

Controversial Issues

Five Nations Citizenship Conference
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Elaine Watts



This Workshop Will...

- Explore what 'controversial issues' might be
- Highlight relevance of controversial issues to aims of current education initiatives
- Consider some skills that can be developed through teaching controversial issues
- Try out some techniques and methods in dealing with controversial issues in the classroom



Confident in Your Understanding Of...?

- The Iraq War
- Syria
- 'Fracking' and UGE
- TTIP
- The World Bank's Policy on Post Conflict Recovery and Reconstruction



Rationale

- Legislation – e.g. The Equality Act (2010)
- UDHR, ECHR, UNCRC
- Sustainable Development Goals (Global Goals)
- Target 4.7: By 2030, ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development; including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and nonviolence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development.
- Article 17 UNCRC – access to information



What Makes an Issue Controversial?

- ‘Issues that are likely to be sensitive or controversial are those that have a political, social or personal impact and arouse feeling and/or deal with questions of value or belief.’ *Oxfam 2006*
- They are usually complicated, hold no easy answers and instigate strongly held views
- ‘Education should not attempt to shelter our nation’s children from even the harsher controversies of adult life but should prepare them to deal with such controversies knowledgeably, sensibly, tolerantly and normally.’ *Crick Report 10.1, 1998*



Fear Factors?

Can you think of 3 issues that teachers/educators might avoid discussing with young people? Why?

- **Parental reaction**
- **Management reaction**
- **Personal uncertainty**
- **Lack of background knowledge**
- **Upsetting someone**
- **Personal values and attitudes**



Effects of Conflict on Children

- **Over the last decade –**
- **2m killed**
- **6m mutilated**
- **1m orphaned**
- **12m displaced**
- **10 m left with irreparable psychological scars**

Professor Paul Connolly, Queen's University, Belfast

Young People Want to Know

- 79 % want to know more about issues in ‘developing’ countries
- 54% thought they should learn about them in school
- 65% concerned about poverty
- 89% get information from TV news, internet and newspapers



Role of the Media

<https://www.facebook.com/MylesDyerOfficial/videos/10154810776221959/>

- Mouthpieces for 'the establishment' ? Agree/Disagree
- Strategies used : Context; Repetition (2:48); Character Assassination (socialist, thick Brooklyn accent, 73 years old); Concision (short time slots); False Balance

Walking Debate

Disagree



**Not sure/Don't Care/ Can
See Both Sides**



Agree



The Role of the Teacher

- Prepare for controversy
- Ensure you have backing of the SMT and parent council
- Establish ground rules for discussion
- Teacher's role –neutral, stated commitment, a balanced approach, the devil's advocate strategy
- Be aware of the classroom context – are there issues that will have special significance for some students?
- Give students an outlet for positive action on the topic



“Don't Use the News Media to Understand the World”

Hans Rosling

- <http://youtu.be/xYnpJGaMiXo>
- How Not to be Ignorant About the World
- <http://youtu.be/Sm5xF-UYgdg>
- Do Teachers Teach an Outdated World View?

Issues Tree

- Consider the issue of Refugees
- Draw a tree
- The roots represent the causes.
- The branches represent the consequences.
- The *leaves* offer solutions.

Red Poppy/White Poppy

