

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 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.
2. Is the controversial issue appropriate to the academic level and maturity of the students?
3. Does the student have access to materials which will provide a significant bearing on the controversial issue being discussed?
4. Can the issue 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.
5. Is the controversial issue being discussed related to the course of study?
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. Subjects whose consideration would give serious offense to large segments of the community.
 - c. Subjects that will strongly divide a community and consideration of which may lead to misinterpretation and even partisan pressures. In cases of doubt, the teacher should seek guidance from the school or District administration.
 - d. 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 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.

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.

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

Legal References: Connecticut General Statutes § 31-51q
Keyishian v. Board of Regents 385 U.S. 589, 603 (1967)
Academic Freedom Policy (adopted by Connecticut State Board of Education, 09/09/1981)

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