



ASSEMBLY DAY 2025

Join us for a Train Journey - Exploring Stereotypes Session 2 Parallel Dialogic Inquiry

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Teacher Education for Global Citizenship



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Join us for a Train Journey – Exploring Stereotypes

SESSION 2 PARALLEL DIALOGIC INQUIRY

Meet the facilitators:



Dr Steve O'Brien is a senior lecturer in the School of Education, UCC. He has taught and published widely in the areas of the education inclusion, multicultural education, and adult education and has served as Principal and Co-Investigator on a number of national and international research projects. He actively designs and manages new curricular and research opportunities for student and practising teachers in the discipline of Global Citizenship Education.

Seánín Hoy is a Ph.D. candidate in UCC, specialising in student teachers' experiences of engaging with GCE and a praxis curriculum design in the post-primary setting. She has co-published video publications on developing understandings of GCE and student teachers' initial experiences engaging with GCE and a praxis pedagogical approach. She is also a practising post-primary teacher.

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!

These parallel dialogic inquiry sessions 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.

Scenario provided at the workshop:

Title:	Join us for a Train Journey - Exploring Stereotypes
Educator	Scenario generated by Seánín Hoy
Educational Setting:	Transition Year (TY) - Post primary school classroom
Related Resource:	This activity is extracted from <i>A Teacher's Handbook on Global Citizenship Education in the Post-Primary Classroom</i> by colleagues Seánín Hoy, Gearóid O'Brien and Stephen O'Brien.
Details & considerations:	<p>This lesson was delivered as part of a TY module. The purpose of the intervention was to explore the concept of diversity and to acknowledge and discuss stereotypes, particularly in relation to 'Others' whose background is different from our own. The goal was not to hide our assumptions or prejudices but to bring them to the fore.</p> <p>The students explored stereotypes by engaging in a participative activity where they embarked on an imaginary train journey and had to make decisions about who they would include and exclude from their seating compartment. They were asked to justify their decisions.</p> <p>The people they had to consider as travelling companions were only identified by short snippets of their identity for example 'A Trump Supporter', or 'A Palestinian Activist'. The lesson, therefore, importantly began with the question,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'how much do we know about this person?' from this description with an example given. • This question was followed by, 'how much do we assume about this person?' thus introducing the topic of the lesson's activity. <p>We recalled our Class Charter, and previous learning about how we treat each other in the classroom space especially when we have different feelings and ideas. I provided some debate language stems for the participants to use in the lesson. They agreed on what they should do if the Class Charter was compromised. We identified that a 'step back' to reflect is the best way to remind everyone that different opinions are welcome.</p> <p>The rules of the activity were explained and time was given to the participants to ask questions. The students made their choices, expressed their opinions. They had to reflect for one minute on the importance of respecting conflicting ideas as some students were in favour of Trump and others were not.</p>

	<p>The reflection time enabled students to understand the importance of listening with empathy. One student from Pakistan said that although she was not a Trump supporter she would like to travel with the supporter to better understand their difference of opinion. Practicing democratic skills was something which was really highlighted in this lesson as learners led, followed, spoke and listened, and, notably, agreed and disagreed.</p> <p>At the end of the lesson we returned to the list of travelling companions and the students were invited to generate questions to gain a fuller appreciation of each person.</p>
Question(s) you would pose to participants about this scenario:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How much do we know about the person? How much do we assume?• Who would you include in your own list of potential travelling companions?• What might we learn from this activity? How?

Related resource activity: *A Teacher's Handbook on Global Citizenship Education in the Post-Primary Classroom* by colleagues Seánín Hoy, Gearóid O'Brien and Stephen O'Brien.

Activity		Let's talk about it
Lead in Train Journey activity	<p>Invite students to go on a hypothetical train journey, the duration of which will be one week.</p> <p>Share the list of people (see Worksheet 6.1) and explain that individually the students must choose three people from the list to travel in the train compartment with them (three people with whom they want the most to spend time) and choose three people with whom they do not want to travel.</p> <p>They have only 10 minutes to decide about the six people.</p> <p>Then, they must explain their choices to the others in their group.</p> <p>Finally, as a group (maximum four people), they must reach a consensus about your six train companions.</p>	<p>How did you decide and why did you choose to travel with these people?</p> <p>How did you decide and why did you choose to not travel with these people?</p> <p>During this activity, what stereotypes were revealed? (Consider: people, group and/or behaviour stereotypes).</p> <p>How do you think those who were eliminated/not chosen would feel and react to your choices?</p>
Racism	<p>Ask students what they understand by 'racism'. Then ask if they can name the nine grounds for discrimination in Ireland – share Table 6.3 with them, as needed.</p> <p>Next, start a group discussion on groups who are discriminated against and how it might affect them.</p>	

Time to think
<p>What do you think was the purpose of this activity?</p> <p>What did you come to realise or learn by participating in this activity?</p> <p>Were you surprised by anything?</p>

Your potential train journey companions:

A Brazilian sex-worker	A Palestinian activist	A Trump supporter
A single mother	A British vandal	A police officer
A French farmer, who speaks only French	A drunk Russian skinhead	A GAA player from Cork
A fat Swiss banker	A beggar	A gender-diverse feminist
A newly-wedded bride	A blind Austrian accordionist	A young artist with AIDS
An Irish author	A Bosnian ex-prisoner	An American lawyer


Choose **six** people from the grid above – three to travel with you; three not to travel with you.

Explain why you chose them – and why you rejected the others.



Key points discussed:

- Controversial issues encountered—both overt and hidden—such as ageism, migration, race, racism, gender, ethics/values, justice and peace, war, equality/equity, and religion.
- The dilemma of whether to engage with these issues or let them go, considered from multiple perspectives: parent, partner, community member, educator, and global citizen.
- The impact of this work on individuals involved and the importance of gaining a meaningful understanding of the broader context.
- Controversial issues in hidden spaces, including online platforms, cyber ethics, digital access, and implications of mobile phone and internet use.
- The value of reflecting on personal and lived experiences while navigating professional work, making education more relevant through contemporary issues compared to historical developments.
- The role of literature in addressing struggles—referencing Yeats’ *rag and bone shop*—and the teacher’s agency in text selection, as well as how poetry and visual arts engage with these issues.
- Outstanding questions regarding the impact of specific content and learning experiences on students.
- The role of reflection and reflective practice in this process.
- Balancing solution-oriented approaches with the skills required to navigate these complex issues.
- The purpose of education in the age of AI and technological proliferation, considering how to create space for meaningful dialogue as a collective.
- The need for a pedagogical space where these conversations can emerge, and strategies to animate this space effectively.
- Focus of this lesson (Lesson 6 of the unit): Exploring stereotypes—acknowledging discrimination and exclusion caused by stereotypes. The entry point for this discussion is an activity framed by an agreed charter, with a rearranged physical environment to support engagement. A reflective piece concludes the session.
- Participants' perspectives on the activity—accepting three statements and rejecting three.
- Discomfort with rejection: How comfortable are educators in engaging with these issues? How much are we consumed with “creating the conditions” for such discussions? If we lack the capacity, what then?

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- The dialogue process as an outcome in itself—the ability to hold space for one another.
 - Framing the activity within legal frameworks such as the Equal Status Act.
 - Providing students with the option to opt out.
 - Considerations for safeguarding students, acknowledging potential exposure, safety concerns, triggering content, and discomfort.
 - Emphasizing that making mistakes is acceptable—it’s about responsible risk-taking and choosing to be present in the process.



Workshop Snippets

