Teaching Controversial Issues in the Secondary RE Classroom

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Roadmap

Research project

Background

Discussion and Reflection
Which issues are the most controversial?
controversial issues

- marriage
- divorce
- faith
- religion
- abortion
- human rights
- homosexuality
- animal rights
- free-will
- faith
- religion
- genetic manipulation
- violence
- politics
- cloning
- creation
- punishment
- contraception
- palliative care
Teaching must promote openness, respect for others, objectivity, scholarly accuracy and critical enquiry.

Pupils are therefore entitled to be taught by teachers who:

a. have secure subject knowledge

b. are capable of addressing misconceptions and misunderstandings and handling controversial issues

c. demonstrate a critical understanding of developments in the study of religion and worldviews

d. promote the value of scholarship.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Why teach Controversial issues?</th>
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<td>Controversy at the heart of religion/worldviews</td>
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<td>Controversial issues affect young people and they are motivated to tackle them</td>
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<td>Controversial issues form the basis of individual or societal change</td>
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<td>Helps in the preparation for adult life</td>
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<td>Developing thinking skills</td>
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<td>Personal and interpersonal development</td>
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Attitudes towards controversial issues

- Inadequate training (ITT/CPD) and no formal guidance
  - Oulton et al. (2004)

- Lack of support from colleagues and SLT
  - Woolley (2010)

- Worried about getting it wrong
  - Wooley (2020)

- Concerns about overheating
  - Council of Europe (2015)

- Dealing with spontaneous, or strong emotional remarks
  - Wansink et al. (2019)

- Not enough curriculum time to do topics justice
  - Anker and von der Lippe (2018)

- Fear of negative reactions from parents and wider community
  - McAvoy and Hess (2013)

- Doubts as to ability to handle own opinions
  - McAvoy and Hess (2013)

- Concerns about underheating
  - Council of Europe (2015)

- Worries about age/stage appropriateness
  - Philpott et al. (2013)

- Structural
- Relational
- Personal
- Conversational
- Pastoral
The PhD research project: Teachers’ experiences of tackling controversial issues in the context of GCSE Religious Studies

• A focus on one controversial issue at a time
• Semi-structured 1-2-1 interviews
• Knowing how teachers feel helps to provide more targeted solutions

Current Call for Participants:
Female teachers’ experiences of teaching abortion at GCSE Religious Studies

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What advice would you give to an ITT Student who was teaching a lesson on a controversial issue?

- Planning and Preparation
- Resources
- Classroom dynamics/behavioural management
- The teacher’s own opinions
- Role or position of the teacher during discussion
- Pastoral issues
- Parents/Local Community/Senior Leaders
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In Conversation with.... Abi Maguire
28th October 4.14 – 5.15pm

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