Fourth Edition

Creative Controversy: Intellectual Challenge In The Classroom

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This book is dedicated to our wives, Linda Mulholland Johnson and Anne Earle Johnson, who keep our conflict skills in practice.

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PREFACE

How students may be taught the procedures and skills they need to resolve intellectual conflicts constructively has been a relatively ignored issue in teaching. Despite the amount of time instructors and students waste in dealing with destructively managed conflicts, and despite the considerable research evidence indicating that the constructive management of conflict will increase the productivity of the classroom, instructors receive very little training in how to use conflict for instructional purposes and how to teach students the procedures and skills involved in intellectually challenging each other. In essence, instructors have been implicitly taught to avoid and suppress conflicts and to fear them when they burst forth and cannot be denied. Conflicts cannot be suppressed or denied. Trying to do so makes them worse.

This book is about using conflict to create student involvement in learning, intellectual curiosity, intrinsic motivation to learn, higher achievement, and higher-level reasoning. Conflict is the heart of all drama, a major tool for capturing interest and attention. If students are to learn and master the procedures and skills required for managing intellectual conflicts constructively, they must do so in the classroom. Teaching students to participate in constructive controversy is not easy; it takes training, perseverance, and support. The results for your students are well worth your efforts.

It has taken us over 40 years to build the theory, research, and practical experience required to write this book. In the 1960's we began by reviewing the research, conducting our initial research studies, and training instructors in the classroom use of constructive conflict (Johnson, 1970, 1974, 1979). Since then our work has proliferated. Our more recent writings on constructive conflict include **Reaching Out** (Johnson, 1972/2006), **Joining Together** (Johnson & F. Johnson, 1975/2006), **Teaching Students To Be Peacemakers** (Johnson & Johnson, 1987/2005), and peace education (Johnson & Johnson, 2005). Related work in cooperative learning includes **Cooperation in the Classroom** (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1984/1998), **Learning Together and Alone** (Johnson & Johnson, 1975/1999) and **Circles of Learning** (Johnson, Johnson, & Holubec, 1984/2002). Yet the concept of constructively managed conflict is much, much older than our work. Our roots reach back to Morton Deutsch and then to Kurt Lewin. We wish to acknowledge our indebtedness to the work of both of these social psychologists.

Many instructors have contributed to our understanding of how to structure academic controversies and have field tested our ideas in their classrooms with considerable success. We have been in their classrooms and we have taught beside them. We appreciate their ideas and celebrate their successes. In addition, our thinking about and understanding of controversy have been enriched by the research of Dean Tjosvold. We have also had many talented and productive graduate students who have conducted research studies that have made significant contributions to our understanding of controversy. We feel privileged to have worked with them.

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