

Instruction

Controversial Issues

Controversial issues are those subjects about which there are significant differences of opinion based on differing values people bring to an issue; as a basic educational competency, students should develop abilities to deal with controversial issues.

Controversy is inherent in the democratic way of life, and study and discussion of controversial issues is essential to citizenship education in a free society. Students can become better informed individuals through examining evidence, facts, and differing viewpoints; by exercising freedom of thought and moral choice; and through making responsible decisions. Perpetuation of the fundamental principles of American society requires opportunities for students to read, to gather information, to speak, to hear alternative viewpoints, and to reach honest judgments according to individual abilities.

Teachers shall help students identify and evaluate relevant information, learn the techniques of critical analysis, and make independent judgments. They must reinforce students rights to present and support personal conclusions with those who have opposing points of view. Teachers should also develop student interest in objective re-examination of long-standing issues, and of newly significant issues, and promote vigorous exchanges of ideas. Although teachers have the right to express personal viewpoints and opinions, they do not have the right to indoctrinate students with their personal views.

Legal Reference: Connecticut General Statutes

31-51q Liability of employer for discipline or discharge of employee on account of employee's exercise of certain constitutional rights.

Keyishian v. Board of Regents 385 U.S. 589, 603 (1967)

Academic Freedom Policy (adopted by Connecticut State Board of Education, 9/9/81)

Policy adopted: June 18, 2003

CAPITOL REGION EDUCATION COUNCIL
Hartford, Connecticut

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Selection of Controversial Issues

The following guidelines, while not all inclusive, should assist teachers in deciding whether or not a given controversial issue should be considered:

1. Is the controversial issue being discussed related to the course of study?
2. Is the controversial issue timely and is it significant? Some issues are quite transitory. They arise rather rapidly, create a great deal of excitement and almost as quickly disappear. The teacher should attempt to select those issues which have a bearing on long-range problems.
3. Is the controversial issue appropriate to the academic level and maturity of the students?
4. Does the student have access to materials which will provide significant bearing on the controversial issue being discussed?
5. Can the issues be adequately considered in the time available? It is sometimes better not to raise questions that cannot be properly explored than to create a situation of hasty, ill-informed discussion. Superficial treatment of important questions usually defeats the purpose of introducing them.
6. Some issues do not have a proper place in the classroom that seeks to educate all children with public funds. The teacher should use sound judgment and tact in selecting those controversial topics and will accomplish the objectives of teaching them rather than defeating those objectives. For example, the following should be avoided:
 - a. The rationale or values of any religious faith;
 - b. Young and immature minds should not be subjected to persuasive or vigorous argumentation or presentation by persons with a known and strong bias;
7. The teacher's responsibilities include the achievement of a scholarly competence, the teaching of controversy as controversy, opinion as opinion, to teach the truth, and to admit ignorance when the truth is not known. The teacher should seek guidance of more experienced colleagues, his/her immediate supervisor, an administrator, and/or community resource people. In the study of controversial issues, indoctrination shall not be the purpose; rather, the purpose shall be to have the student see as fully as possible all sides of the question or issue.

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Controversial Issues (continued)

8. The responsibility of maintaining and manifesting at all times a decent respect for the dignity and worth of each individual is paramount.

9. Teachers and administrators will recognize the importance of free discussion of controversial issues and safeguard student's rights to such discussion as stated in Board policy and these regulations.

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