

# CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES

## Teacher Notes

### Introduction



Controversial issues can be daunting to teach as their very nature provokes debate and can bring a difference of opinion and possible conflict within a classroom environment. However, it is important to teach controversial issues to improve students' skills, increase their awareness and help them form opinions which will prepare them for their lives as adults.

Within the Action Plan for Geography's online Key Stage 3 resources there are many opportunities to discuss and deal with a range of controversial issues, from the capacity of a physical environment to support new development to whether billionaires should share their wealth with the poor. This resource gives you a useful starting point for teaching controversial issues with helpful links and information.

The student handbook also provides extension activities for more able students and useful links to support student study on four of the units which include controversial issues featured on the website.

### How to approach the teaching of controversial issues

The government is strongly in support of teaching controversial issues in order to "promote spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development" (Education Act, 2000). As government policy and recommendations on the teaching of citizenship, controversial issues and the global dimension can change, it is worth keeping up to date with current policy before embarking on teaching.

### Links:

The following links are a good starting point for further information.

Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency:

[www.qcda.gov.uk/6755.aspx](http://www.qcda.gov.uk/6755.aspx)

Guidance on the duty to promote community cohesion:

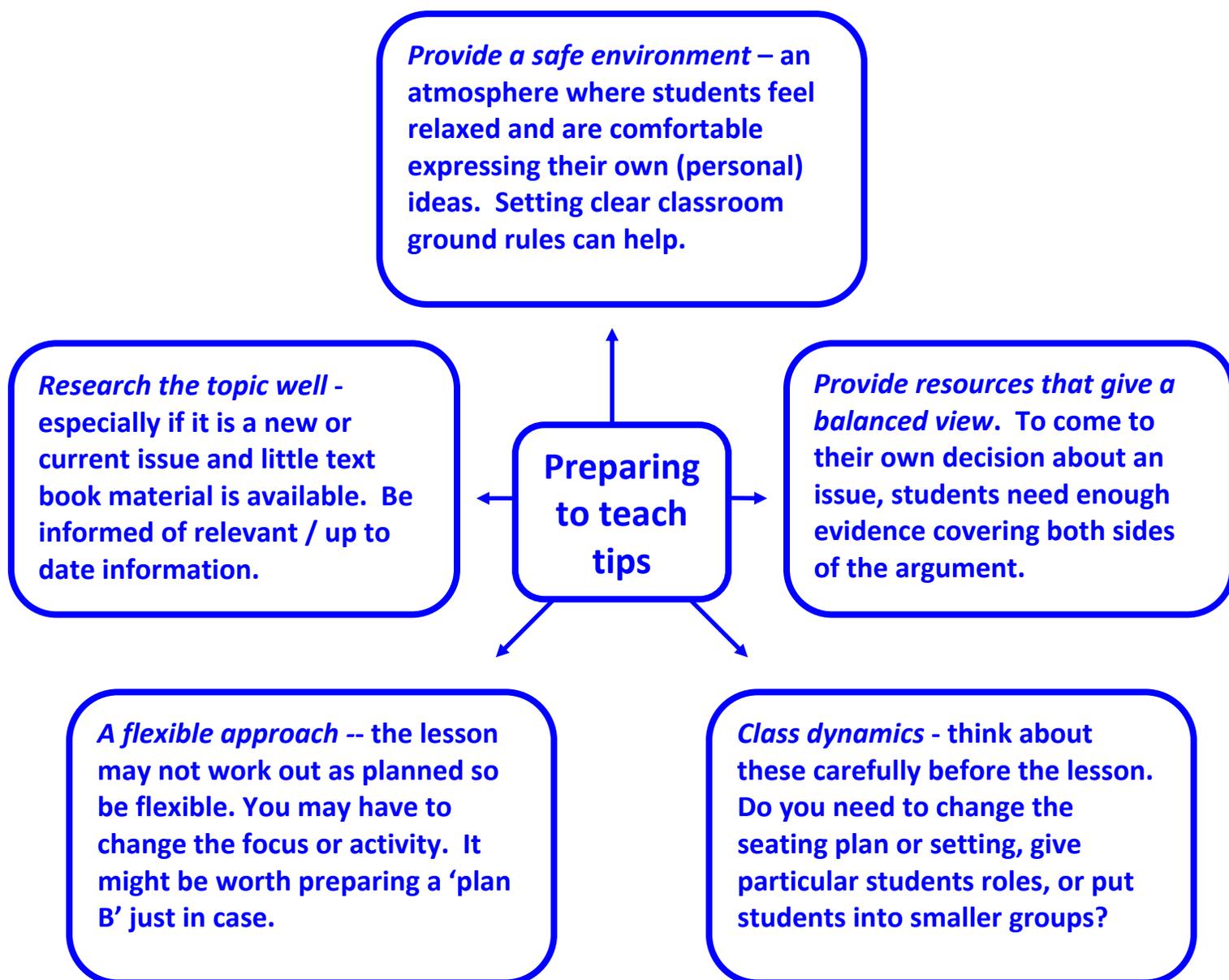
[www.teachernet.gov.uk/\\_doc/11635/Guidance%20on%20the%20duty%20to%20promote%20community%20cohesion%20pdf.pdf](http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/_doc/11635/Guidance%20on%20the%20duty%20to%20promote%20community%20cohesion%20pdf.pdf)

Curriculum Review: Diversity and citizenship:

<http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/Diversity&Citizenship.pdf>

## **Preparing to teach controversial issues**

Before embarking on teaching a lesson which involves controversial issues, it is worth considering the following tips:



## Your role as teacher



As a teacher, you have a very important role when teaching controversial issues. Your job is to ensure that students receive a balanced view of both sides of the argument, that they are made aware of potential bias in any materials that you use, and that you help to facilitate an environment where discussion can ensue. The following tips can help you in your role as facilitator:

### **Tips:**

- Set clear ground rules. Students should:
  - Speak one at a time
  - Listen and respect the views of others
  - Not monopolise the discussion as individuals, but allow others a turn
  - Use appropriate language and refrain from making noises
  - Respect those who do not wish to give an opinion
- Ensure that you provide a balance of views by giving equal importance to opposing views, not just presenting the prevailing public opinion.
- Ensure that you differentiate between facts and opinions, being careful not to present opinions as facts.
- Be sensitive to individual pupils who may have been affected by the issues discussed.
- Refrain from preaching or acting as if you are the authority on the issue as this may alienate students or even put them off the issue altogether.
- If a one-sided consensus develops quickly in the discussion, challenge it by providing alternative viewpoints.
- Challenge bias, racism, discrimination, sexism or views that are against our community values.
- Take care not to reveal your own personal opinions inadvertently, for example through gestures or facial expressions.
- If you decide to give your own views, ensure students know that these are your views as a private citizen and not as a teacher.

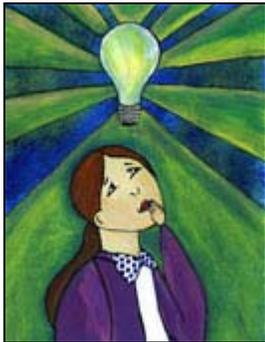
### **Links:**

The following links provide more information and advice on teaching controversial issues:

- The Citizenship Foundation:  
[www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/page.php?43](http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/page.php?43)  
[www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/page.php?79](http://www.citizenshipfoundation.org.uk/main/page.php?79)

- Who do we think we are?  
[www.wdwtwa.org.uk](http://www.wdwtwa.org.uk)
- Insted: Equality and Diversity in Education:  
[www.insted.co.uk/links.html](http://www.insted.co.uk/links.html)
- Oxfam:  
[www.oxfam.org.uk/education/teachersupport/cpd/controversial/files/teaching\\_controversial\\_issues.pdf](http://www.oxfam.org.uk/education/teachersupport/cpd/controversial/files/teaching_controversial_issues.pdf)
- Channel 4 INSET: Teaching controversial issues:  
[www.channel4.com/learning/programmenotes/inset/teachcontrv01.htm](http://www.channel4.com/learning/programmenotes/inset/teachcontrv01.htm)
- The Historical Association:  
[www.history.org.uk/resources/secondary\\_guide\\_1140\\_54.html](http://www.history.org.uk/resources/secondary_guide_1140_54.html)

## Teaching ideas



There are many different teaching and learning approaches that you can adopt when teaching controversial issues. The prospect of holding a discussion - especially with a challenging class - can be daunting. However, a discussion or debate is a useful way of exploring different issues and by listening to their peers, students can gain a variety of useful skills which they can take with them into adulthood.

There are different techniques that you might consider using when holding a discussion or debate. It is important to think about what you hope to gain out of the lesson and what the learning objectives are first, as well as thinking about the approach that you feel best suits your class and your own teaching style.

It might be useful to do some preparatory work with students prior to the discussion, particularly on topics that might be new to them. You could provide a stimulus in the form of a picture, video clip, extract or even a poem. Once you feel that the students are engaged you might feel ready to hold a discussion. Below are some techniques that you could utilise when holding a discussion:

<b>Public forum</b>	Students discuss the issue in the traditional way with a pupil or teacher taking the role of chairperson.
<b>Teams with an audience</b>	Two small teams present opposing arguments to the rest of the class on an issue. Students from each team challenge the other team on their points. The audience ask both teams questions
<b>Role play</b>	Students take on roles of individuals or groups of people. They then debate 'in role' as a class or in small groups.

Envoys	Students work in groups to research an issue and when the activity is complete, send an envoy to another group to tell them what their group thought/achieved.
Snowballing	Students begin in pairs to discuss an activity. They then join another pair to discuss their thoughts, then join another group to become eight, continue to join other groups until the class becomes one group.
Decision making	Students are given scenario cards in groups and have to make a decision about an issue and justify their reasons.
Using 'thinking hats'	Students take a hat which has a particular way of dealing with a problem. For more information see: <a href="http://www.teachnet.com/how-to/manage/sixhats120800.html">www.teachnet.com/how-to/manage/sixhats120800.html</a>

## Links:

The following links provide additional ideas on debating techniques:

- Idea (International Debate Education Association):  
[www.idebate.org/teaching/classroom.php](http://www.idebate.org/teaching/classroom.php)
- Learning and Teaching in Scotland:  
[www.ltscotland.org.uk/debatinginschools/classroom/index.asp](http://www.ltscotland.org.uk/debatinginschools/classroom/index.asp)
- 'Explore at Bristol' debating ideas:  
[www.at-bristol.co.uk/cz/teachers/czhowto\\_web.pdf](http://www.at-bristol.co.uk/cz/teachers/czhowto_web.pdf)