

## **Teaching about Controversial/Sensitive Issues**

Controversial issues are defined as those problems, subjects or questions about which there are significant differences of opinion, for which there are no easy resolutions, and discussion of which generally creates strong feelings among people. Although there may be disagreement over what the facts are and what they mean, subjects usually become controversial issues because of differences in the values people use in applying the facts.

Controversy is inherent in the democratic way of life. It is essential, therefore, that the study and discussion of controversial issues have an important place in education for citizenship in a free society. Students can develop into free citizens with informed loyalty to democracy only through the process of examining evidence, facts and differing viewpoints; through the exercise of freedom of thought and moral choice, and through the making of responsible decisions. These procedures are as characteristic of and essential to a free society as authoritarian indoctrination is to totalitarianism.

Students have the right and need, under competent guidance and instruction, to study issues appropriate to their interests, experience, abilities and ages. They must have access to relevant information, and they have the obligation to examine carefully all sides of an issue. Students have the right to form and express their own points of view and opinions without jeopardizing their positions in the classroom or in the school.

Teachers have the right and the obligation to teach about controversial issues. It is the teacher's responsibility to select issues for study and discussion which contribute to the attainment of course objectives and the educational program established by the Board and to make available to students materials concerning the various aspects of the issues. Teachers also have the obligation to be as objective as possible and to present fairly the several sides of an issue. Although teachers have the right to express their own viewpoints and opinions, they do not have the right to

indoctrinate students to their views. Controversial issues are to be presented with good judgment, keeping in mind the maturity and background of the students. The influence on values, attitudes and responsibility of the individual students must be considered in conjunction with the actual subject content.

Adopted: September 9, 1980

Revised: September 28, 1993

Revised: October 12, 2010

CROSS REFS.: IJ, Instructional Resources and Materials

Swink School District #33, Swink, Colorado