



ASSEMBLY DAY 2025

Teaching Controversial Issues on the Professional Master of Education programme

Session 1 Keynote inputs

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Teacher Education for Global Citizenship



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Teaching Controversial Issues on the Professional Master of Education programme

SESSION 1 KEYNOTE INPUTS

Meet the facilitators:



Dr Anthony Malone is Programme Leader for the M.Ed. Educational Leadership and Management; the M.Ed. (Innovative Learning) and the Postgraduate Diploma (ELM). He teaches on teacher education and educational leadership programmes in Maynooth University. His recent funded international research projects include EDURAD: Educational Responses to Extremism (ISF-P Funded - <http://edurad.eu/>); Learning to Disagree (EU funded - www.euroclio.eu); Salam (Ireland) Research project (Qatar Foundation International funded - www.cmhcr.eu/salam).

Sarah Timmins joined the Department of Education in 2018 and has worked in the roles of School Placement Tutor, University Tutor for the PME Programme and lecturer in History Methodologies. She has a background of 20 years in Further Education at levels 4, 5 and 6 and in teaching at Second Level (junior and senior cycle) History, Geography and Politics. She has written, developed and delivered modules for the Trinity Access Programme, Transition Year Curriculum and numerous QQI courses/qualifications. She is currently studying Conflict Resolution, Mediation and Restorative Justice with the Edward Kennedy Institute.

Overview:



The presentation will focus on our experience of teaching a “Teaching Controversial issues” module we designed which is part of a PME Advanced Methods programme of study. The module aims to prioritise the promotion of democratic values in and through education, and to bring together PME 2 Students to explore a range of pedagogic strategies and responses relevant to teaching controversial issues. Working in dialogic ways with students we reflect on the challenges of teaching controversial issues and how to meet these challenges.

Meet the Chair:

Angela Rickard is a Lecturer/Assistant Professor in the Department of Education in Maynooth University. She is the current Course Leader for Year 2 of the Professional Master of Education (PME). She teaches on this and on other programmes in the department. She is interested in integrating education for social justice in Initial Teacher Education and in developing creative approaches to teaching, learning and research. She is currently researching how schools support LGBTQ+ inclusion. Angela has been a member of the Ubuntu Teacher Education Network since its inception and collaborates with colleagues on a number of Ubuntu Network funded projects.

Presentation


	<p>In the short session we will do work collaboratively and collaboratively do so.</p> <p>Unpack and clarify what we understand and mean by commercial issues and why teach them.</p> <p>To bring together PME 2 students to explore a range of pedagogical strategies and responses to develop students' competences for a democratic culture.</p> <p>Recognise the complexity and contestability of the issues.</p> <p>Reflect on the challenges of teaching commercial issues and how can these challenges be met.</p> <p>Create opportunities for students to work together and bring their own pedagogical experiences into focus.</p>		<p>Student Voice and agency</p> <p>What do students have to say to us!</p> <p>In small groups take some time to read the feedback from the Youth Advisory Group (YAG) below and share:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Statements you didn't agree with Statements you didn't see but responded to Statements that resonated with you.
<p>Some questions for them to consider</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> How do we define 'commercial'? What's the connection to your curriculum? Howing the discourse, how do we decide on terminology and approaches used? Moving from 'teaching with' to 'unpacking'? What are the challenges for this? Commercial messages and advertisements – Agency and identity? Are commercial issues/ideas attractive to young people? What do they offer? Why teach them? Learning capacity, difference, pluralism in the classroom, what part does self-awareness play? 	<p>Course Outline/Theory</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning – Cultivating the Art of Learning Learning to Unpack – Identifying, engaging and the construction of culture Identifying systems power: Identifying systems of the world, political and ideological power and their consequences Deconstruction: Questioning the concept of culture and the commercial play in the culture we live Engaging with terms such as 'unpacking, bringing and unlearning' Learning to engage with difference including consideration to some of ethics and identity formation. Learning to teach and the demand of active Citizenship (Muller) Identity and engagement/engaging with 'other' for social needs and commercial issues. 		<p>Reflective Tools for listening – self-awareness and hearing the meaning behind the words</p>
<p>Sample activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Download Share to get Placement Pair & share Brandenburg's Disparatization strategies (BAND) Online reading and reflection Multiperspectivity / variety of viewpoints activities Scenarios Grounded circles Lucy Step 20 Research informed pedagogical activities Signage activities Communications audit 	<p>But first!</p> <p>We take a few moments to discuss norms of engagement, etc. we need in the group to ensure we create the safe space necessary for communication to occur.</p> <p>Take a couple of moments to write down your thoughts on what basic expectations/responses/behaviours we need to support authentic and safe and challenging conversations during our next sessions together.</p> <p>Some things we might keep in mind. We work as a community in support of each others' journeys.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> We seek to be curious and genuine in our questions and comments. We engage conversations with shared respect and openness. We listen. We are present. We respect boundaries and differences. We focus on relevant not problems. 		<p>Current Research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacherhood and engagement in the practice of communication: a case study of a teacher's experience of communication with students Active Document Research Teacherhood – Practitioner of empathy and the emergence of the classroom Teacherhood – Practitioner of empathy and the emergence of the classroom Teacherhood – Practitioner of empathy and the emergence of the classroom
<p>Revisiting the snowball</p> <p>Activity: Hearing and listening: listening to hear and not always to be heard. Active listening: listening to hear and not always to be heard. Active listening: listening to hear and not always to be heard.</p>	<p>Navigating the Terrain</p> <p>Participants take a few moments to reflect on and write out what commercial issues matter to you as teachers, how would you define them and why are they about hard things?</p> <p>What are your thoughts on the statement: When Richard shares your thoughts with your team members, in the context of the statement for those areas you all agreed on and those areas you didn't all agree on what will be responses?</p>		

Link to resource: [HERE](#)



Key points:

- Elective in PME2; 7 weeks, 25 students, dialogic processes
- Disagreement is ok, as long as we remain in dialogue
- These are 'perilous pedagogies'
- "Takes alot out of me, so many things come up"
- Awareness of positionality, awareness of self.
- **ESTABLISHING GROUND RULES:**
 - How are we going to sit together? Chatham house rules (discussions remain in the group) and Robert's rules (not allowing some to dominate) applied.
 - Used SNOWBALL activity, writing notes on paper and throwing around the room. Participants read, this is added to a padlet and refined into ground rules.
 - Revisit ground rules every week or at the end of a session. Allow the list to change over the course of the module.
- Awareness of privilege and power.
- NB - recognising our own power to silence others! Exploring dominance of voice.
- **LISTENING ACTIVITY** - outer circle; inner circle.
 - How difficult was it to be the listener
 - listening for (1) feelings (2) needs. Unmet needs can give rise to negative attitudes and feelings.
- Identifying and ranking issues of concern among student teachers
- How much of yourself do you choose to bring to class based conversations?
- Content focusing on a discussion and unpacking of 'what is controversy' (which is hugely commendable) and where controversy is in the curriculum?
- **ACTIVE LISTENING:**
 - Highlighted as crucial in these pedagogical approaches, supported by reflective tools to enhance awareness of behaviours, feelings, and needs.

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- Developing active listening skills fosters self-awareness, requiring presence, grounding, and attunement to both internal and external cues—what is said, unsaid, and sensed in the space.
 - 'Listening to understand or listening to respond'.

Testimonials



I found it very interesting just how prevalent controversial issues are in the educational space. The desire and need to help teachers, to provide support and the ideas of how to unpack these issues.

Everything was hugely valuable both professionally and personally. In terms of something I can implement immediately in my practice, the session on the PME module on Teaching Controversial Issues was very useful.



What I intend to expand on in my practice was the practical activities that can support in approaching controversial issues e.g. snowball activity.

I intend to review the PME programme content to see where learnings from today can be layered into relevant modules through CPD sessions with staff. I will use some of the studies and scenarios used today in my own modules.





Snippets from the day

