

INSTRUCTION

Teaching of Controversial Issues

Definition: A controversial issue arises when one or more of the proposed solutions to a problem is in conflict with the cherished interests, economic or social beliefs, group affiliations, or political expectations of a section of the citizens of the community.

Purpose: Controversial issues provide stimulation to learning by stirring intellectual excitement and are thus an integral part of the normal classroom environment. Free inquiry in a democratic society requires that controversial issues arising in the normal classroom situation be handled as a regular aspect of instruction and learning in such a way as to not inhibit the dignity, personality or the intellectuality of either the teacher or the student.

Guidelines: Guidelines are established to achieve an educational environment through which the teachers and students of the district may enter the marketplace of free ideas with hope, anticipation and enthusiasm for the achievement of individual excellence consistent with individual ability. Controversial issues outside the established curriculum for the grade or class in question shall not be studied.

1. Controversial issues shall be handled as they arise and shall not be avoided in order to restrict or restrain the academic freedom of either the teacher or the student.
 - a. Neither the teacher nor the student shall avoid an issue simply because it is of a controversial nature, nor shall an issue be raised merely because it is of a controversial nature.
 - b. All sides of a controversial issue shall be explored.
 - c. Materials and references presenting all sides of controversial issues should be made available by the school library to the extent possible.
2. When handling controversial issues, the teachers may not present their own personal positions as the only acceptable positions which may be taken on that particular issue.
 - a. In handling a controversial issue, the teacher shall not suppress a student's view on that issue as long as the expression of that view is not derogatory, malicious or abusive toward other students' views; but on the other hand, one student shall not be permitted to dominate the discussion.
3. In handling controversial issues, the teacher shall not seek to bring about a single conclusion to which all students must subscribe.
4. Controversial issues shall be studied with as much objectivity as the ability of both teacher and students permit.

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- a. When handling a controversial issue, teachers will suggest resource materials or sources of information on as many aspects of the issue as they can in order that all students may pursue individual reading and study so that they may reach individual conclusions with respect to that particular issue.
 - b. The handling of controversial issues does not always require an extensive examination, but all the competency of both teacher and student shall be exerted to make a clear definition of the issue.
5. In handling controversial issues, both teachers and students shall be encouraged to keep the problem-solving attitude in mind; in other words, rather than determining what is right and what is wrong in certain issues, students shall be encouraged to come to their own conclusions to a particular problem after independent inquiry.
6. Students should be taught to distinguish propaganda from fact insofar as possible.