Chapter 11 - Case Studies

Case Study 11.1
Comment from a Middle School Student

David Spitzler, a 12-year old student at Boston Latin School, faced disciplinary action for refusing to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. When interviewed by the press, David said he considered the Pledge “a hypocritical exhortation to patriotism” because there is no “liberty and justice for all.” This Middle School Student also said:

“(The Pledge attempts to unite) oppressed and oppressors. You have people who drive nice cars, live in nice houses, and don’t have to worry about money. Then you have the poor people, living in bad neighborhoods and going to bad schools. Somehow the Pledge makes it seem that everybody’s equal when that’s not happening. There is no justice for everybody.”

From: Dancing with Bigotry: Beyond the Politics of Tolerance
By Donaldo Macedo and Lilia I. Bartolome

Critical Thinking Questions:

1. Many adults grew up reciting the Pledge of Allegiance at school, and they believe it teaches children to be patriotic toward their country. Do you think it is still appropriate for all K-12 students to recite the Pledge of Allegiance every day at school? Explain.

2. What if you were David Spitzler’s teacher and he came to see you after school and made the comments quoted above? He is obviously correct in observing that there are significant economic inequalities between Americans. What would you say to him?

Case Study 11.2
Comment from a College Student

For the last two summers I have worked in a factory, and where the company’s Corporate Executive Officer (CEO) received a salary of $2 million a year. Not only did this person receive $2 million a year, but he also received a bonus every year. Last summer he was given a $1 million bonus, so the CEO received $3 million for one year’s salary!

That made me think about how many employees could have been paid by this person’s salary. The average factory employee’s salary was about $23,500. The CEOs salary for that particular year would amount to salaries for about 128 average factory employees. I remember always hearing the employees of the factory say that this difference in salaries was unfair because they were the ones who were making the company stand out on top of
the rest of the field. I started thinking about why the company could not give the factory workers a big bonus also since they could give the CEO $1 million.

What if the company gave each employee a $1000 bonus? In the factory where I worked there were 500 workers, so if they each received a $1000 bonus the company would be giving $500,000 in bonuses to the factory workers. This kind of bonus would probably keep the workers happy and content with their job. If we were to take $500,000 away from the $1 million bonus the CEO received, there would still be $500,000 left over as a bonus for the CEO. I’m sure that the company wouldn’t like this idea, but it seems like the fair thing to do.

**Critical Thinking questions:**

1. Can you think of reasons the Board of Directors for this company might express to justify their $1 million bonus for the CEO? What reasons might they give to justify their unwillingness to accept the proposal stated above about giving half of that bonus to the workers as a $1000 Christmas bonus?

2. Why do you think that CEO salaries across America have gotten so high at a time when the salaries of workers have been decreasing? Do you believe this practice is consistent or inconsistent with American values?
Who Are the Homeless?

Read the following questions or statements about homeless people in the United States and select what you believe to be correct. Then respond to the questions that follow.

1. Approximately how many of the single adult homeless population suffers from some form of severe and persistent mental illness?
   a. 10-15%  b. 15-20%  c. 20-25%  d. 35-40%

2. In most cases, homelessness is not temporary but a permanent condition.
   a. True  b. False

3. Most studies show that single homeless adults are more likely to be female than male.
   a. True  b. False

4. Families with children constitute what percentage of the homeless population?
   a. 15%  b. 23%  c. 33%  d. 38%

5. According to estimates, approximately how many of the urban homeless are veterans?
   a. 11%  b. 19%  c. 29%  d. 40%

6. What percentage of the homeless population are employed?
   a. 5%  b. 13%  c. 26%  d. 35%

7. The leading cause of homelessness in the U.S. in the inability of poor people to afford housing.
   a. True  b. False

8. Which group has been the fastest growing segment of the homeless population over the past twenty years?
   a. Families with children
   b. Veterans
   c. Mentally ill people
   d. Teenagers
9. What percentage of the homeless population consists of children?
   a. 17%  b. 27%  c. 39%  d. 47%

10. It is estimated that 25-35% of homeless women and children are fleeing abuse.
   a. True  b. False

Data from: National Coalition for the Homeless
   [www.nationalhomeless.org](http://www.nationalhomeless.org)

(Answers: 1 = c, 2 = b, 3 = b, 4 = c, 5 = d, 6 = c, 7 = a, 8 = a, 9 = c, 10 = a)

Critical thinking questions:

1. Explain which statistics surprised you the most.

2. With regard to our societal responses to the problem of homelessness, what services at a minimum are Americans obligated to provide?