effectively discusses CPIs. The Division and Regional Offices of the Department of Education provided advanced training to teachers, equipping them with the necessary skills to address contentious public issues (CPIs). Chosen by school administrators, teachers participated in workshops facilitated by supervisors and social studies specialists. This allowed them to embrace methods aligned with democratic values and skillfully involve students in conversations on CPIs.

Theme 2. CPI topics included in the discussion

This theme examined the diverse landscape of teaching controversial public issues (CPIs), focusing on two separate categories: curriculum-based CPIs and current events-based CPIs. Grade 10 Social Studies curriculum incorporated necessary topics such as environmental difficulties, labor issues, gender dynamics, and political institutions to stimulate conversations among students. By following this systematic method, students not only gained a thorough comprehension of how societies function but also initiated the process of creating strategies to address real-life problems, promoting analytical thinking and active participation in society.

Category 1: Curriculum-based CPIs

Teachers in public schools based their lesson plans in the curriculum guide provided by the Department of Education. Given this, *Kontemporaryong Isyu* teachers most likely teach CPIs included in the Grade 10 Social Studies curriculum. This was affirmed by the following statements of the participants:

“I believe the most debatable is about the concern in the mining industry of the country. Since the mining, although economically it adds more profit to the economic growth. But when it comes to economic sustainability, that's a big question. So, this is a debatable question in economics. On the second quarter, we focus on the globalization. In the third quarter, yung sex education with regards to same sex marriage.”- P1 (L14-L21)

“Part of it would be the same sex marriage because of the the topic for the third quarter, which is the gender issues in the society. So that is 1 controversial topic that we had discussed and also in the fourth quarter. I think the the political dynasties, because we are talking about citizenship and political issues in the fourth quarter. For the second quarter, I think the labor issues. The moral compass of the companies because we are talking about the transnational companies and the multinational companies. On the first quarter controversial public issue would be the environmental challenges especially us in the Philippines pertaining to the solid waste.” - P2 (L67-L78)

“I think isa sa mabibigay kong topic is about gender yes sex and gender. Sa controversial topic in grade 10 so far yung about sa Aktibong pagkamamamayan or good governance.”- P4

Their responses showed that the participants taught controversial issues that were part of the Grade 10 Social Studies curriculum, such as environmental issues, labor issues, gender issues, and political issues. Due to this, students who completed Grade 10 Social Studies

received extensive instruction that prepared them to be capable and significant societal contributors. This was accomplished by starting the process of creating solutions to real-world concerns or problems. According to Reyes (2017), a thorough awareness of the country and society helped students connect with their environment and became critical thinkers who solved societal problems. It suggested that Grade 10 Social Studies teachers prioritized addressing controversial public concerns (CPIs) as specified in the curriculum. These issues included environmental challenges, labor disputes, gender equality, and political dynamics. By exploring these topics, Social Studies teachers wanted to foster analytical reasoning abilities in students and enabled them to actively participate in tackling complex societal issues, aligning with educational goals that prioritized civic consciousness and problem-solving proficiencies.

Category 2: Current events-based CPIs

In addition to the CPIs in the curriculum, some teachers also integrated CPIs that were currently happening in Philippine society. It may range from political issues involving government officials to local issues and international relations between countries that may come to be known by teachers and learners through the internet or news shows. Look at the responses of the three participants below:

“Pag sinabi po nating contemporary issue yung ngayon na nangyayari i-ano natin sa current events na makukuha natin sa internet at journals. Siyempre alam yan ng mga bata tapos tuwing magtuturo pero bago mag start ang class merong tayong balitaan.”- P3 (L122-L125)

“Aside from that these topics are from news and current events or puwede ding i-relate yung personal journal. Yung sa internet could be a good source din”- P4 (L167-L169)

“I also read some article and news about my topics”- P5 (L215-L216)

Based on this response, one can see that news was one of the sources used by the teachers in teaching CPIs. Also, teachers integrated the current CPIs in society through news sharing before the start of the class. Engaging in sharing breaking news stories or discussions on current CPIs offered students concrete examples from the real world and a context to enhance their comprehension of the topic content. This method probably facilitated students' perceiving the significance and practicality of the knowledge they were acquiring in the classroom about the real world. Some Grade 10 Social Studies teachers enriched the curriculum by including current events-based controversial issues (CPIs) from news outlets and internet journals. By integrating current societal problems into their lessons, teachers offered students concrete illustrations that link classroom education to the wider societal framework, cultivating a more profound comprehension of the significance and practicality of their studies in real-life scenarios.

Theme 3. Teacher's Autonomy

This theme examined the level of autonomy granted to teachers in these areas within the framework of Grade 10 Social Studies classes. It explored how teachers utilized democratic education concepts and professional autonomy to navigate curriculum guidelines, address real-world issues, and employed various teaching methods to foster critical thinking and civic consciousness in students.

Category 1: Teacher's Autonomy in Selecting Topics

Dewey's (1916) notion of democratic education underscored the significance of active engagement and cooperation in the educational process. Within a democratic educational setting influenced by Dewey's principles, it was believed that educators should be able to actively participate and influence the curriculum and classroom discourse by being free to select topics to teach. Look at the responses of the participants:

“I have never experienced that my department head will scold me with regards to topic that being is being discussed. I have my freedom.”- P1 (L29-L30)

“we are the designer of our subject as long as it's related to MELCs. Basta nagagawa naming yung gustong mapagawa ng DepEd at connected to sa MELCs.”- P5 (L218-L220)

Based on their responses, the two participants experienced autonomy in selecting the CPI topic to integrate into the discussion. P1 said that she had never been admonished by her head teacher just because she had selected a certain CPI topic. P5 added that they had the freedom as long as they followed the Most Essential Learning Competencies issued by the Department of Education. Though it limited the teachers' autonomy, it consequently aligned the teacher's activity to the curriculum, giving some sense of uniformity among public schools. However, this still signified that teachers could participate in the educational process as they could choose what topic to integrate into the discussion. This practice made the educational system consistent with the principles of democratic education, where everyone in the educational system, from the teacher to the high school principal, should possess a degree of influence in the educational decision-making process (Feng, 2019). The teachers' capacity to choose CPI topics demonstrated their dedication to promoting intellectual autonomy and critical examination among students. By granting teachers the authority to apply their judgment in their teaching practices, educational institutions respected the ideas of democratic education advocated by Dewey. This created an environment that fosters active participation and collaboration. Ultimately, this independence enhanced the learning process and fostered a feeling of possession and accountability among teachers and students, establishing the basis for knowledgeable participation in society.

Category 2: Teacher's Autonomy in Selecting Teaching Strategies

Allowing teachers the autonomy to select instructional methodologies was an additional element in establishing a democratic educational setting. Within a democratic education system, teachers were entrusted as professionals to utilize their experience and discernment in choosing the most efficient approaches to facilitate student learning. Granting teachers this autonomy recognized their unique abilities, experiences, and comprehension of their student's needs. It acknowledged the absence of a universal teaching method and that other strategies may be more appropriate for different subjects, student populations, and learning goals. Look at the responses of the participants below:

"The law actually provides in the Magna Carta for teachers that teachers have the academic freedom to teach what they believe would be effective in their classroom." - P2 (L80-L82)

"nasa teacher na lang talaga yun kung paano yung strategy na yun"- P3 (L128)

Based on their responses, it was also evident that the participants were free to select teaching strategies they utilized to teach CPI. This level of autonomy enabled them to modify their teaching approaches to their students' specific needs and preferences and the curriculum demands. Through the deliberate selection of teaching strategies, educators could cultivate more captivating and efficient educational experiences for their students, ultimately fostering profound comprehension and proficiency in the CPIs. Autonomy was crucial for establishing a nurturing and empowering learning environment that promotes the growth and success of educators. Overall, it emphasized the need for teachers to choose teaching strategies, confirming their position as experts responsible for improving student learning. This autonomy recognized the variety of teaching methods. It enabled teachers to customize their strategies to address the specific needs of their students, ultimately creating a dynamic and effective learning environment that promotes deep understanding and skill development in contentious public issues.

Theme 4. Learner's based Predicament

This theme explored Grade 10 Social Studies teachers' challenges in teaching controversial public issues. It specifically focused on two main issues: students' lack of awareness and competing viewpoints. Teachers faced the challenges of dealing with students' diverse degrees of participation, comprehension, and viewpoints while teaching controversial public issues (CPIs). This theme delved into the difficulties presented by students' lack of awareness about societal concerns and their varying perspectives within the school environment. This examination illuminated the dynamics of learner-centered challenges and their implications for promoting critical thinking, empathy, and constructive discussion among students, based on an analysis of participants' experiences and insights.

Category 1: Lack of Awareness

Most CPI literature argued that teaching was complex as students have diverse views. However, two participants of this study experienced otherwise. Look at their responses below:

"They are not very much aware about the news happening in the society. Lack of awareness. They never look onto the both side of the story."- P1(L39-L40)

"The challenge is the lack of interest of the student. They do not see the relevance of such issues in their respective lives. That is why sometimes it is hard to actually discuss that because they cannot relate."- P2 (L108-L110)

"I guess one of my struggle here in teaching contemporary issue is the students lack of attention. Kulang sila sa topic na ito kasi hindi ko nakikita na nakakarelate ito sa pang araw-araw nilang buhay some of the topics."- P5 (L268-L270)

The statements made by both participants made it evident that they faced the same difficulty: their students' disinterest in engaging in contentious discussions. This widespread occurrence emphasized how critical it was to address this problem in the educational setting.

Both participants cited many reasons for this lack of interest, such as students' ignorance of current affairs and societal concerns and their belief that these topics had no bearing on their daily lives. Furthermore, there was evidence that some students might not completely weigh both sides of an issue while discussing contentious subjects, which further obstructed insightful conversation and comprehension. This experience of the participants was contrary to the literature on CPIs as most of them found learners very interested in CPIs to the point that they could have conflicts among their views (Le May, 2019; Pace, 2016; Flesner & Von der Lippe, 2019) The participants' experiences highlighted a shared challenge: student indifference towards contentious public issues (CPIs), based on their insufficient knowledge and perception that these topics are irrelevant to their lives. The difference between what the participants observed and what was already known in the literature emphasized the complex nature of student interaction with CPIs. It emphasized the need for customized strategies to encourage meaningful discussion and comprehension.

Category 2: Conflicting Views

Another challenge a Social Studies teacher experienced was managing diverse perspectives among learners. Students' differing views on historical events, cultural practices, or societal issues can create tensions and conflicts within the classroom. Look at the responses of the participants below:

"I experienced also having students with conflicting views especially in the cream section. That is good because may sense ang arguments."- P1 (L43-L45)

"There are a lot of times that I have experienced conflicting views among my students. But I consider that challenge as a positive challenge because you're able to know the perspectives of other people, and you also learn from them."- P2 (L111-L113)

"Mostly sa mga sections na talagang nagdedebate sila and then but before that bago sila magdebate I'll make sure na meron silang mga back up sources syempre hindi lang naman more on opinions kailangang nakabase, kailangang meron pa ding mga source."- P4 (L218-L221)

The study's participants remarked on their experiences dealing with students with opposing views, especially in certain classroom sections or groups. They saw this dynamic favorably, despite the difficulty, seeing it as a chance for critical thinking and understanding expansion. Students were encouraged to express their opinions and engage in spirited conversations in this setting, which promoted polite discourse and mutual learning.

Participants also underlined the significance of arguments supported by evidence, emphasizing that students must cite reliable sources to support their positions. By forcing students to provide evidence to support their beliefs, teachers fostered a commitment to critical thinking and assisted students in strengthening their argumentative abilities. All things considered, these observations demonstrated how important it was to accept and use a variety of viewpoints in the classroom as stimulants for learning and cooperation. This affirmed Flensner and Von der Lippe (2019) classroom of disagreement, where students inevitably had different points of view that could conflict, and Alstein's (2019) classroom in turmoil, where teachers were confronted with remarks that are confrontational by students or in the context of hotly debated conversations or polarizing incidents. This was also consistent with Pace (2016), who said that a social studies teacher might find it challenging to teach controversial public issues because of the persistent tensions between various racial, socioeconomic, and religious groups in schools, probably made worse by the chaotic sociopolitical environment. In Social Studies classrooms, managing differing student opinions effectively was a challenge. Social Studies teachers perceived this challenge as a chance to encourage critical thinking and reciprocal learning, highlighting the significance of arguments supported by evidence in cultivating students' analytical abilities and nurturing respectful discussions.

Theme 5. Secondary Social Studies Teachers' Way of Teaching CPIs

This theme examined the pedagogical approaches Grade 10 Social Studies teachers utilized, with a specific emphasis on two categories: implementing learner-centered teaching methods and implementing fair teaching strategies. These methods strived to promote analytical reasoning, inclusiveness, and active student participation, specifically in comprehending controversial public issues (CPIs) in the classroom. This theme explored the various approaches employed to empower students in their learning process while also promoting fairness and respect for other perspectives by analyzing the participants' experiences and practices.

Category 1: Utilization of Learner-centered Teaching Strategies

According to Cain (2020), learner-centered teaching practices aimed to develop independent, self-directed, and self-regulated learners. This teaching strategy was consistent with Dewey's (1916) idea of a democratic educational system in which all school community members participate in creating and exchanging knowledge. Utilizing learner-centered teaching practices to teach CPIs supported Dewey's ideas of inclusivity, participation, and cooperation by prioritizing learners' needs and interests and enabling them to take charge of their educational path.

In a learner-centered environment, students are actively involved in the learning process, encouraged to explore their interests, and given opportunities to add to the community of learners in the classroom. Social Studies teachers acted as guides and facilitators, helping students find their way through the educational process and creating a welcoming environment for those with different viewpoints. Looking at the statements of three participants would reveal the following:

"I am first doing scaffolding. Meaning, what are the basics? And then we are giving towards the the higher order thinking skills for them to scrutinise what the topic is all about. What do they have to learn? Why do they have to learn such a controversial public issues and see to it that you know, they see the relevance in their day-to-day lives of the prevailing issues in our society."- P2 (L115-L119)

"One of the teaching strategies that I use is balitaan di naman mawawala yan syempre sa pagtuturo ng *Araling Panlipunan* and then yung sharing sa class about their personal experiences at kung ano yung napanood nila sa news o yung nabasa nila something like that."- P4 (L223-L226)

"I use different methods depende sa topic, I use role play, picture analysis, writing essay, slogan and poster making, writing an action plan to some issues specially sa environment, Debate and Socratic method."- P5 (L272-L274)

Participants discussed a range of learner-centered teaching techniques to help students comprehend CPIs. One strategy brought to light was scaffolding, in which teachers start with basic ideas and progressively incorporate higher order thinking abilities. This allowed students to critically analyze controversial public issues and recognize their application to everyday life. News sharing was another strategy that often gave students a forum to discuss their experiences and participate in current affairs, raising awareness of social issues and promoting linkages to real-world contexts. Participants also underlined the significance of using various teaching strategies,

including debates, role play, picture analysis, essay writing, and essay writing, to suit students' varying learning preferences and encourage active participation and critical thinking. Using these learner-centered strategies, Social Studies teachers aimed to give students the confidence to take charge of their education, foster a more profound comprehension of societal concerns, and equip them with the necessary skills for responsible citizenship. These strategies supported democratic education by creating a dynamic learning environment that promotes inquiry, reflection, and collaboration. This encouraged all students to participate actively in their education and have meaningful learning experiences. These practices were in accordance with Kettler's (2020) arguments that a curriculum should promote open discussion and thoughtful consideration, allowing students to develop logical and ethical stances on controversial public issues freely. It also affirmed Wansink et al. (2023) that students must participate fully in classroom discussions of controversial issues by expressing their own opinions and attentively considering the viewpoints of other students to gain advantages. According to Alven (2024), teacher may use deliberative discussions within the classroom, thereby assisting learners in developing the capacity to accept opposing points of view, comprehend intricate matters through diverse lenses, and articulate their insights and expertise about significant controversial issues. Active learning was one approach to teaching controversial public issues. Goodenough et al. (2023) added that establishing a disruptive pedagogy in which more time is spent on discussion, debate, critique, and forming well-informed opinions rather than on facts in and of themselves is an exceptionally effective strategy. This could be accomplished by integrating practical experiences and using hands-on activities.

Implementing learner-centered teaching methodologies enabled students to actively participate in discussions surrounding controversial public issues (CPIs), promoting the development of critical thinking, empathy, and a sense of responsibility for their own education. Social Studies teachers used a variety of interactive strategies to create an inclusive and dynamic learning environment. This approach aligned with Dewey's ideals of democratic education, which encouraged cooperation, inquiry, and meaningful participation among students.

Category 2: Fair Teaching Strategies

Fair teaching strategies promoted equity and objectivity in the classroom, guaranteeing that each student's viewpoint is handled fairly and respectfully. This entailed establishing a setting where all perspectives are embraced and esteemed, regardless of background, opinion, or capability disparities. Effective teaching practices facilitated open discourse and empowered students to articulate their viewpoints openly, cultivating an environment characterized by mutual respect and comprehension. In addition, equitable instructional methods entailed actively listening to students, recognizing their viewpoints, and affirming their input in discussions and activities. The following were also observable in the responses of the participants:

"Pero dapat matanggap nila without judgmental tapos yung ano na ang isip nila na nandyan yan pero may solusyon. Hindi ka lang sa isang side para marunong sila na hindi sila kakampi lang sa isang side."- P3 (L165-L167)

"More on balancing history. So first state the facts, then follow up question then justify their answer. It is important to clarify all the issues. I do not want to end a topic without giving the two side of the story."- P1 (L47-L49)

According to their responses, the two participants valued fairness and balance in their teaching methods, especially when teaching CPIs. Both participants embraced pedagogical approaches that achieved balance in CPIs by presenting information, posing probing inquiries, and providing occasions for students to substantiate their responses. These approaches promoted a learning environment that is both inclusive and intellectually exciting by encouraging students to explore different perspectives on an issue freely. According to Lintner (2018), teachers and students must guarantee that the discourse maintains respect and accuracy. Maintaining this delicate equilibrium might prove challenging when strong emotions overshadow information.

Fair teaching strategies are essential for cultivating an inclusive and respectful classroom atmosphere where students' varied perspectives are recognized and appreciated. Teachers fostered an environment for free discussion and critical analysis by prioritizing fairness, impartiality, and considering other viewpoints. This approach empowered students to participate thoughtfully in debates on contentious public matters and gain a comprehensive comprehension of intricate societal problems.

Theme 6. Democratic Education

This theme explored the fundamental concepts and methods of democratic education, specifically emphasizing how teachers foster equity, regard, and inquiry inside the classroom. Democratic education prioritized establishing an all-encompassing and collaborative learning atmosphere where students were motivated to think critically, articulate their perspectives, and actively participate in meaningful discussions regarding controversial public issues. Social Studies teachers employed diverse strategies and methodologies to foster the development of students' critical thinking skills, instilled a sense of responsibility in them as members of society, and encouraged their active engagement in democratic processes.

Category 1: Teacher's fairness

Fairness must be the teacher's top priority in creating a democratic classroom atmosphere. This could be achieved by encouraging students to think critically and express their perspectives on controversial public issues without influencing them on their stand on the issue. This method allowed learners to think critically, participate actively in class debates, and engage in meaningful discourse with others. When the researcher interviewed the participants, three said they dealt with the challenges by encouraging their students to

voice their opinions without indoctrinating them. They said,

“I let them actually express their ideas and then but at the end of the day you are setting boundaries. You are setting a certain standard that you as a teacher, leading them into the right perspective.” - P2 (L120-L122)

“My role should be parang to guide them hindi lang basta basta, hindi ko inuuna yung saloobin o yung emotional feeling ko dun sa issue or dun sa controversial issue.” - P4 (L229-L231)

“I make sure that they can express their opinions based on facts, respect each other differences of ideas.” - P5 (L277-L278)

These answers showed an accord among participants regarding the need for teachers to lead their students while still giving them the freedom to voice their thoughts on contentious matters. As a teacher, P2 emphasized the significance of establishing guidelines and expectations, guiding learners toward the correct viewpoint while allowing them to express their opinions. In discussing CPIs, P4 highlighted the role of the teacher as a guide and placed a higher value on impartial advice than on one's feelings or prejudices. Similarly, P5 emphasized the significance of fostering an atmosphere in which students were free to voice their thoughts based on the facts and showed respect for one another's differences of opinion. These viewpoints highlighted the need to balance offering direction and encouraging candid discussion in the classroom, which eventually helped create a democratic learning atmosphere where students felt free to discuss difficult subjects. According to Jofre and Stein (2019), establishing a secure educational setting where students were encouraged to openly voice their opinions and embrace ideological diversity was imperative. The teacher should articulate their stance on the argument and reveal its underlying reasoning. Misco (2018) added that one important factor affecting how controversial public issues were discussed in the classroom was how much of an open climate students needed to consider opposing viewpoints. Fairness was essential to foster a democratic classroom environment where students felt free to express their opinions on controversial issues under the teacher's guidance. This method helped students develop democratic values by promoting respectful discourse and critical thinking.

Category 2: Respect

In a democratic classroom, respect was shown to each learning community member, including teachers and students. It entailed treating every person with respect and decency and acknowledging and appreciating the various viewpoints, backgrounds, and identities in the classroom. In democratic education, respect also meant creating an environment where people could voice their thoughts, pose questions, and have productive conversations. This entailed keeping a courteous and tolerant attitude in conversations and accepting opposing opinions, even if they contradicted personal convictions or presumptions. Three participants shared that they ensured that respect was observed in their classes during the discussion of CPIs. They said,

“I’ll give my procedure on what are the do’s and don’ts to make sure everybody will express their ideas respectfully.” - P1 (L63-L65)

“We celebrate the differences ng bawat isa of course ang number one rule ko naman sa kanila is to respect each one opinion or to respect each one background kasi tayo ay may kaniya kaniya o tayo ay nanggaling na sa iba’t ibang kultura.” - P4 (L237-L239)

“I make sure that in my time, it is a safe space for them, safe space to open their thoughts to the sensitive topics. I also make sure that every opinions will matter.” - P5 (L283-L285)

When it came to discussing CPIs, their responses indicated that they placed a high priority on fostering an inclusive and respectful classroom atmosphere. Establishing precise rules was crucial, according to P1, to guarantee that everyone may politely express their opinions. P4 emphasized the value of appreciating diversity, honoring the perspectives and experiences of all people, and recognizing the multiplicity of cultures represented in the classroom. Similarly, P5 stressed the need to provide a secure environment where children could express their opinions on controversial topics and ensure that each one is heard. All things considered, these participants showed a dedication to encouraging diversity and respect in their classrooms. They understood the significance of establishing a welcoming environment where all views are respected and heard. Putting respect first, they supported a democratic learning environment where students were encouraged to explore various viewpoints on difficult subjects and participate in meaningful conversation. According to Lintner (2018), teachers and students should guarantee that the discourse had maintained respect and accuracy. Maintaining this delicate equilibrium might prove challenging when strong emotions overshadow information. Overall, cultivating respect in the classroom came out as a top concern. The focus was on fostering an inclusive atmosphere that celebrates differences in viewpoints and promotes candid communication to help students eventually develop mutual understanding. This commitment to fostering respect helped create a democratic learning environment where students are encouraged to participate in important conversations.

Category 3: Inquiry Method

An additional crucial component of democratic education was the inquiry method. This method encouraged students to question, explore, and independently research various topics by emphasizing critical thinking and active involvement. It allowed students to take charge of their education in a democratic classroom by encouraging them to pose thoughtful questions, look for answers via investigation and analysis, and come to conclusions.

Through inquiry-based learning, students gained critical abilities, including communication, information literacy, and problem-solving. This equipped them to handle challenging situations and make meaningful contributions to society as educated and involved citizens.

Additionally, the inquiry approach encouraged students to question presumptions, assess the facts, and think critically about their surroundings. This cultivated a sense of curiosity and intellectual curiosity. The participants revealed to the researcher that they also dealt with the challenges using the inquiry method. They said,

“What am I doing is to asking them. What do you think is the standard or what should we be able to observe among that leaders? Were you able to observe that?”- P2 (L134-L136)

“Tanungin mo din sila bakit nila nasabi yun tapos iexplain bakit ganun.”- P3 (L187-L188)

“Kailangan ay ginagamitan pa din ng critical thinking hindi lang yung puro emotional or hindi lang dahil galit ka dun sa issue or doon sa controversial topic”- P4 (L233-L235)

The responses showed that the participants addressed difficulties in their classes by applying the inquiry method. P2 suggested posing challenging questions to students to promote analysis and critical thinking. P3 stressed the value of asking learners to clarify their viewpoints and encouraging them to do so. In a similar vein, while debating controversial issues, P4 emphasized the importance of using critical thinking abilities rather than depending exclusively on feelings or personal prejudices. The National Council on Social Science (2016) recommended a critical inquiry method for teaching controversial public issues. This method exposes students to diverse ideas, even those that may diverge from their perspectives. Similarly, Pace (2022) introduced a teaching approach called "contained risk-taking" for teaching controversial public issues. It actively addressed potential risks while promoting the teaching of controversial topics through inquiry and discussion. The participants' application of the inquiry method highlighted its importance for promoting democratic education. Social Studies teachers enabled students to actively participate in their education by fostering critical thinking and independent inquiry. This gave students the tools to negotiate challenging social challenges and contribute to society. This strategy aligned with advice from academics and educational organizations, highlighting the value of inquiry-based learning in tackling CPIs and fostering intellectual development.

Conclusions

Secondary Social Studies teachers experienced various complexities in teaching controversial public issues (CPIs), including the need for focused training, integrating current societal problems into lessons, and the complexity of student interaction with CPIs. Granting autonomy to teachers and providing opportunities for customized strategies could enhance the learning process and foster critical thinking among students. Navigating these experiences allowed teachers to promote analytical reasoning, civic consciousness, and problem-solving proficiencies among students, ultimately preparing them for knowledgeable social participation.

Secondary Social Studies Teachers also employed learner-centered teaching methodologies to encourage active student participation in discussions on controversial public issues (CPIs), fostering critical thinking, empathy, and a sense of educational responsibility. Additionally, fair teaching strategies played a crucial role in cultivating an inclusive and respectful classroom environment where students' diverse perspectives are acknowledged and valued. These strategies empowered students to engage meaningfully with CPIs, promoting deeper understanding and constructive dialogue.

In addition, secondary Social Studies Teachers prioritized fairness and respect in fostering a democratic classroom environment where students felt empowered to express their opinions on controversial issues. Teachers created a conducive learning environment through their commitment to fostering respect and encouraging meaningful conversations. By nurturing critical thinking and independent inquiry, teachers equipped students with the necessary skills to navigate complex societal challenges and make valuable contributions.

This study recommended the following:

Students may participate actively in discussions about controversial public issues (CPIs) by examining data from various sources and considering different viewpoints.

Araling Panlipunan Teachers may employ learner-centered teaching strategies such as student-led discussions, inquiry-based projects, reflective journals, and community engagement projects to foster empathy, motivate students to take an active role in their education and inspire them to take responsibility for their learning experience. They may also emphasize openness and fairness while fostering inclusive, respectful learning settings where students feel encouraged to voice their ideas about CPIs.

Araling Panlipunan Head Teachers may provide school-based comprehensive training and assistance to Social Studies teachers to effectively tackle the challenges of teaching CPIs, which involves incorporating contemporary societal issues into lessons and effectively managing student engagement with controversial topics. They may also implement professional development support wherein they have Regular meetings, peer observations, and shared lesson plans to facilitate the sharing of successful approaches and solutions to common challenges. This collaborative exchange not only enriches teaching practices but also fosters a supportive community where teachers feel valued and motivated to continually improve their instructional methods.

Araling Panlipunan Education Program Supervisors may organize workshops or seminars on integrating CPIs into the curriculum. They may also map the CPIs across the curriculum to ensure they are integrated seamlessly into existing units and lessons. Align CPIs with learning objectives, standards, and competencies specified in the curriculum framework for *Araling Panlipunan*.

Future Researchers may conduct comprehensive research to investigate further the intricacies of teaching CPIs and the efficacy of different teaching methodologies in fostering students' critical thinking and civic participation. This study can serve as a basis and can be used to compare other studies. It can also help standardize the content of a qualitative study.

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