

Introduction

A controversial issue is any topic or problem on which there are substantial differences of opinion. Students experience valuable educational outcomes from studying controversial issues:

- Ability and will to study complex life situations and make intelligent choices among alternatives;
- Skill in analyzing materials, recognizing propaganda and evaluating sources of information;
- Ability and desire to use rational methods in considering significant issues and coming to decisions about them;
- Willingness to recognize the necessity for and the value of differing viewpoints.

Selections of Issues

The issues and materials selected for study should make a positive contribution to the education of students. The following questions should be considered by the teacher and discussed, in advance with the principal when selecting issues and materials for class activity:

- Are the issues / materials at the maturity level (emotional, intellectual, and social capacity) of the students?
- Are the issues / materials of interest to the students?
- Are the issues / materials socially significant and timely for this course and grade level?
- Are the issues / materials those which the teacher feels can be presented objectively without personal bias?
- Are the issues / materials those for which adequate study material can be obtained?
- Is there adequate time to develop the topic effectively?
- Are adequate and appropriate materials and/or personnel available to present multiple perspectives regarding the issues?

Responsibility of Principal or Designee

- Base judgements approval of issues for discussion on relevant administrative policies (INB-AP: Studying Controversial Issues)
- Encourage cooperative study and discussion with the professional staff.
- Base decisions on sound professional knowledge and the welfare of the students, rather than on personal feelings.
- Contact supervisor prior to the studying of controversial issues if compliance with INB-AP is in doubt.
- Be aware of controversial issues being taught in the school.
- Make sure teachers understand and are in compliance with INB-AP.

Responsibility of Teachers

A teacher must be knowledgeable of the role of controversial issues in education and recognize their own potential for prejudices and biases. The teacher must recognize that their own opinions may serve to inadvertently indoctrinate students. Full knowledge of policies, the students, the school and community is essential. Teachers must be prepared to:

- Create and maintain a safe and inclusive classroom culture;
- Monitor and guide students' choices in selection of topics;
- Choose high-quality instructional materials and resources;
- Encourage students to make use of a wide variety of appropriate materials and experiences, both in and out of the classroom.
- Interpret materials by explaining or supporting students to explain significant ideas, identifying or helping students identify possible missing arguments, interpretations and alternative points of view;
- Provide experiences in recognizing and evaluating the consequences of alternatives;
- Promote, in all possible ways, student interest in and appreciation of rational methods of considering issues and arriving at decisions;
- Ensure class discussions and activities cover varying points of view.

Notice and Alternative Options

Parents / guardians will be informed in advance regarding controversial issues discussed in courses either through a course syllabus or direct home communication and will be afforded the opportunity to withhold their student without penalty. Alternative activities must be made available to students who object or whose parent / guardian objects to the content.

Review of Complaints Associated with the Handling of Controversial Issues in the Schools

Parents / guardians may confer with school personnel if they have concerns or need information about instructional programs and student experiences. When a parent / guardian is concerned about a specific program, method, or learning experience to the extent that they wish the school to review or change (i.e., add, delete or alter) its program, the parent / guardian may use the procedures outlined in KL-AR: Public Complaints or in IIA-AR: Reconsideration of Instructional Materials.

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