

## **Controversy in our classrooms: Problems, Perspectives and Possibilities**

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### **Abstract**

The emotionally shattering events of September 11, the human tragedies of war, the race for the first human clone, the environment, the teaching of homosexuality in the school's sexual health education curriculum, .....the list of potential controversial issues to be explored in our classrooms can go on. The issue of whether schools should include controversial curriculum content has been the centre of much dissension and has raised many questions; Should schools be offering politically oriented content in its curriculum? Should schools be responding to wider societal issues? How should teachers handle discussions about controversial issues? What is the teachers' role in the classroom? This paper explores some of the debates surrounding the nature and place of controversial issues in the school curriculum. It opens the terrain for discussing the relevance and important contribution controversial issues can have to student learning. In support of the inclusion of controversy in the school curriculum, this paper presents ways of exploring and handling controversial issues through English Literature studies. Essentially this paper is a provocation which aims to challenge the increasing attitude of dissension towards controversy in schools and present constructive solutions.

### **Introduction**

We have reached an era in schools in which an increasingly number of societal and world events are exerting a stronger influence on schools and their curriculum decision-making. Textbooks are no longer the primary resource in the classroom and the teacher's role is constantly being redefined. Classrooms have become places where teachers are required to deal, not only with matters of fact, but also with a wide range of student opinions, attitudes, values and beliefs. Increasingly, teachers have also had to deal with morality and ethical issues in class, conflicting definitions, public debate and action (Brinkley, 1999). Dealing effectively with the changing social forces has represented a dramatic shift in education with far-reaching implications. The most obvious has been the cause of an 'overcrowded curriculum' (McGee, 1997) or what William Doll (1996: 125-126) refers to as the 'curriculum bulge':

In an era in which curriculum, particularly in the public schools, is already overloaded and in which thorough teaching of fundamental subject matter has been a priority, new demands for addition of subjects are cropping up everywhere. Today society expects that schools will teach AIDS prevention, improve the quality of sex education, warn against unwise use of drugs and alcohol, counsel against suicide, control violent behaviour and on and on. The consequence is a bulge in the curriculum that makes the responsibilities of teachers and administrators so heavy that the fundamental original work of the schools is done poorly.

As social institutions, schools are very responsive to their societal context and in addressing societal issues, schools are playing an expanded role in the community. Many schools are endorsing political controversies in the curriculum as a powerful way of preparing students for political participation (Hess, 2005: 47). In contrast, many other school settings are situating value laden topics and issues in the 'null curriculum'. Elliot Eisner (2002:107) defines the null curriculum as "the options students are not afforded, the perspectives they may never know about, much less be able to use, the concepts and skills that are not part of their intellectual repertoire". The construction of a null curriculum and thus silence on potentially controversial issues supports claims in the literature that what students *should* learn and *must* acquire are curriculum decisions made by the many competing forces and interests seeking to influence the curriculum decision-making process. Schools have always been highly selective with respect to the minds they wish to cultivate. As Print (1993:15) describes, the curriculum is essentially a 'manipulative strategy'; "what students learn in schools is the result of what certain people want them to learn".

While there is no lack of important current issues for discussion in schools, the important question is why and how should schools include lessons in controversies. These are important questions for how teachers handle the controversies will ultimately affect the way these events will be inscribed in students. This paper opens the terrain for discussing the relevant and important contribution controversial issues can have to student learning. In support of the inclusion of controversy in the school curriculum, this paper presents ways of exploring and handling controversial issues through English Literature studies. Essentially this paper is a provocation which aims to challenge the increasing attitude of dissension towards controversy in schools and present constructive solutions.

### **Controversy in the school curriculum: What can it offer?**

Any curriculum subject area that touches on social values and beliefs, family life and personal relationships is likely to evoke controversy (Brinkley, 1999). Human issues such as sexuality education, HIV/AIDS, drug education and personal development, are also generally referred to as controversial because they involve matters of value as well as matters of fact (Stradling et al., 1984; Stenhouse, 1975) and have generated

vigorous public debate intersecting with community values and beliefs. Eisner and Vallance (1974) declare that:

[C]ontroversy in educational discourse most often reflects a basic conflict in priorities concerning the form and content of curriculum and the goals toward which schools should strive (cited in Joseph et al., 2000: 44-45)

Over the history of social studies, many prominent thinkers have advocated curricular reform with greater emphasis on in-depth study of controversial issues (Engle and Ochoa 1988; Evans and Saxe 1996; Hunt and Metcalf 1955; Oliver and Shaver 1966; Rugg 1921). From an anthropological perspective, controversial issues and topics receive little attention in schools because in the culture of schooling and the culture of society, many controversial topics and issues are viewed 'taboo'. Taboo or 'tabu' is a Polynesian word that means a general ban on a specific object, which should not be touched (Evans et al., 2000:295). Taboos are the "permitted and the prohibited, the do's and don'ts" and are "developed by society for its members out of self-preservation, tradition enhancing motives" (Farberow 1963: 1-2). Taboos exert control on our everyday lives, as well as our schools and can determine the boundaries for what is acceptable and unacceptable. Many taboos are the shadow of the sacred or the ideal. Although topics considered taboo do not threaten the belief system of the culture (McGinnis 1992), taboos remain important because their goal is to preserve the status quo. In this paper, taboo is defined as beliefs that constrain actions by making certain behaviours and discussion of certain topics forbidden or discouraged.

There is a considerable body of literature to date supporting the incorporation of controversial issues in the school curriculum (Dewhurst, 1992; Carrington and Troyna, 1988; Bridges, 1986; Wellington, 1986; Stradling et al., 1984). The literature on democracy education "abounds with varying approaches to teaching controversial issues" (Hess, 2005: 47). Four main approaches or ideological positions are generally suggested in the literature; those concerned with the future civic and social responsibilities of students, with ethical thinking, those addressing the sociology of knowledge and those with their basis in the psychology of learning.

The civic and social line of argument presents the case that many controversial issues address contemporary social, political, economic and moral problems and as such it is argued, they enable students to learn governing principles and current social norms. Thus, any school or educational institution intentionally avoiding controversial issues could be seen as remiss and inadequate (Stradling et al., 1984; Stenhouse, 1970). In the ethical line of argument, controversial curriculum content can demonstrate various moral and value positions to students, which in turn assists in their moral development. Bridges (1986) sums up this line of argument as fostering a number of principles including respect of persons, personal autonomy and honesty of opinions.

Together with the ethical and civic arguments, the use of controversial content in the curriculum is also concerned with the sociology of knowledge. The status of knowledge and its social construction are both important elements in any controversy (Aikenhead, 1994). These authors argue that presenting controversial issues to students is a positive educational move, showing students that knowledge of every kind is developed and constructed by people and as such is not value free, clear cut or unproblematic. The fourth line of argument emanates from the literature on the psychology of learning. It puts forward the argument that the teaching of controversial issues increases student discussion, problem solving and decision-making skills.

The common thrust of all four lines of argument is that controversial issues will provoke interest in students, which will aid in the acquisition of understanding controversy as well as engage students in their learning and contributing to the goal of intellectual independence (Stradling et al., 1984; Dearden, 1981).

Further, the inclusion of controversial issues in the classroom can:

- Create opportunities for class discussion which promote active listening of various viewpoints (Riss, 1991).
- Enable students to voice and change their opinions in the light of new information and renewed discussion (Riss, 1991).

- Lead to an improvement in affective knowledge skills. Students become more active learners and come to enjoy the complexity of the topic under study (Solomon and Aikenhead, 1994).
- Lead to an improvement in student empathy towards others in the community (Solomon and Aikenhead, 1994).

There is much more to a controversial issue than content. Stenhouse (1975) points out that the nature of controversial material in the school curriculum necessitates a particular teaching style, a pedagogy that should harness student interest in an attempt to foster motivation and learning. Teachers play a critical role in stifling or promoting the discussion of controversial topics. They decide whether such topics will be part of the intended curriculum, whether students can bring such issues into the classroom, and how the issues will be discussed (Bickmore 1993). Perhaps most importantly, teachers create a classroom environment that supports or inhibits the expression of student opinion.

In the literature (Stradling et al., 1984), three main pedagogical approaches to controversial issues are stated; commitment, balance and neutrality. *Commitment* is a stance where the teacher makes his/her position known at an opportune time during class discussion. *Balance* is a position where the teacher presents a variety of alternative views including those which might be termed safe as well as those which might be termed unsafe or risky. This way the teacher might be less likely to be accused of indoctrination. *Neutrality* is a position where the teacher either supports all viewpoints equally (affirmative neutrality) or withholds support from any view (negative or procedural neutrality). The underlying assumption here is that teachers, because of their position, can influence student opinion and hence, the adoption of a neutral stance minimises teacher bias and gives all students a chance to participate and communicate in open, free discussion.

In teaching controversial issues, many recommend teachers to suspend all personal criticism and confrontation in order to induct students into a wider debate of the chosen topic (Solomon and Aikenhead, 1994; Dewhurst, 1992). Advocated are

pedagogical approaches that promote and encourage free discussion of ideas, tolerance of various viewpoints (Johnson and Johnson, 1988) and opportunities for students to change opinions in the light of new information and renewed discussion (Riss, 1991). Conversely, teachers who disclose their views to students often argue that they have an obligation to model the importance of taking a stand on issues. They also value reciprocity, voicing concern about asking students to take a public position on issues when they remain silent (Hess, 2005: 47).

In the teaching of social justice and globalization, William Bigelow and Robert Peterson (2002) advocate for a ‘visible pedagogy’ and curricula which is explicit and open for critical reflection. This is what distinguishes “partisan” from “biased” work. In Bigelow and Peterson’s terms, being partisan means inviting a “diversity of opinion, but not losing sight of the aim of the curriculum: to alert students to global injustice, to seek explanations and to encourage activism” (p. 5). Being biased on the other hand, “ignores multiple perspectives and does not allow interrogation of its own assumptions and propositions” (ibid). Bigelow and Peterson further state that for educators to feign neutrality is irresponsible. The pedagogical aim in this social context needs to be truth rather than balance, “if by balance we mean giving equal credence to claims that we know to be false and that, in any event, enjoy wide dispersal in the dominant culture (ibid).

Social Education is committed to coverage of important current events (Oulton et al., 2004). Studies in English and English Literature can also present opportunities for students to engage in wider discussions on social and current events. This paper opens the terrain for debates about the relationship between English teaching and studies in controversy. The rest of this paper situates the teaching of the classical text, ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ (1960) by Harper Lee as a vehicle for creating discussion on controversy and developing in students an appreciation for moral and ethical issues. In my teaching experience, I have found that any opportunity to weave an ethical and moral dimension into a discussion is generally sought by the students. I have worked with many students who cannot resist invitations to make assessments of right versus wrong, good versus bad, proper versus improper and so on.

In presenting and exploring controversy through ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ (1960) this paper is a provocation which aims to argue what English teaching is, what it does and what it should offer as one of the privileged core subjects in the curriculum. It asks, ‘What should English teachers think about when selecting classroom reading material? Should English teachers find ways to make their pedagogies open to change by offering politically orientated content? Should English teachers question the classic’s assumptions and contributions to cultural and moral excellence before use in the classroom? While the paper asserts unequivocally that English is perhaps the most relevant of academic subjects to build on the moral education of students, it presents a broader argument that texts such as ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ (1960), can be used to foster timeless and universal values of justice, fairness, respect for persons and honesty, contributing overall to the moral character of students.

### **Classroom Possibilities: Exploring controversy in year 10 English**

There are many reasons for choosing classroom reading materials, such as the literary value of the works, the need to expose students to contemporary books and the classics. We can rightly anticipate that many students will struggle with the classics. Almost by definition, classics are challenging to read because of their sophisticated and artistic use of language and their immersions into unfamiliar worlds. The concept of controversy is equally difficult for many students to understand. When preparing to read Harper Lee’s classic, ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ (1960) with my year 10 English class, it was crucial to carefully consider how I would present the text and prepare my class for it. I was dissatisfied with the approach I have previously taken to the novel; that is a series of introductory activities emphasising the historical background, literary terms and techniques, implicitly and inadvertently signalling to my students that the real reason for reading the classic is to learn history or literary terms, not to become involved in a compelling story about conflict, emotions, human experience and controversy. To peak the interest of my year 10 students, I decided to introduce the text as a controversial one.

### **Listening to the Mockingbird**

If there is such a thing as a secondary school classic, ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ has become one. Since its publication in 1960, Harper Lee’s novel about racial bigotry in the Deep South has been one of the most frequently selected student textbooks for many secondary English classes. In 1961, ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ won a Pulitzer Prize, has since been translated into 10 languages, was made into a classic film starring Gregory Peck as Atticus Finch and according to the Library of Congress’ “Survey of Lifetime Reading Habits” (1991), ‘To Kill A Mockingbird’, was second only to the Bible in being “most often cited as making a difference in people’s lives” (Durst-Johnson, 1994: 14).

‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ (1960) was written during a period of radical change and although it has captured many readers for its ability to provoke thought on many levels, it has also made the list of most challenging books. Censorship attempts have been made by those who claim the book promotes racial bias because of the word nigger and “other derogatory names that reflect a negative portrayal of African Americans” (People for the American Way, 1995: 61). In Washington, it was banned on the grounds that the setting dehumanises the African American child. “It is belittling the African American students and race” (People for the American Way, 1995:223). In Minnesota, it was described as a filthy, trashy novel because of the words ‘damn’ and ‘whore lady’. These words were seen as doing “psychological damage to the positive integration process” (Doyle, 1994:43).

As I look at my book shelf, I realise that most of my favourite texts have also made the most frequently challenged book list, including:

*Of Mice and Men (John Steinbeck)*

*The Catcher in the Rye (J.D Salinger)*

*The Crucible, (Arthus Miller)*

*I know why the Caged bird Sings (Maya Angelou)*

*Bridge to Terabithia (Katherine Paterson)*

*Schlinder’s List (movie)*

As with 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1960), these materials have been referred to as immoral, anti-religious, anti-God, anti-family and have the "potential to destroy the minds of our children" (People for the American Way, 1995:223). Behind this list of texts and the criticisms about them lies, a strong message that English offers the best forum for discussing controversial issues. English teaching proposes a platform for ethical and moral education for students, otherwise why has the purpose and role of these texts in the school curriculum been called into question? Why would people bother to get involved in such intense battles?

Many critics characterise 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1960) as a novel of initiation and indictment of racism. However, I find the novel's exploration of issues such as tolerance, guilt, innocence, knowledge, ignorance, courage and cowardice to protest against prejudice and racism. The teaching of such value-laden issues has generated much controversy in school curriculum discourse (Brinkley, 1999; Carrington and Troyna, 1988). While I am inclined to think that in a pluralistic society like ours, there can be no broad consensus on values, I strongly believe there is consensus on fundamental moral and ethical values in our society and that these values can be taught in schools in some meaningful way.

I chose 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1960) for my year 10 English class because of its literary quality and moral content and in preparing the unit, I asked myself, 'Should I limit my students' access to the value-laden, controversial issues surrounding the text?' No teacher welcomes personal or professional criticism and many teachers do not feel they can spend much time or energy worrying about potential complaints or challenges to their teaching practices. Some teachers may even agree that schools might be better off not to open Pandora's box- that is not to give students access to materials that so many consider objectionable. However, in the words of Atticus Finch "*The one thing that doesn't abide by majority rule is a person's conscience*". In my view, exploring the controversy surrounding 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1960) had the potential to inculcate moral values and strengthen the character of each of my students.

### **Challenging the Mockingbird: Putting the unit together**

Making the controversial issues in 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1960) explicit meant engaging the senses. Therefore, this literary study had to become multi-dimensional.

My objectives for the unit were to:

- enable my students to read the novel for both personal enjoyment as well as critical inquiry;
- help students form their own opinions after thoughtful inquiry;
- appreciate this classic for its literary quality and platform for critical debate;
- make a connection where possible with the ideas in the text to their lives;
- permit students to discover their 'voices'; encourage debate and discussion about these issues.

Exploring the element of controversy also meant that as the teacher, I had to address my own objectives to reflect on my own teaching practice, so I posed these questions at myself:

- What influence does 'a controversial issue' have upon curriculum decision-making and planning?
- What are the priorities when developing a unit for the teaching of controversial issues?
- What are the possible educational values of exploring the text from this perspective?
- What are some classroom implications for developing this unit?

### Preparing the class for controversy

Productive discussions of controversial issues are effectively conducted in an environment marked by an open and respectful exchange of ideas. To establish a safe and open classroom, providing greater opportunity for students to express their feelings and concerns about the topics, I first put up these rules for discussion:

- Be sensitive to the beliefs and experiences of others.
- No sarcastic comments or other 'put-downs' will be tolerated.
- Everybody has the right to speak and to be heard.
- Personal issues may be disclosed.

Exploring the controversies: Claims for censorship

The following worksheet (see figure 1) presented the students with some of the censorship claims made about ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’ (1960). In pairs, students had to find segments in the book that support those claims and then present a counterargument.

Controversial claims made about the text (published in Edwards, 1998:94)	Segments in the book that support this claim	Your Counterargument
1) The word nigger and other derogatory remarks undermines the self-esteem of African- American teenagers. The book condones the institutional racism that existed at the time- the segregated schools, housing, and courts- and this is a depressing, humiliating book.		
2) When Jem and Scout attended the rape trial they were exposed to words and sexual acts they should not even know about at their age, and there are profane words used by the characters in the book, especially by Scout.		
3) The book contains aspects of the supernatural, witchcraft, even characters such as Boo Radley is depicted as almost ghost like.		

*Figure 1: Exploring the controversies in ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’*

Allowing students to provide a counterargument for each claim, not only gave them further opportunity to analyse the dimensions of these issues, but provided useful insight into the students’ understanding and position on the issues. In their counterargument for the first issue, students wrote that the use of the word nigger “portrays realism of life in the 1930s” and “documents the facts about historical events that should not be neglected”. Many of the students tied Harper Lee’s literary work to today’s life experiences and drew a significant connection to their daily lives. For example “the setting is merely a depiction of Maycomb town in the 1930s and

that is the purpose of the novel, to show the prejudices and social customs that existed in society back then and to make us think about if they still exist today”.

When commenting on the claims about whether Scout and Jem should be exposed to explicit language during the court case, the students wrote, “The rape trial is essential to show the cruelty of the community towards the accused black man, Tom Robinson and Scout and Jem’s presence shows how it affected everyone”. One group of students wrote that “in the courtroom, Jem and Scout learn a little about sex, but more about equality and justice”. Other counterarguments included this one; “Scout is now learning to respect people rather than judge them on the basis of appearance”.

Many of the students viewed the ‘explicit’ language in the text as “acceptable because of the circumstances” and one group even made the point that “as an innocent but very perceptive child, Scout is merely expressing her anger at the situation”. Another group wrote “Scout uses bad language because she is independent, feisty and likes to be in control”. In their answers, some students were quick to point out the moral of the story, by making comments such as “the book has many examples of family values, such as love, patience and respect, particularly when describing the relationship between Atticus and his children”. “The children learn high morals from Atticus and Calpurnia (the African American housekeeper)”.

The issue about witchcraft in the text seemed ambiguous to the students; they simply couldn’t identify it, but made counterarguments such as, “using ghosts in a novel goes hand in hand with the creative, narrative quality of the book”, “Boo Radley’s character keeps the reader intrigued and in suspense”. One group of students even suggested that because Scout is narrating the story, “the whole story is viewed from a child’s point of view and children are naturally very creative”.

### Exploring the controversies: Generating Questions

A central education objective in any inquiry is to help students think for themselves. Generating questions for class discussion do more than guide the reading process; they help the students articulate problems. Students need to make some of their own discoveries for their reading of the classics to be rewarding. The more we limit the scope of the questions, the more we predetermine what their reading experience will

be and limit the extent to which students might make discoveries for themselves. Throughout reading the text, students were asked questions and were invited to pose their own. In my questions I aimed to:

- Involve higher order thinking.
- Challenges ideas, opinions and prejudices
- Show students my interest in their ideas and my confidence in their ability to think.
- Encourage students to ask questions, not just offer answers.
- Provide an insight into language as an artistic expression to deliver a message.

Some of the questions used in class discussion include:

- ❖ What does Scout's assertion that Walter is 'just a Cunningham' tell us about attitudes in Maycomb county?
  - ❖ What impressions do you have of the relationship between Atticus and his children?
  - ❖ What do you think Atticus means when he says 'Simply because we were licked a hundred years before we started is no reason for us not to try to win'.
  - ❖ What do you think is Maycomb County's 'usual disease'?
  - ❖ What lesson do Scout and Jem learn about judging others when Mrs Dubose dies?
  - ❖ Explain the change in Calpurnia's attitude- addressing Jem as 'Mister'.
  - ❖ How did the black folk behaviour change when Jem and Scout entered the church? Why did it change?
  - ❖ Explain, in the context of the following quotes, why the word 'nigger' is permissible among 'niggers'?
- "I want to now why your bringin' white chillin to nigger church"*
- "When Lula came up the pathway towards us Calpurnia said "Stop right there nigger"*
- ❖ Identify the value positions of Aunt Alexandra. How similar or different are her values to others in Maycomb county and to you?
  - ❖ Put yourself in Tom Robinson's case. How would you have reacted if you were falsely accused?
  - ❖ What motives might Harper Lee have for writing To Kill A Mockingbird?

### Classroom observations

Both the questions and the worksheet, not only made the controversial content of 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1960) explicit, but encouraged students to internalise the issues; discuss, decide, act and assess. This approach generated powerful class discussions. Throughout the unit, I found my students were willing to question more, examine and

make decisions about their attitude and behaviour towards situations. The students were encouraged to think about the various positions before arriving at their personal value position.

'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1960) not only raised compelling questions about the historical and lingering inequalities in American society, but encouraged my students to look at those inequities in contemporary Australian society. Class discussions provided my students with opportunities to clarify their personal values, work out the consequences of those values and decide for themselves what they will or will not accept. This involved both rigorous intellectual exercise and sensitivity towards judging the behaviour of human beings.

Our discussions involved exploring facts, opinions and attitudes, and ways to deal with controversy. This provided the students with the opportunity to practise the techniques of handling conflict through compromise, consensus, and sometimes even withdrawal. Overall, the unit provided a unique opportunity to develop students' awareness of the complexity of decision-making and of the necessity for examining the possible choices and consequences of various actions.

### **Final statement**

In today's changing society, there is a need for young people to engage in open and thoughtful discussion of issues that are controversial. Presenting controversial issues to students is generally considered by many as an positive educational move, showing students that knowledge of every kind is developed and constructed by people and as such is not value free, clear cut or unproblematic. In studying the controversy surrounding 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1960) with my students, space was created for in-depth thinking, problem solving and decision-making skills. There were ample opportunities for students to formulate opinions and decisions about public policy issues, thus increasing students' levels of political efficacy and preparing students for effective citizenship.

Literature's value in the classroom must be measured in terms of its accessibility, relevance and significance in the lives of the students who will study it. This unit

moved away from superficial content coverage, fragmented learning and low-level cognitive challenge. Using controversy as a springboard for critical analysis, asserted my belief that students are capable of reading classics and understanding the complexities involved. Furthermore, it showed my students that I have faith in classical literature to do what classic literature does; pull readers into rich and thought-provoking human experience.

'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1960) provided a platform to increase students' knowledge about the real world of conflict. In presenting this English unit, the aim was not to reach any final solutions for such problems, still less to establish any prior chosen position, but rather to build in the students methods of tackling controversial issues and developing attitudes of open-mindedness, empathy and understanding.

To teach 'To Kill a Mockingbird' (1960) without making reference to the controversy surrounding it would be to misrepresent it. As Dearden (1981: 41) asserts, "ignoring controversial matters is further to misrepresent the subject in its nature as a historically developed line of enquiry". I don't think Harper Lee wanted her readers to just accept the Mockingbird, but challenge it, to develop a better informed, more sensitive, more discriminating audience of readers. The controversial matters explored in this unit, allowed for an immediate and open invitation to consider how they might be settled.

If our schools are to continue into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, serving a pluralistic, multi-cultural, multi-religious clientele, teaching children how to think, learn and value themselves and others, teachers must courageously and whole-heartedly resist the efforts of those who wish to undermine the teaching of controversial issues in the classroom. Learning how to constructively deal with controversy can be a bridge towards helping students deal with the conflict that touches their own lives. Controversial curriculum content can demonstrate various moral and value positions to students, which in turn assist in their moral development. Here, controversial curriculum can foster a number of principles including respect of persons, personal autonomy and honesty of opinions. We must commit ourselves to the values of openness, freedom of thought, speech and inquiry and most of all freedom to read.

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