

STUDYING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

A controversial issue consists of a problem about which different individuals or groups urge conflicting courses of action. Controversial issues are those questions for which today's society has found no resolution or commonly accepted solution. They may involve emotions, ethics, political and religious beliefs, or human needs of such significance as to arouse protest among some segments of society over one specific way of dealing with the issue. This protest may result from a feeling that a cherished belief or principle is being threatened or that the topic is inappropriate for discussion in a certain way or in a specific group.

The public schools have an obligation to prepare students for intelligent and conscientious participation in a democratic social order. Such participation requires that students have the opportunity to become cognizant of public issues, to learn the skills of analyzing current problems and arguments, to distinguish between fact and opinion, to gather and organize pertinent facts, and to respect the opinions of others. The schools have the additional responsibility of providing students the opportunity to identify, form and express their own opinions on controversial issues.

Following are guidelines for selection and study of controversial issues in the classroom:

1. The topic and method used in its study should contribute toward helping students develop techniques for examining other controversial issues.
2. The issue should be suitable for students of the maturity and background in the class.
3. The issue should be related to the course content and help achieve course objectives.
4. A balanced presentation by those well qualified to speak on the topic must be assured.
5. If teachers decided to express their personal opinion on an issue, they should be certain that it is presented as such, and those students have every right to arrive at a different opinion.
6. Teachers desiring to bring resource people into the classroom to discuss controversial issues shall first obtain endorsement of the principal in a discussion based on the above statement of policy and guidelines.

Cross References: IB: Academic Freedom
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