

TEACHING ABOUT CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

Criteria for Determining Appropriateness of Controversial Issues for the School Curriculum.

1. The topics selected for study must contribute to the major purposes of the school curriculum.
2. The topics will be considered appropriate and acceptable areas of study by most students and citizens of the community.
3. No issue involving indoctrination of religious belief will be included in class discussions or in the curriculum. This should not prevent or discourage the teaching of religions as an educational reality, the comparison of history of various religions, nor the influence of religions upon our society, our country's values, or those of other societies.
4. Questions treated will come within the range of the knowledge, maturity, and competence of the particular students involved.
5. Problems and issues selected for discussion and study will be current, significant, and of interest.
6. Materials should be available on all sides of the issues which will yield a reasonable amount of data.
7. The issues studied will be allotted only that amount of time required for a satisfactory study by the class.

Rights and Responsibilities of the Student

1. Students have a right to study and discuss controversial issues and problems in a class atmosphere devoid of partisanship and bias.
2. Students have the responsibility to learn and practice the techniques of participatory democracy in preparation for carrying out the duties of intelligent, involved citizens.
3. Students have a right to an explanation by the teacher if an issue is not to be studied.

4. Students have a responsibility to undertake the study of all sides of an issue, to listen to other viewpoints with an open mind, and to evaluate issues on an intellectual, rather than an emotional, basis.

Rights and Responsibilities of the Teacher

1. The teacher will determine whether the issue raised is to be considered at the moment; whether there will be time to explore the issue sufficiently; what the relation of the problem to be considered is to the course or the curriculum; whether the students are prepared or ready to study the issue; and whether the teacher is prepared to discuss and present it effectively.
2. The students will be instructed in the importance of the reason for considering controversial issues. If an issue is not to be studied, the teacher has an obligation to explain the reason.
3. The teacher as a moderator and a participant will point out the possibility of errors in statements of pupils and writers and the possibility of alternative points of view. The teacher will see that all facts, evidence, and aspects of an issue are honestly presented and that students are helped to evaluate their sources of data as well as their own procedures and conclusions.
4. Teachers have the right to express their opinions providing the pupils understand that it is opinion and not an authoritative answer. Teachers will not attempt to limit or control the judgment of pupils, directly or indirectly.
5. The teacher will uphold, protect, and defend the fundamental freedoms of our American democratic way of life.

Rights and Responsibilities of the Administration

1. A teacher who is in doubt about the appropriateness of discussing certain controversial issues in the classroom or regarding his or her ability to explore such issues will confer with the building Principal. If Principal and teacher are unable to agree, the matter will be referred to the Superintendent of Schools or his or her designee to make a decision.

2. No group or individual has the right, without authorization, to present arguments for or against any issue under study directly to students or to the class. The teacher; however, may invite representatives of different viewpoints to appear before the class to discuss their opinions after obtaining approval of the Principal.

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