

CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN THE CLASSROOM

Background

The Division believes that controversial issues are those topics that are publicly sensitive and upon which there is no consensus of values or beliefs. They include topics on which reasonable people may sincerely disagree. Opportunities to deal with these issues are an integral part of student learning in Alberta. Globalization has produced an ever-growing multicultural aspect to our society. These forces have converged to create a situation in which there are more and more conflicting values and viewpoints held among Albertans.

Controversial issues need to be treated with sensitivity and fairness in the Division. This treatment will result in more open-minded, sensitive, questioning and empathetic attitudes among our students thus contributing to their development as well-rounded citizens.

Procedures

1. In the treatment of controversial material, teachers shall acknowledge alternative points of view on an informational basis.
2. Material being presented shall appropriately reflect the maturity, capabilities, and educational needs of students as stated in the Program of Studies.
3. Presentations by teachers shall be sensitive to the community in which the school is located, but not to the exclusion of provincially, nationally, and internationally accepted principles.
4. A teacher's personal opinion shall be stated as such and care shall be taken to guard against over-emphasizing personal opinions or exploiting their relationship with students for ideological advantage.
5. Teachers shall ensure that students have access to factual materials with an opportunity to find, collect, and assemble such materials.
6. Teachers shall preview videos and materials in advance of presentations to students.
7. Teachers shall adequately prepare for the use of such films and materials, including appropriate culminating activities.
8. If a video, pamphlet or other material contain information or opinions that are thought to diverge from those held by a number of people in the local community, parents shall have the opportunity to view such materials in advance of their use, and shall have the right to withhold a student from participation.
9. If guest speakers are invited to discuss a controversial issue, the qualifications of the speakers shall reflect expertise in the area under study. Also, an effort shall be made to see speakers to discuss alternative points of view on an issue.
10. If teachers are in doubt concerning any potentially controversial issue, or instructional material, they shall consult with their Principal.

Reference: Section 16, 58, 58.1 Education Act
Section 11.1 Alberta Human Rights Act
Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers and Teacher Leaders (2022)

Reviewed: January 2023