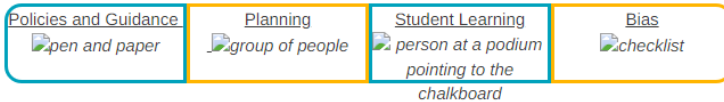


Facilitating Student Learning: Controversial Issues



Contact

Deborah March
Educational Specialist, Culturally
Responsive Pedagogy
dmmarch@fcps.edu



https://hub.fcps.edu/organizations/social-studies/basic-page/facilitating-student-learning-controversial-issues?check_logged_in=1

Facilitating Student Learning: Controversial Issues

The following tools clarify and support the teacher's role as a facilitator of student learning:

- A set of **discussion protocols** to help teachers facilitate thoughtful and respectful conversations.
- A collection of **thinking routines**; structures to help students reason, engage multiple perspectives, and practice fairness in collaboration. These routines can be adapted for use across grade levels and subjects.
- Resources to help your students set **community expectations** (norms). By engaging in norm-setting before encountering controversial issues, students can review and define their shared expectations for civil discourse and a caring, inclusive environment.

Discussion Protocols and Guides

These resources offer protocols and guidance for facilitating academic conversations with students about controversial issues.

- [PBS Newshour Structured Academic Controversy protocol](#) (PDF): Protocol with note-taking guide for academic conversation
- [Teaching Tolerance: Civil Discourse in the Classroom](#): Chapters 2-4 offer guidance and structures for preparing students for civil discussions of controversial issues
- [Courageous Conversations Protocol](#) (PDF): A "compass" to promote reflection on different ways of engaging difficult topics, and a reflection protocol
- [Academic Conversations for Grades 4-6](#) (ZIP): structured activities to promote evidence-based academic discussion for elementary students
- Portrait of a Graduate [Communicator Conversation Skills](#) (DOCX): Contains a bank of focus lessons to develop conversation skills

- Generation Global Essentials of Dialogue: clarifies the role of “facilitator,” offers guidance for creating a safe and inclusive classroom, and includes lesson plans with rubrics and assessments
- Deliberating in a Democracy Resources: lesson plans and resources for understanding and practicing deliberation
- Barometer: Taking a Stand on Controversial Issues: in this routine, students stand along a continuum representing their opinion on an issue
- Iceberg Diagrams: a structure to help students identify the underlying issues beneath the surface
- The Talk Show: a Pedagogical Tool: norms and procedure for using the talk show format to support complex academic discussions

Thinking Routines

Visible Thinking, by Harvard University’s Project Zero, is a flexible and research-based way to blend students’ developmental thinking with learning content in all subjects.

Visible Thinking has two tracks:

1. To cultivate students’ thinking skills, curiosity, concern for truth and understanding, and a creative mindset. Not only being skilled, but also aware of thinking and learning opportunities and eager to take them.
2. To deepen content learning.

The routines below encourage the habits of mind important to civil discourse:

- reflection,
- explanation with evidence,
- perspective-taking,
- questioning, and
- deliberation.

Project Zero Thinking Routines

- What Makes You Say That?: Students describe what they see or know and build evidence-based explanations for their interpretations.
- Step Inside: Students examine another perspective closely, exploring sensory experiences, knowledge, beliefs, and values.
- Circle of Viewpoints: Students brainstorm diverse perspectives related to an issue and then explore each perspective more deeply.
- Here Now/There Then: Students explore past perspectives on controversial issues and examine how and why attitudes may have changed based on context.
- Reporter’s Notebook: Students take on the role of a journalist to record “facts and events” separately from “thoughts and feelings” in order to clarify and evaluate information.
- Tug of War: For dilemmas that have two clear sides, students identify forces “tugging” on either side, taking perspectives and reasoning collaboratively.
- Claim, Support, Question: A structure for argumentation that emphasizes open-mindedness.

Classroom Community Norm-Setting

Setting expectations (norms) that guide individual and group work can prevent many conflicts. This is especially true for work related to controversial issues. These resources offer guidance and processes for norm-setting.

- Generation Global: Essentials of Dialogue: This handbook clarifies the role of “facilitator,” offers guidance for creating a safe and inclusive classroom, and includes lesson plans with rubrics and assessments.
- AllSides For Schools: Norm Setting Resources: A norm-setting lesson plan with discussion questions and “Conversation Agreements” handout.