



ASSEMBLY DAY 2025

Bring it up, or let it go? Tackling topical issues in the classroom

Session 2 Parallel Dialogic Inquiry

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Teacher Education for Global Citizenship



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SESSION 2 PARALLEL DIALOGIC INQUIRY

Meet the facilitators:



Dr Brenda Gallagher is a graduate of University of Galway and was awarded her PhD from Trinity College Dublin in 1998. She has experience of working in industry and of teaching at second level within the Irish context. She also has experience of conducting research and teaching at third level within both Irish and African contexts, most within the area of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) focusing on both the secondary and further education sectors. Brenda currently holds a fulltime lecturing post within the School of Education, University of

Galway, where she works closely with practicing teachers to promote the concept of global citizen education (GCE).

Kathryn Moore is an experienced educator with a demonstrated history of working in post-primary and initial teacher education. Committed to the mentoring of future educators in the realm of CSPE, music & global citizenship education. Experienced in the development of curriculum materials for CSPE & Music. Holder of Masters degrees in Music & International Development (both from Maynooth University) & a Graduate Diploma in Education focused on Human Rights Education from Trinity College, Dublin.



Overview:



This pedagogical approach is motivated by those situations that arise in class/outside of it, where comments or conversations around controversial issues arise, and as educators we are left wondering if we could have done better!

This parallel dialogic inquiry session invited participants to consider and discuss real-world documented scenarios/stories provided by participants or colleagues (and their student teachers) on instances where controversial issues arose in an educational setting (either incidentally/ unexpectedly or through a planned lesson activity). Scenarios/stories were located within a post primary classroom setting, a staffroom, or in a teaching space in higher/further education. Any scenario/story might relate to topics such as inequality, bias or stereotyping, discrimination, elements of sustainable development, consumption and waste, climate action, migration, or power relations to name but a few. Participants were encouraged to consider theoretical/conceptual lenses (e.g. white privilege; power structures; cultural perspectives) that support interrogation of the issues, and practical pedagogical responses that support constructive learning. There was a strong focus on dialogue and participation in this session!

We adopted a shared approach to facilitating discussion across the session.

The session was not just for sharing; we hoped that ideas will be developed through dialogue. The following approach was taken:

- Participants are invited to sit in a circle
- Session starts with a Standing Circle where each participant offers one sentence in response to a question e.g. how you have encountered controversial issues in education?
- Facilitator points to the scenario (in the handbook and on printed sheets) and to the structured questions beneath. There will also be a sample set of 'rules of participation' that promote democratic participation and creation of a safe space for dialogue.
- A participant volunteers a response.
- Other participants indicate if they wish to speak. This is done in a subtle, non-intrusive way e.g. hand gesture, but not a raising of hands as this can put the speaker under pressure to finish. An object (e.g. ball) is passed to the next speaker to indicate that they have the floor.
- The facilitator intervenes - to keep participants on task; redirect conversations that are going off point; ask questions that support ideas to be developed; prompt the speaker to invite another participant to speak; ensure all who wish to speak have an opportunity to do so.
- A note taker will consolidate key points for the final feedback session.

Scenarios provided at the workshop:

Title:	Bring it up, or let it go? Tackling topical issues in the classroom
Educational Setting:	Post primary 1 st year CSPE class
Educator	Scenarios generated by Brenda Gallagher and Kathryn Moore
Details & considerations:	<p>10 years ago, I was explaining the Charlie Hebdo* attacks in a 1st year CSPE class of which I have little memory. What I do remember is of being accosted the following day on a corridor by some Muslim students (from a different class) who had heard I was attacking their faith. Luckily, I had the time for a long chat with them. It transpired one of their sisters was in the class and the version she brought home caused offence. Another aspect of this incident I recall is of having a PME student whose reaction suggested it would discourage him from referencing such information at all.</p> <p><i>*The Charlie Hebdo shootings occurred on January 7, 2015, when two gunmen, brothers attacked the Paris offices of Charlie Hebdo, a satirical magazine known for publishing controversial cartoons, including depictions of the Prophet Muhammad. The attack, which killed 12 people and injured 11 others, was carried out in retaliation for the magazine's perceived blasphemy against Islam. The incident sparked widespread condemnation, debates about free speech, and a global movement under the slogan "Je suis Charlie" (I am Charlie) in solidarity with the victims.</i></p>
One question you would pose to participants about this scenario:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How might a PME student deal with this scenario? • Can we ever be sure we are unbiased when dealing with a topic which is so emotive particularly in the aftermath of a specific event? • What harm can be done when there isn't the time to talk through issues such as these with young people? • Can these conversations potentially do more harm than good?

Title:	Penetrating indoctrinated group thinking – group dynamics and critical thinking
Educational Setting:	Senior Post-primary class
Details & considerations:	Very many years ago, I was working short term in a private school in Dublin city (south) and I was facilitating a class with a senior group where there was some mention of those 'living in poverty' including those people who were dependent on social welfare payments.

	<p>I can't remember the actual lesson but I have never forgotten one comment by one boy who said 'You mean those people we should gather up and throw in a furnace?' I assumed he was being controversial, testing the then young teacher, but as I tried to steer an informative and empathic conversation the manner in which his classmates supported and defend his comment was for me then, and still is, shocking. There was not even a single discerning voice; they portrayed indoctrinated group thinking which I could not penetrate.</p>
<p>One question you would pose to participants about this scenario:</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can a teacher successfully raise and discuss controversial issues with a cohesive group who have an established mind-set? • How can these conversations be managed in a non-emotive and respectful manner? • If not managed well, can conversations with such groups potentially further cement group thinking mentality and unacceptable viewpoints?



Key points discussed:

How have you encountered controversial issues in education?

- Sometimes students are nervous to engage because of limited knowledges so they end of going for the middle
- Extremist views entering the primary school
- Some parents have vested interests
- In French there is a focus on opinion pieces whereas Maths is more logical with less space for exploring controversial issues
- The appropriateness of volunteering in international orphanages
- The use of language
- Students get most of their information from social media
- Sometimes conversations with family and friends are challenging
- Whose knowledge counts?



Advice for dealing with the scenarios presented

Buy yourself time e.g. 'Could we post that comment on the wall and we will come back to it'.

There are different realities when it comes to controversial issues

- Look at issues of power
- 'There is no solution to an argument in an argument' i.e. you need to stand back from an argument and reflect
- Have the conversation with parents about controversial issues
- We need to consider why people have prejudiced views e.g. is there a reason why you think this
- Have walking discussions rather than walking debates

Testimonial



One thing that sticks with me, from Brenda's session was when confronted with a controversial issue - asking 'is there a reason that you say that' rather than 'why' as it's less confronting and gives an opportunity for the person to back down or explain, etc.



Workshop Snippets

