

# Handling Controversy in the Classroom

The resources at *Educating About Immigration* are designed to stimulate active student participation. Some of the examples and hypotheticals are controversial. They were developed (1) to provide a realistic context for students to discuss immigration issues and (2) to generate critical thinking, debate, and analysis on the part of the students.

It is important to lay down ground rules in advance of discussing controversial ideas. Below are some suggested rules. Students should:

- Argue ideas, not personalities or prejudices.
- Represent the opposing positions fairly and accurately.
- Demonstrate an attempt to understand all opposing perspectives.
- Be able to admit doubts and weaknesses in their own position.
- Concentrate on evidence in their arguments.

If serious disagreement arises in your classroom, remind students that they agreed to abide by the ground rules and set about *defining*, or clarifying, the disagreement. Teachers should:

- Identify the issue(s) under dispute.
- Identify areas of agreement and disagreement.
- Identify underlying assumptions.
- Make sure students concretely define their terms and avoid slogans and epithets.

Students should look for a chance to air their own views, hear their opponents' views, and examine both. Be sure students understand that closure of a controversy does not mean one side wins.