

Addressing controversial issues in a whole-school approach

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REPUBLIC OF CYPRUS
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
CULTURE, SPORT
AND YOUTH



CYPRUS PEDAGOGICAL
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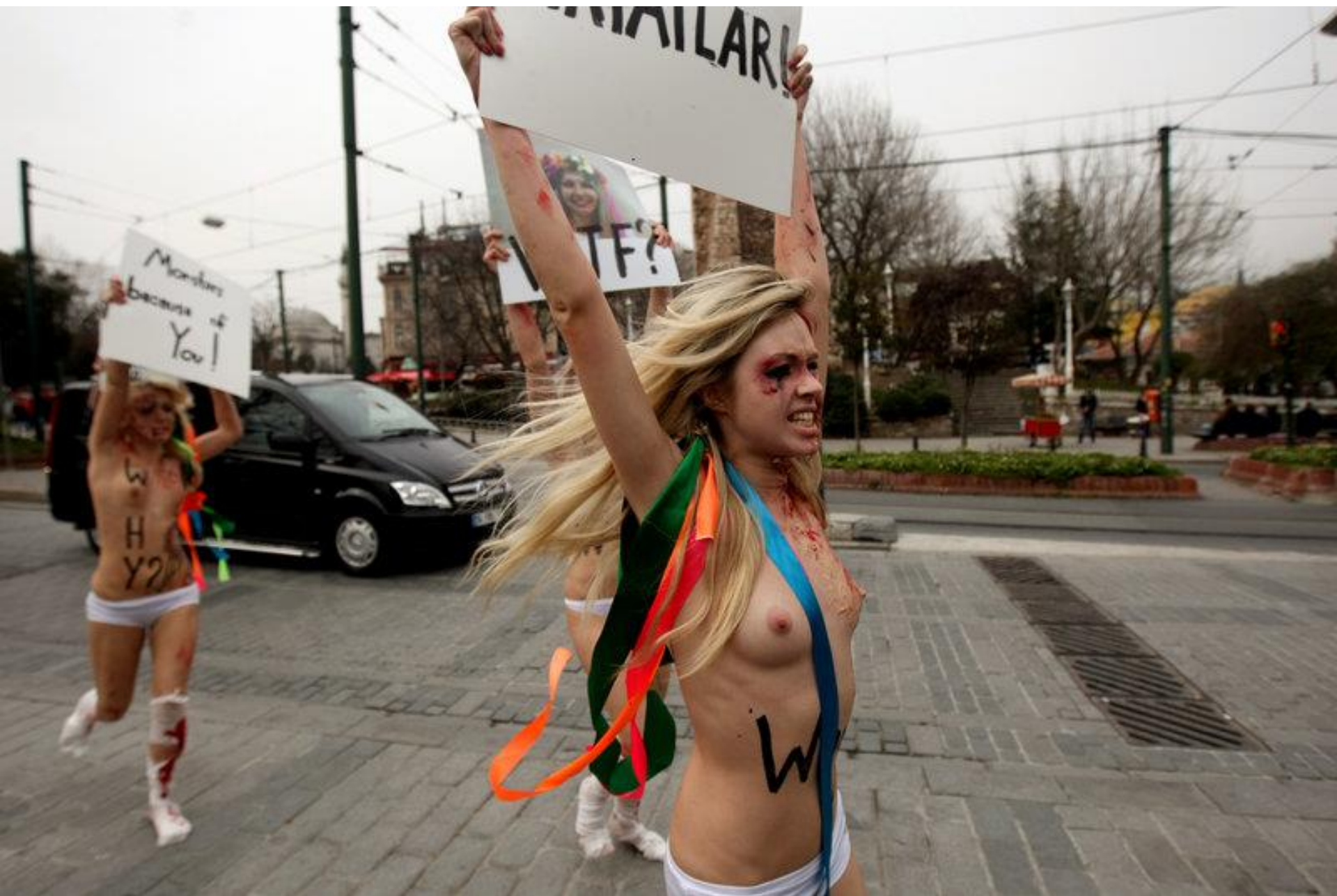
Issues which arouse strong emotions/feelings and which divide public opinion in society.

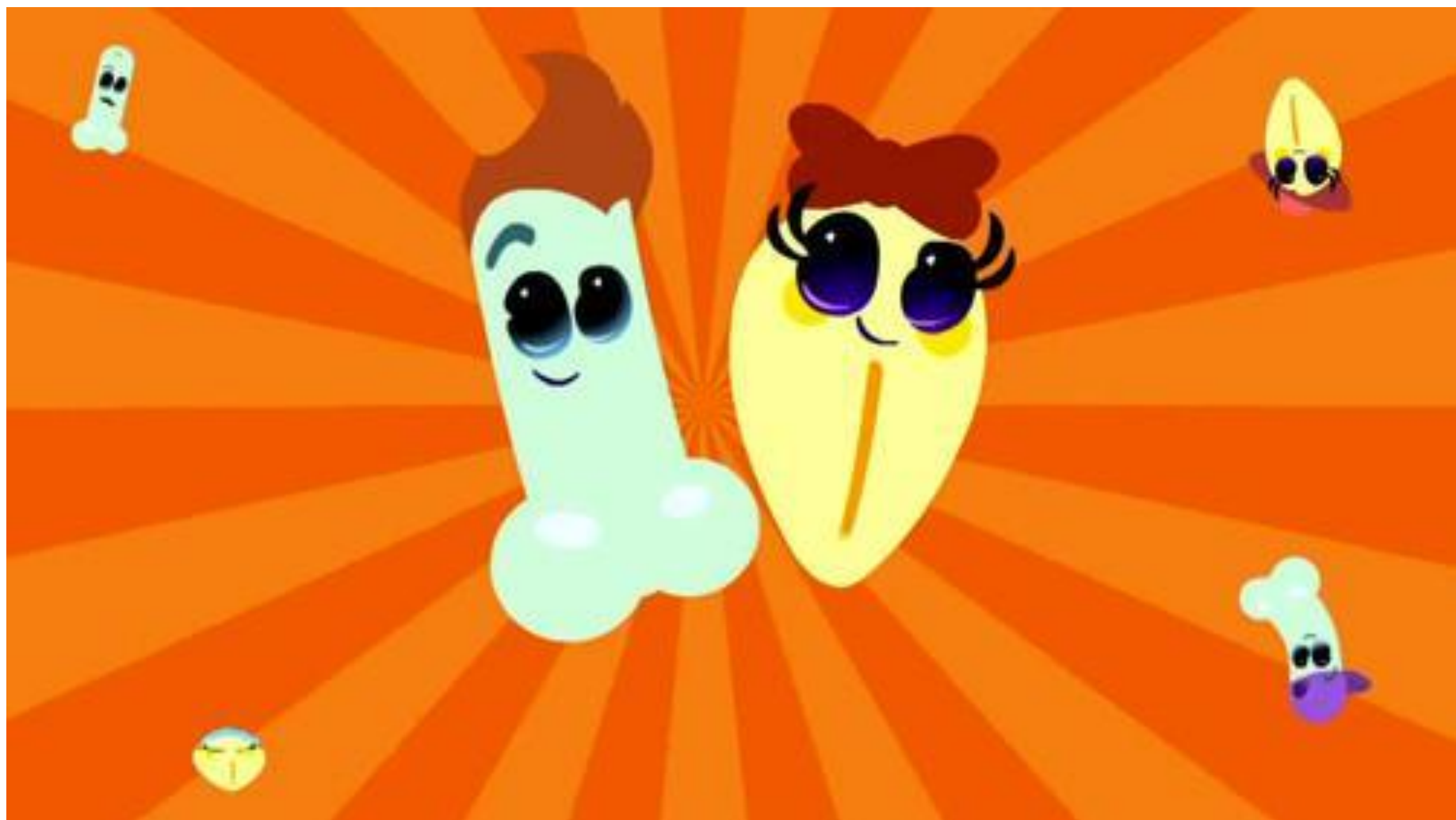
Controversial issues may be difficult to discuss because of the radically different views people have about them and the strength with which they hold these views.

Controversial issues remain in the public sphere for various periods of time, until they reach a 'closure' or an agreement - although that does not mean that the dispute will be eliminated altogether.









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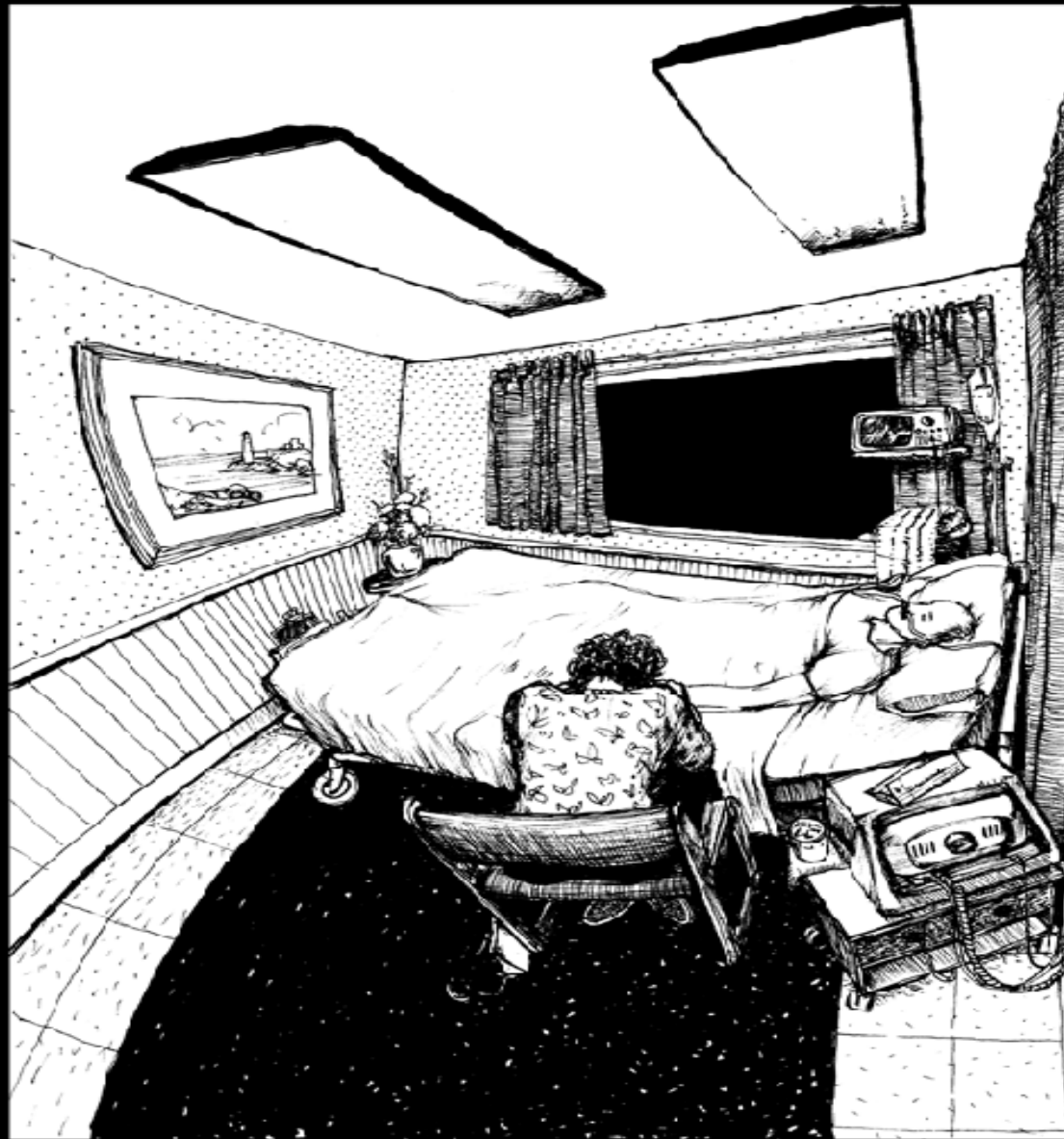
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EUTHANASIA:



IF YOU REALLY CARE, YOU'LL END IT.

a message from the NEW PARTY

Factors that make
issues
controversial



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EU/CoE Pilot Projects Scheme on Human Rights and Democracy in Action (2014): Teaching controversial issues – developing effective training for teachers and school leaders

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/charter-edc-hre-pilot-projects/teaching-controversial-issues-developing-effective-training-for-teachers-and-school-leaders>



- PARTNERS: Cyprus, Ireland, Montenegro, Spain and the United Kingdom with the support of Albania, Austria, France and Sweden
- AIM: to develop effective training on teaching controversial issues and strengthen the capability and confidence of teachers and school leaders

Results

- Scoping paper on the importance, principles and processes of effective teaching of controversial issues in citizenship and human rights education
- Production and piloting of a teacher training programme for teachers in the participating countries
- Strengthening of the capability and confidence of teachers and school leaders
- An international conference to share the learning and outcomes with other member states and European and international partners

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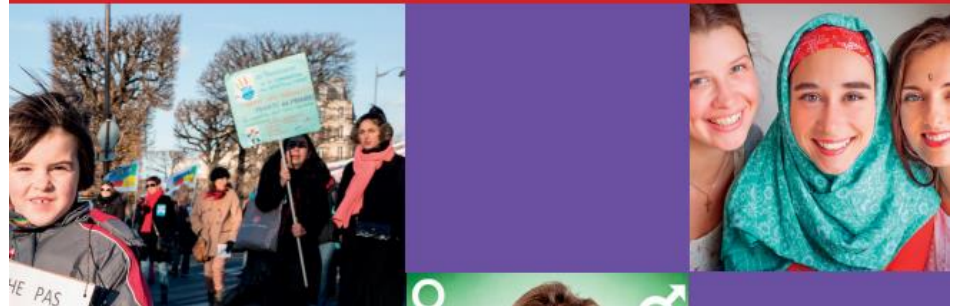
Implemented
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EU/CoE Pilot Projects Scheme on Human Rights and Democracy in Action (2015): Managing Controversy: A Whole-School Training Tool

<https://pjp-eu.coe.int/en/web/charter-edc-hre-pilot-projects/project-1-managing-controversy-a-whole-school-training-tool>

MANAGING CONTROVERSY

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY FOR HANDLING
CONTROVERSY AND TEACHING
CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN SCHOOLS



- PARTNERS: Austria, Cyprus, Ireland, Montenegro, and the United Kingdom with the support of Albania, France and Sweden
- AIM: To develop a training tool on Managing Controversy in Schools which offers practical support to school leaders/senior managers on how to proactively manage and react to controversial issues in and beyond the school

Outcomes

- A whole school training tool on handling controversial issues
- A scoping paper on the role of school leaders/senior managers in managing controversial issues in schools
- A practical 'How to' guide with answers and guidance in relation to managing proactively and reactively controversial issues
- A self-evaluation matrix on key aspects of school policies and practices that impact the school's management of controversial issues
- Integration of the training tool into existing Education for Democratic Citizenship / Human Rights Education (EDC/HRE) activities by the Council of Europe

A whole-school approach

A whole-school approach to controversial issues implies more than a one-off event or a set of training initiatives. It means working with students, parents, staff and the whole community to provide a solid foundation on which to embed developments and improvements in this field in a systematic way. Why is such an approach needed?

- Vision
- Training
- Support
- Personal and professional concerns
- Developing a common approach to policy and practice
- Monitoring and evaluation
- Child protection, safeguarding and student welfare
- School ethos and culture
- Consulting stakeholders
- External and public relations

Whole school approach

Creating a supportive school culture

A school culture that encourages discussion of controversial issues is one where diversity of opinion is celebrated and where any person – staff member, student or parent – feels they can raise their opinions without fear. It is one in which the social and educational value of such discussions is widely recognised and accepted. Creating such a culture means promoting a sense of belonging and responsibility across the school community through an emphasis on inclusion, gender equality, democracy, student participation, well-being and related principles. It also involves identifying and endeavouring to reduce or counteract the factors that work to undermine these, such as the marginalisation of individuals and minority groups.

Connecting curriculum, culture and community

Handling controversy is not just about teaching certain “hot potatoes” in the curriculum – it can relate to any aspect of school life. It also means recognising that controversies often overlap different aspects of school life – the curriculum, school culture and a school’s links with the wider community (“the three Cs” of EDC). This may need to be taken into account when deciding how to deal with particular issues.

Involving the whole staff – teaching and non-teaching

It follows that if controversy can relate to any aspect of school life then it can also relate to any member of staff, teaching or non-teaching. How the school handles controversial issues is therefore relevant to all staff and all can have a part to play – for example, by reflecting diversity in their subject teaching or contributing to a more open and supportive climate.

Whole school approach

- Controversy should not be seen as a problem but as a **natural part** of life in a democracy.
- Controversial issues should not be shied away from but **discussed openly** wherever possible.
- Controversial issue discussions are an essential part of **democratic education**.
- Controversial issues can arise **anywhere** in school at **any time**.
- Controversial issues are relevant to **all school staff**, not just a few.

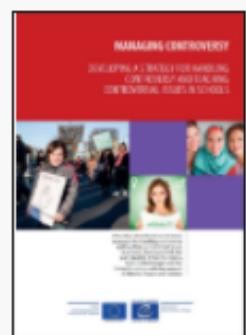


Teaching controversial issues

This training pack is a professional development programme for teachers designed to support and promote the teaching of controversial issues in European schools.



Download in **Albanian, Czech, English, Estonian, Finnish, French, German, Greek, Hungarian, Icelandic, Latvian, Lithuanian, Montenegrin, Norwegian, Polish, Romanian, Russian, Slovak, Spanish, Swedish** and **Ukrainian**.

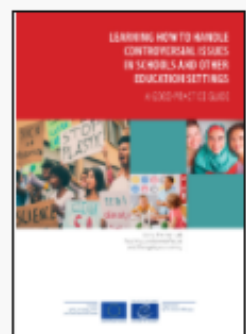


Managing controversy

This tool aims to help strengthen the managing of controversial issues at whole-school level.



Download in **Czech, English, Finnish, German, Greek, Icelandic, Norwegian, Romanian, Russian** and **Swedish**.



Learning how to handle controversial issues in schools and other education settings - A Good Practice Guide

This guide captures the rich learning that has emerged over past years from the promotion of the two manuals ("Teaching controversial issues" and "Managing controversy") across Europe.



Download in **English**.

The Cyprus experience

- Teaching and dealing with controversial issues is especially relevant in a post-conflict society like Cyprus, in the context of a multiperspective approach to History teaching and the need to promote social justice and education for human rights and democracy across society.
- Initially, Health Education provided the main focus for the trainings delivered at the Cyprus Pedagogical Institute, which touched upon questions concerning religion, sexuality, euthanasia, racism, homophobia, transphobia, bullying, sexism and nationalism. The comprehensive training package that was developed could be integrated into and used to support official policy and practice in Health Education. This included websites, lesson plans, videos, guidelines and tools for teachers and head teachers. The teachers' guide on intercultural education within the Health Education curriculum, developed by the Ministry, recommends activities such as debates on controversial issues, for example euthanasia for animals, family types, smoking and drugs.

- At the whole-school level, questions relating to teaching about and managing controversy raised in the two manuals played an important role in the implementation of the ministry's anti-racist policy, the "Code of Conduct against Racism and Guide for Managing and Recording Racist Incidents". The policy outlines the responsibilities and commitments expected by each member of the school community, and provides schools with detailed guidelines on how to prevent and deal with racist incidents. It views diversity as a multidimensional phenomenon involving various aspects of people's identities, inextricably related to controversy.
- Managing controversial issues within a framework of human rights and democracy is thus an essential element in a whole-school approach countering racism based on various forms of diversity in schools such as religion, ethnicity, language, appearance, disability, gender and sexual orientation.

WHAT IF...

- ... racist views are heard in the room?
- ... arguments are presented in favor of sexist views?
- ... I can not change the opinion of those with racist perceptions?
- ... I do not reduce the prejudice against people who are different?
- ...???



Let's be realistic

it is easier to feel confident in tackling controversial issues, if you don't feel under pressure to change attitudes, and if you recognise that it is an acceptable goal simply to raise awareness of issues and to promote critical thinking among students about them.

(CDVEC, 2012)

THANK YOU

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