

TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Controversial issues arise from conflicts in the interests, beliefs, or affiliations of large groups of our citizens. They are issues on which conflicting views are held by political parties, by management and labor, by city and country, and by other large groups of our people who disagree with the proposed solutions to important problems.

Most of the school curriculum is composed of established truths and accepted values, but it also includes controversial issues. The public schools include the study of some important unsolved problems that involve controversial issues. These are appropriate studies insofar as the maturity of students and the means available permit. Only through the study of such issues will youth develop the abilities needed for citizenship in our democracy.

In the study of controversial issues students have four rights, which must be recognized:

1. The right to study any controversial issue that has political, economic, or social significance and concern, which (at his level) he should begin to have an opinion.
2. The right to have free access to all relevant information, including the materials that circulate freely in the community.
3. The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.
4. The right to form and express his own opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing his relations with his teachers or the school.

The study of controversial issues is objective and scholarly with a minimum of emphasis on opinion. The teacher must approach controversial issues in the classroom in an impartial and unprejudiced manner, and must refrain from using classroom privileges and prestige to promote a partisan point of view.

Teachers will use the following criteria for determining the appropriateness of certain issues for consideration as a part of the curriculum:

1. The treatment of the issue in question must be within the range, knowledge, maturity, and competence of the students.
2. There should be study materials and other learning aids available from which a reasonable amount of data pertaining to all aspects of the issue should be obtained.
3. The consideration of the issue should require only as much time as is needed for satisfactory study by the class, but sufficient time will be provided to cover the issue adequately.
4. The issue should be current, significant, real, and important to the students and the teacher. Significant issues are those which in general concern considerable numbers of people, are related to basic principles, or at the moment are under consideration by the public, press, and radio.

A teacher who is in doubt about the advisability of discussing certain issues in the classroom should confer with the principal as to the appropriateness of doing so. If discussion of an issue is not approved by the building principal, the teacher may refer the issue to the superintendent.

Adopted: November 19, 1980

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CROSS REF.: IB, Academic Freedom