**Teaching as a Subversive Activity – Revisited**

**H. Douglas Brown, Berkeley Language Center, April 6, 2012**

**"For every complicated problem there is an answer that is short, simple, and wrong.”**

**–H.L. Mencken**

**Some Observations…**

1. Our motives for teaching language are rooted in our desire to help people to communicate across national, political, and religious boundaries, and our desire to be “**agents for change”** in this world.

2. Any language—and English is our focus—is so intertwined with its users’ **identity and culture** that we can hardly teach this language without teaching a set of values.

3. Our discussions, debates, group work activities, essays, and other classroom techniques offer opportunities for us to engage students in debate over **controversial issues**.

4. In our curricular materials and activities, our choices of topics present us with opportunities to stimulate **critical thinking** – to examine all sides of issues.

### Some Questions…

1. But can we be agents for change and at the same time refrain from revealing **our own beliefs and convictions**?

2. What sets of **values** are we teaching when we teach conventions of oral and written communication, as well as strategies for listening and reading?

3. Does our zeal for realizing our own vision of a better world stand in the way of truly equal, **balanced treatment** of all sides of controversial issues?

4. However, might we also run the risk of **offending and polarizing students**?

**Are the following “universal” values?**

1. Equality of all human beings, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, or gender.

2. Freedom of individuals to speak and write their opinions without censorship.

3. A culture of open-mindedness & acceptance of diverse points of view.

4. Non-violent resolution of conflict.

5. Responsibility as stewards of the earth for the preservation of the planet.

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**“You must be the change you want to see in the world.”**

**–Gandhi**