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Teachers' Concerns Regarding Controversial Issues in the RE- Classroom

ConCitizen

*Contested Narratives and Controversial Issues
in Citizenship Education.*

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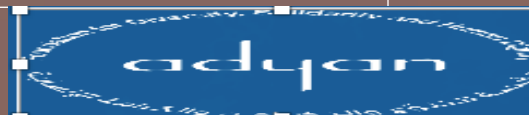
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Agenda

Padlet activity: Examples of controversial issues and contested narratives from your context

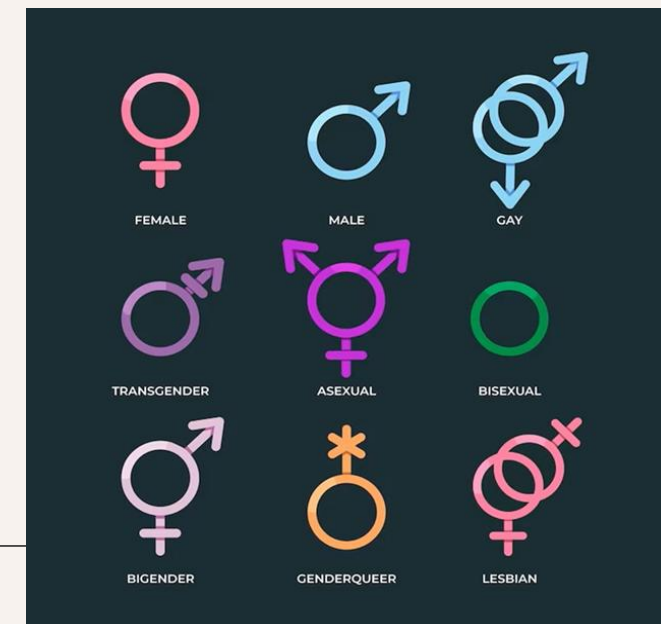
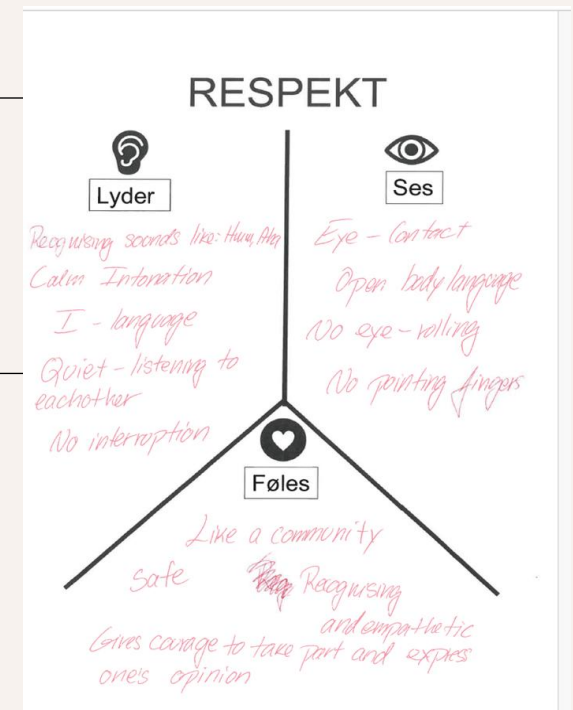
Introduction to the ConCitizen project and definitions of CN and CI

- Why is this relevant both from a societal and classroom perspective?
- The classroom as a community of disagreement
- When religious beliefs and practices become controversial: Cases involving controversial issues in the RE teaching of Northern Ireland and Denmark

Pedagogical/Didactical stations activities:

Britta: Dialogue game, Norman: Case-based activity, Eva: Limits and dilemmas - the respectful dialogue

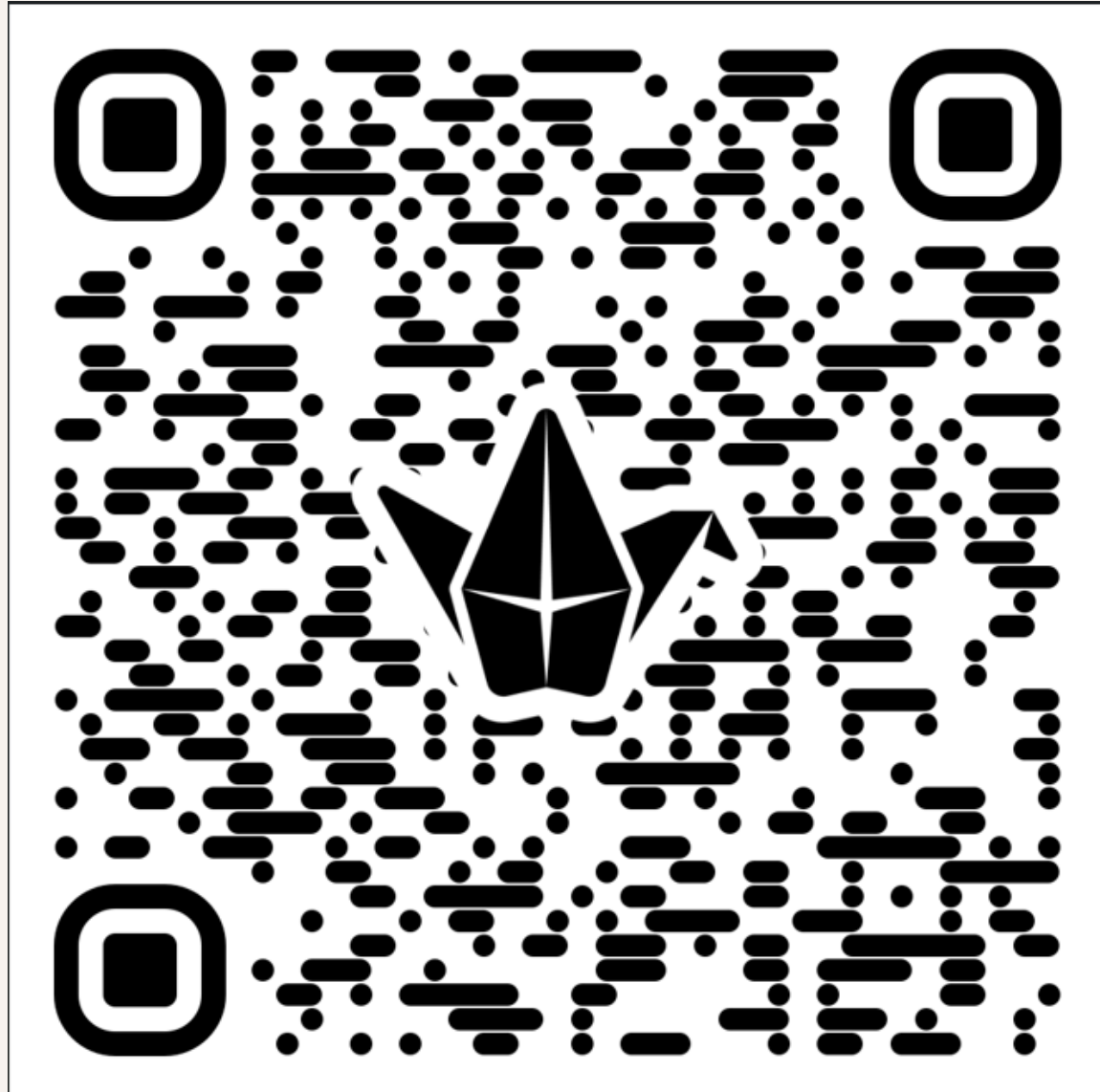
Questions



Examples of CI and CN from
your RE-context

Upload a picture that
illustrates a controversial
issue or one that includes
contested narratives from
your teaching in RE.

Please include a brief
explanation below the
picture.



Have a talk
with your
colleagues

Please present the picture or case you
just uploaded to the person sitting next
to you.

What makes it controversial?

How would you describe the challenges
it presents in a classroom setting?



Context matters

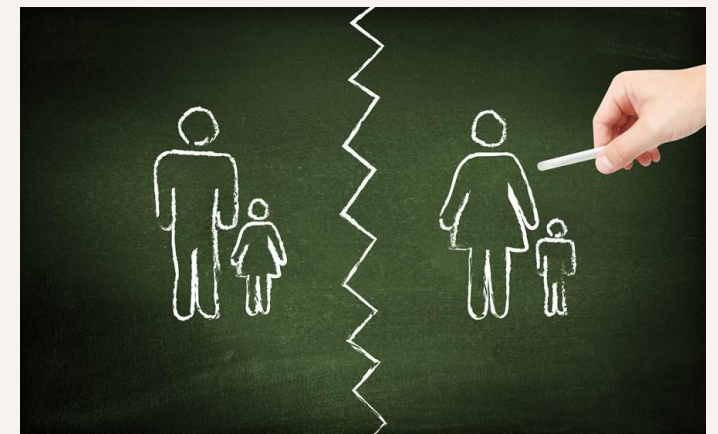
TIME



Copenhagen ZOO 1900.

PLACE

- Global
- National
- Local
- School
- Class



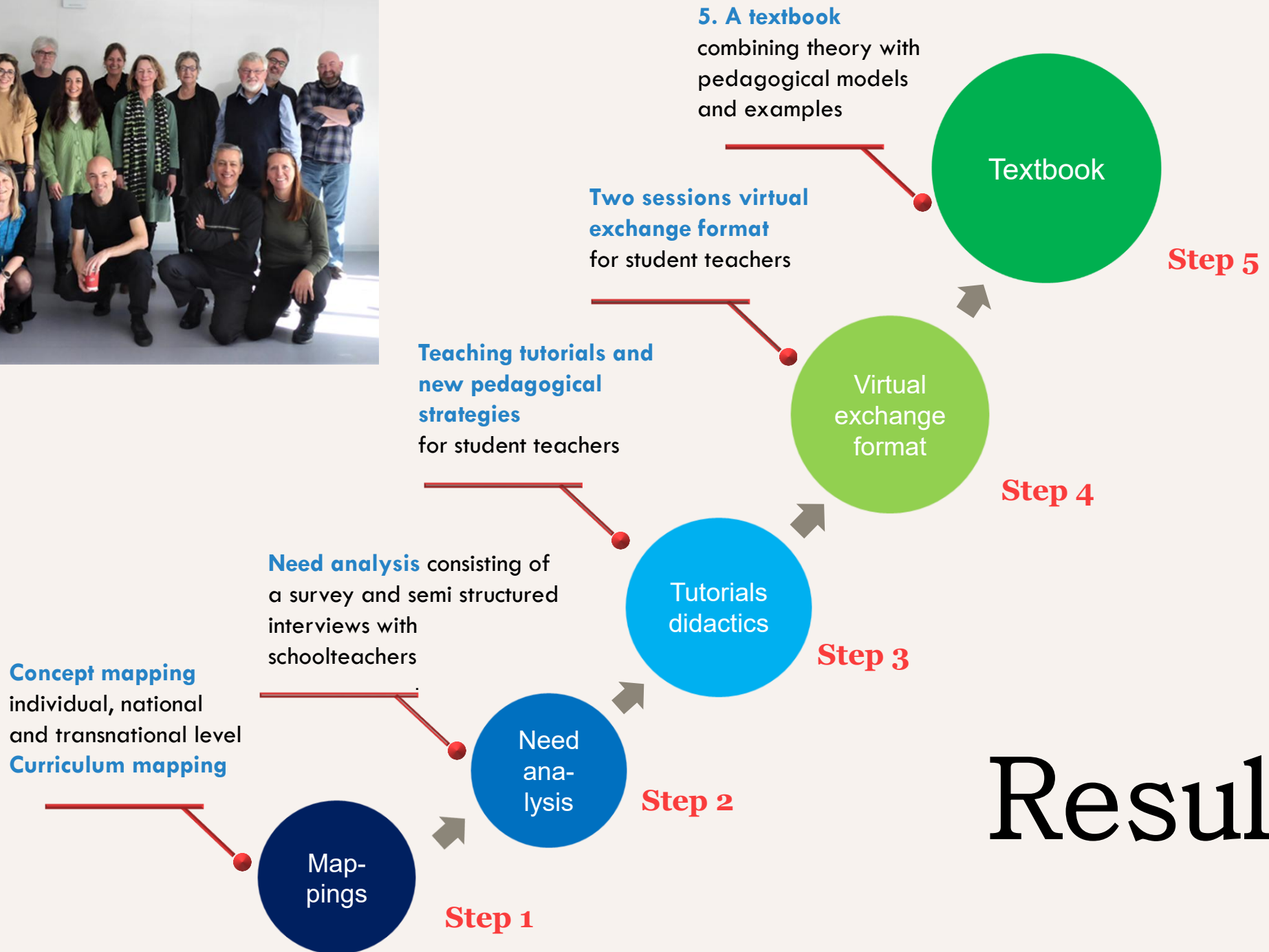
Project ConCitizen: Key question



How do we teach controversial issues particularly related to contested narratives in post-conflict and diverse societies?

Target group:

- lecturers at teacher education
 - student teachers in history, social science and religious education.
 - Teachers in schools
-



Results

Definitions

Contested Narratives (CN) - Different collective interpretations of events, figures or texts that create conflicting perceptions and feelings about the past, present and future

Controversial issues (CI) - Issues of public importance that generate conflicting views and evoke strong emotions that may result in (outward) reactions or avoidance



The Classroom as a community of disagreement

Democracy is no longer something young people can take for granted – they observe cracks appearing in European democracies.

The consensus seeking classroom might not prepare the students for living in a democracy today.

The classroom as a community of disagreement includes multiple perspectives, critical thinking and the aim of understanding other positions" (Iversen 2014).

Definition:

A community of disagreement is a group of people with different opinions who find themselves engaged in a common process in order to solve shared problems or challenges. (Iversen 2019, p. 17)

"it is not possible to make a classroom entirely safe, only more safe" (Jackson 2014, 49).



In a brave space, one dares to engage in dialogue, even knowing that you may be contradicted, affected, and disturbed by what others say and believe.

Northern Ireland:

Whatever you say, say nothing!

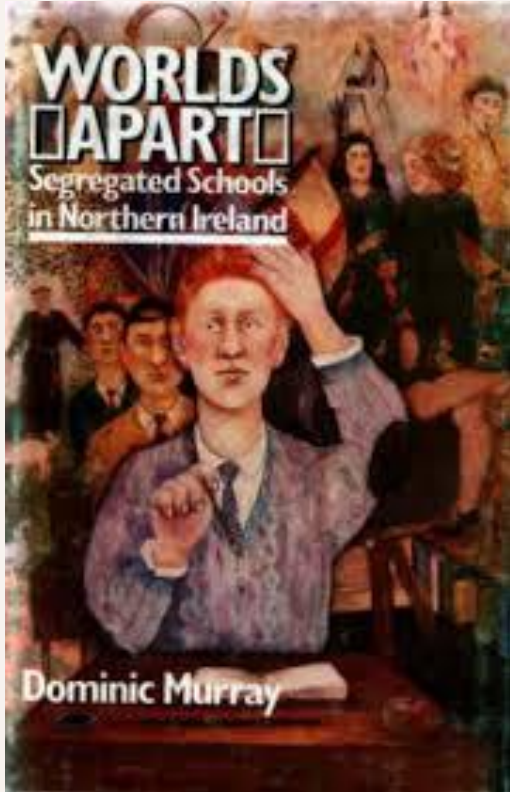
- Title of a Seamus Heaney poem (1975 - 'The Troubles')
 - A divided society where we know "what people are" but we don't talk about the divisions in mixed company!
 - Separate schools still mark out these divisions.
 - Teachers and students have to learn to talk about the things we don't talk about - developing and modelling new skills!
-



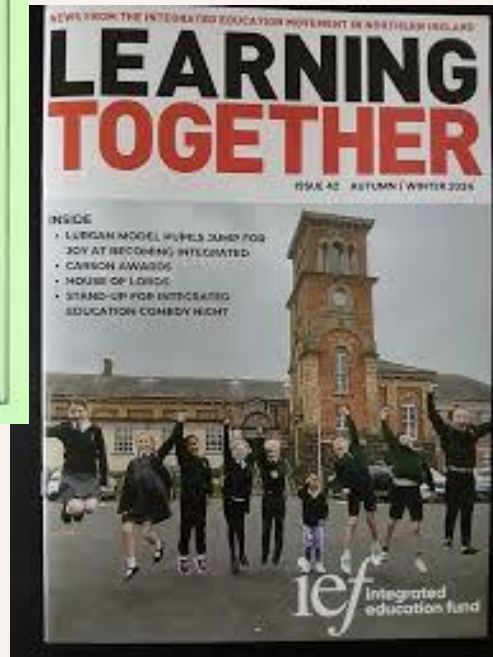
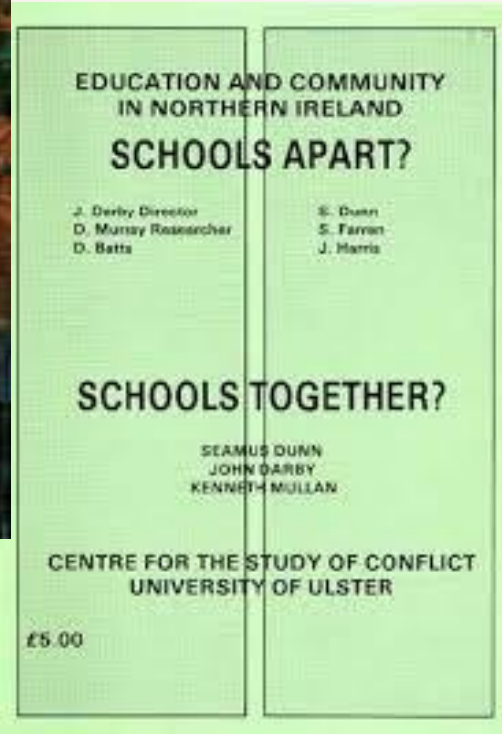
Overcoming separation?

Sharing?

Encounter?



Breaking barriers?



Together or Apart?

Integrating?

Q: GIV ONE OR MORE EXAMPLES OF CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN YOUR TEACHING SUBJECTS + CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES RAISED BY STUDENTS

The teachers description of high frequent controversial issues n=60 Top 7 frequency:	Part of the subject content	Raised by students
1 : Israel-Palestine conflict	29	19
2 : Gender identity and gender roles	19	9
3: Religious interpretation and practice	15	9
4: Sexuality	12	14
5: Muhammed caricature crisis	12	2
6: Racism/nazism	9	10
7: Immigration- and integration politics	9	3

Low-income/many minority ethnic students

- Evolution vs creation
- Religious social control

High-income/many majority ethnic students

- Social heritage
- The welfare state

RE: "One student pointed out that another student wasn't a "real Muslim" because the student didn't fast." Teacher school 4

Social inheritance raised by student: "It's people's own fault that they ended up the way they did. It's not fair that I should help them just because I have my life together." Teacher, School 5

Gender equality, diverse school contexts and teachers' preconceptions

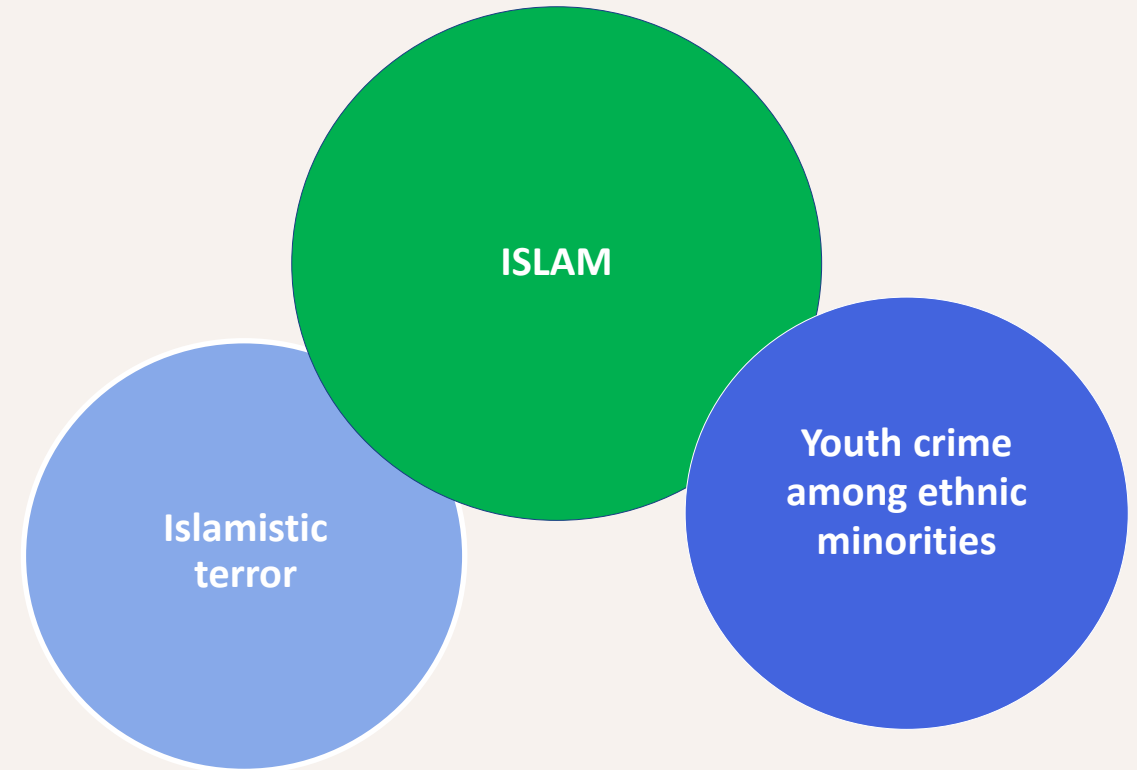
CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND DISCOURSE "RUB OFF"/IMPACT

"I see that there are many prejudices about Muslims when I introduce the topic of 'Islam.' There is almost always an immediate association with 9/11 and terrorism. Then, I experience that they link it to the criminals from Nørrebro – or refugees. We often have to go through a longer discussion before we can start on the actual topic; that is, the religion of Islam."

Teacher, School 7.

Teacher's description of student statements about Muslim practices: *"No one wants to live like that. It's forced."*

Teacher, School 7.



CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES AND DISCOURSE "RUB OFF"/IMPACT

When the class saw a documentary where a Jew introduced Jewish belief and practice, one student exclaimed: "You fucking Jew!" Teacher, School 7

"An exclamation from a student: Jews are evil". Teacher, school 4.



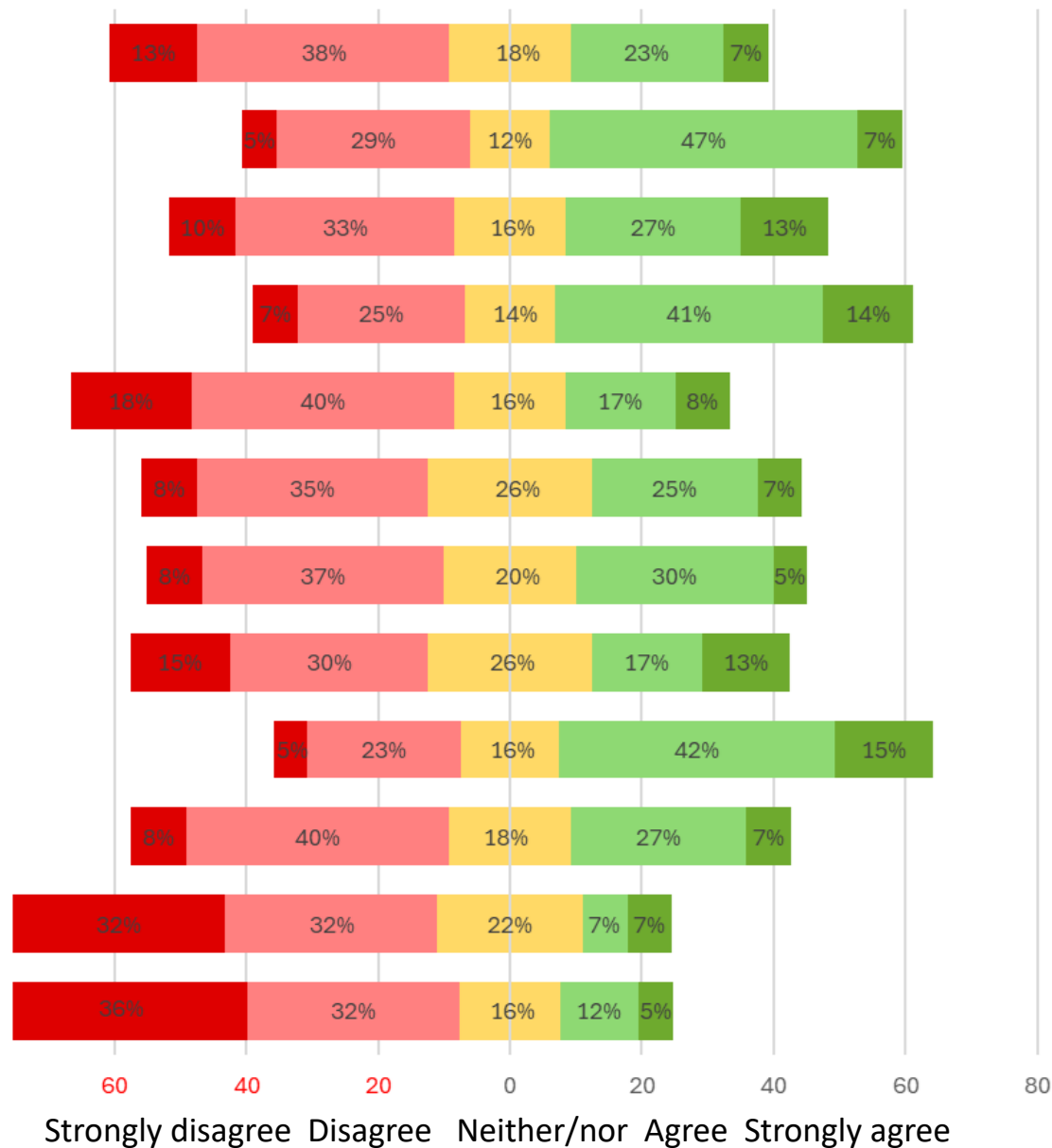
"When we had of the World War 2, one of my students asked the question: "Why do the Jews do this to the Palestinians, when they themselves have been exposed to it?" Teacher, School 5

" The conflict between Israel and Palestine – There are strong polarized positions The issue if Holocaust is a historical event. I have occasionally encountered this stance with students from other ethnic/religious backgrounds. The conflict between Israel and Palestine is characterized by strongly polarized positions, particularly from the pro-Palestinian side. This often reflects a worldview that does not align with the principles of my teaching." Lærer Skole 2

"Judaism/Jews: Holocaust and the subsequent "special status" of the Jews." Lærer skole 8

I sometimes avoid controversial issues ...

1. because there is not enough time to teach these topics
2. because there is a lack of teaching materials
3. because I do not have enough knowledge about the topic
4. because I am concerned that the topic may cause conflict among the students in the class
5. because I am concerned that the topic may cause conflict between me and some of the students
6. because I lack strategies for facilitating student dialogues on these topics
7. because I don't know how to deal with the emotional reactions of the students
8. because I don't want to offend some of the students' parents
9. because I think the topic might be sensitive to some of the students in the class
10. because some of the students have very strong opinions on the topic
11. because I have very strong opinions on the topic
12. because I am concerned about the consequences for my security



How can we address controversial issues in a school setting?



Learning and teaching stations

Dialogue game –
bridge building and
the art of asking
questions (Britta)



Walking debates
(Norman)



Student dialogues
and teacher stances
(Eva)



Questions?



Links to e-twinning site and website with tutorials and podcasts from ConCitizen:

Links

Project ConCitizen Website <https://www.kp.dk/en/concitizen/> Introduction and teaching resources.

Project ConCitizen on eTwinning Access to teaching resources on Twinspace Pages.

Tutorials:

- Halldis Breidlid, OsloMet on Contested Narratives: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GFI7N8GEpSE>
- Lakshmi Sigurdsson, University College Copenhagen KP on Controversial Issues: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3Txcp9vmiCU>
- Lesley Emmerson, Queen's University Belfast on The Benefits and Rationale for Teaching Contested Narratives and Controversial Issues: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZxkSIAR_1U0

Podcast:

- In this podcast, hosted by Professor Tony Gallagher of Queen's University Belfast, educational experts from the ConCitizen project discuss dealing with controversial issues in their respective societies.
- Spotify: <https://open.spotify.com/show/5u7MHsuyiZm72j1KTRKtiG?si=30a88868d2394d17> Apple podcasts: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/queens-university-belfast-how-teachers-from-different/id1677311132>

Article

Kathrin Kello (PDF) [Sensitive and Controversial Issues in the Classroom: Teaching History in a Divided Society \(researchgate.net\)](#)

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Børne og Undervisningsministeriet: Hvordan taler vi nemt om det svære? <https://emu.dk/grundskole/undervisningsmiljoe/trivsel/hvordan-taler-man-nemt-om-det-svaere?b=t5-t286-t305>

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