



Teaching Controversial Issues

Training in reflective and responsible thinking is the responsibility of all teachers. This training is impossible, or at least severely hampered, if the entire community does not respect the principles of freedom and recognize that dissent does not necessarily mean disloyalty. However, one form of dissent which is absolutely incompatible with freedom is that which attempts to end freedom. Irrational fears do just this, and thereby may block such a community institution as the school in its effort to handle controversial issues.

Many areas of study are alive with controversial issues that demand the teacher-pupil freedom to deliberate, decide, and accept the ultimate responsibility of their decision. Indeed, a sustained study of the political, social, and economic record of man inevitably leads to different value judgments. To learn how to make value judgments is the right of all pupils.

- I. It is the responsibility of the schools to make provision for the study of controversial issues.
 - A. The study shall be emphasized in the senior high school when most pupils are mature enough to study the significant controversial issues facing our citizens.
 - B. The study shall be objective and scholarly with a minimum emphasis on opinion.
- II. The pupil has four rights to be recognized in the study of controversial issues.
 - A. The right to study any controversial issue which has political, economic, or social significance and concerning which he should begin to have an opinion.
 - B. The right to have free access to all relevant information, including the materials that circulate freely in the community.
 - C. The right to study under competent instruction in an atmosphere free from bias and prejudice.

- D. The right to form and express his own opinions on controversial issues without thereby jeopardizing his relations with his teacher or the school.
- III. The teacher employs the same methods in handling area of controversy as characterize his best teaching at any time.
- A. The teacher, in selecting both the content and the method of instruction shall be mindful of the maturity level of his students. The teacher has become acquainted with the thought patterns of his community and his decisions shall be made with these in mind.
 - B. The teacher shall assure himself that the controversial subject to be discussed belongs within the framework of the curriculum to be covered, that the subject is significant as well as meaningful for the pupils, and that through the discussion pupils will have some opportunity to grow.
 - C. The teacher shall handle the classroom presentation in ways which will insure a wide range of information and interpretation for the pupils' consideration. He shall strive to present a balance among many points of view.
 - D. The teacher shall not use the classroom as a personal forum. He shall not employ the techniques of the demagogue or the propagandist for attention, for control, or simply for color.
 - E. The teacher shall emphasize keeping an open mind, basing one's judgment on known facts, looking closely at facts to evaluate them in terms of the subject under discussion, and being ready to change one's opinion should new facts come to light.
 - F. The emphasis always shall be on the method of forming an opinion as much as on the opinion formed.

Policy
Adopted: 9/25/69

Board of Education of Baltimore County