DEALING WITH CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES WITH PRIMARY TEACHER TRAINEES AS PART OF CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION.

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Abstract

In this article I argue that dealing with controversial issues is an essential part of education for democracy and touches on all the main strands of citizenship education. We need to analyse WHY people are divided. I outline some of the concepts to do with values, ethics and theoretical approaches to resolving conflict which relate to social and moral education. I then discuss some of the blocks to open minded thinking and logical argument that get in the way of rational approaches to dealing with controversy. The section on the possible content of work on controversy connects both with pupils’ own lives, with the curriculum and the community.

Introduction

Case studies from the real world of classrooms

Five year olds are comparing school pictures from 25 years ago and now: Esther notices that most of the children in the older picture are white, while most of her class (including herself) are black. ‘Why might this be?’ asks my student, expecting a discussion about different communities having moved into the area. Esther's reply disturbs her and cannot be left hanging:

Esther: Because in that picture the children prayed to God to make them white so that the white people wouldn’t say horrible things to them.

The Year 2 teacher is teaching her class about Chanukah and becomes aware that a group of Muslim boys are muttering ‘Evil people, evil people of the Menorah’. Meanwhile, in the KS1 playground, children are heard chanting ‘you’re Al Qaida, your Dad’s Al Qaida,’ to 7 year old Ibrahim.

Year 4 children are learning about Romans in Britain. My student brings in primary evidence including some showing connections to the wider Empire. Because some Romans stayed on, she suggests that some of us may actually be able to trace our ancestry to Romans.

Jo: No way am I related to Romans. No way. You can see they’re kinda dark, mixed race.

Year 5 children have been talking about concentrating and thinking. Later, my student leads a discussion about WW2 as part of her work on Britain since the 30s. Ten year old Luke's comment reveals how unexpected misunderstandings of words, can take you unwittingly into controversial areas.
Luke: Miss, I know about this. I've heard of Hitler. He had these thinking camps, and he didn’t like the Jews and he gassed them and they choked to death.

I am team teaching in Yr 3 about children at work in Victorian Britain. We start by asking what work children themselves do, and, based on children’s suggestions, create a subdivision: ‘working for pay’. Several older siblings, all over 16, are working for pay. Then Zehra says ‘my sister works for pay. She is 12. She works in a factory in Morocco making clothes.’

This report does not try to address directly the controversies which these case studies exemplify. Rather I explore how we might support our students, so that they can deal with contentious issues like these, which arise from children, as well as those they introduce as part of citizenship education. Students need to understand just how controversy manifests itself in school, what their role as teachers might be, and how these are both at the heart of Citizenship Education. Dealing openly with controversial issues in the ITE curriculum models and teaches the skills to facilitate similar debates with children, but also allows them to consider and clarify
  - their personal values
  - how far there are fundamental, shared ethical values in society
  - the consequences of the values they hold, and decide for themselves what they might do or support.

THE KNOWLEDGE BASE

Controversy is by definition rooted in strongly held, conflicting views about important issues in society, whether founded in political or economic ideologies, religious beliefs or secular values and attitudes. Citizenship Education needs to recognize that democracy, social responsibility and concern with peace are premised upon acknowledging the challenge of controversy. Where there is difference within the law, people should understand what they share and where they differ. When people feel that there is no forum for their views, especially if they are in a minority, there is danger of alienation from the moral and legal order. To attempt to suppress views, particularly if strongly held, has historically rebounded on societies, which are then seen as oppressing dissident members.

A democracy does not imply unanimity of values: on the contrary, the possibility of criticism and change are essential to its health. Citizens in democratic societies expect that reasonable strategies will be in place to resolve conflicts and do not normally expect to be silenced or penalised for holding minority opinions (other than where they transgress the law and have to be handled through that forum). Consider Zimbabwe (mid 2003)! It is also important to remember that controversy has raged round much of what we now accept as just or progressive. Think of the suffrage campaigns, the abolition of slavery, scientific inventions like the lightning conductor or smallpox vaccination, attitudes to children at work or compulsory schooling. With hindsight, we evaluate some positions as reactionary and unjust and judge the commitment of those who challenged them as responsible for progress. Many current controversies have historical parallels –
whether it’s militancy versus passive resistance, conflicts between religious and secular power, claims to rights to territory. There are some positions which many of us genuinely support, and some that one might well consider reactionary and perhaps unjust: neutrality in controversy is not necessarily admirable. Time will tell!

In a plural society such as contemporary Britain, even if everyone believes in broad values about human equality, dignity and basic rights exemplified by the Human Rights Convention, complete consensus about how those values are worked through in detail is not possible. While we might agree that promotion of human rights, reducing poverty and inequality locally, nationally and globally are central to developing a just society, the ways in which this might be done, and who should be the specific beneficiaries of any programme are regularly contested, and thrashed out in pressure groups, informal gatherings and political organisations.

To summarise: the existence of a spectrum of strongly held values and beliefs, and the expectation that there will be systems for dealing with clashes between them is integral to the working of a democracy in a plural society. It follows that teaching children how to handle controversy is an essential part of citizenship education.

Engagement in a contained classroom setting with controversial issues – in contrast with pious hopes about consensus - or avoidance strategies - is a step along the path towards social justice. To acknowledge and debate different views is essential in a non authoritarian society which values diversity of opinion. Secondly, attempting to resolve, (or at least look for compromise positions between strongly held beliefs and values) using the procedures of democratic, pro-social conflict resolution provides alternatives to violence and confrontation.

i) What is a controversial issue – ( see Stradling\(^1\) for further useful discussion)

- Any issue about which there is disagreement and about which people feel strongly, and in which values are invested.
- May or may not have direct consequences for the people debating the issue.
- Requires supporting evidence, elucidation of values underpinning the position taken and willingness to both express a point of view and recognise other people’s right to their position.

What is deemed controversial varies across time and place and between communities. Controversial issues can range from local to international concerns. For example:

- How to bring up your children – smacking; explanation; limits of autonomy and freedom
- Relationships between the sexes; sexuality and gender
- Clashes between parental values and school values coming from class/religious or cultural differences
- Control over availability and content of books, films and videos for children and adults, including the messages of pop culture
- Environmental issues, for example about GM crops or whether a new by-pass should run through an area of natural beauty
The extent of state involvement in individual lives or in funding public projects
The relationship between religion and the secular state
Issues of national identity and policy, such as keeping a national currency like the pound
Policy about immigration, asylum seekers and attitudes to diversity within the wider community
Participation in a war.

All these – and many more - have relevance for students’ understanding of controversy within the Citizenship curriculum. Students need an analytic appreciation of the relevant concepts, for example
- ethics and values
- rights and responsibilities
- relevant concepts from economics
- prejudice, stereotypes.

Also, they need to pick their way through false reasoning and offer sound arguments. This means recognizing
- manipulative arguments
- irrational and illogical thinking.

Constructivist theory recommends that students debate the concepts and issues themselves, and practice the necessary critical thinking skills; later, I show how a group of students needed help with the quality and direction of their argument.

As well as asking students to consider controversies that arise within school, such work needs to be at the students’ own adult level, aiming to develop their understandings about values and conflict resolution. Within ITE there will be different opportunities to promote both conceptual understanding and thinking skills – across the curriculum as the NC itself advises.

ii) The centrality of values in controversy

Values are about what we consider ‘right’ and ‘good’ and have both ethical and prescriptive moral force.

In the brief list above, several clashes in values are apparent. There’s no way in a multicultural plural society to suppress such differences. Value systems are at the core of human identity, attitudes and behaviour: their diversity reflects the cultural complexity of society. There is no problem if we don't care what other people are doing, as long as they leave us alone. Controversies arise when other people's actions, beliefs and values trouble us or affect us.

Some controversies are 'of their time and place' and then move on. Those where the dust has settled remind us that not only can moral values differ, but they can change over one or two generations. It is not that long ago for example, that homosexuality was punished.
with imprisonment or treatment in a mental hospital, that unmarried mothers were considered to have transgressed important moral norms. While the law has changed, there are still people in society who feel very strongly about the morality of these human situations. It is only 50 years since both capital and corporal punishment were considered the appropriate way to deal with wrongdoing in Britain, and they are still controversial because they are practised elsewhere. That the state should support the poor, the old and the ill through family benefits or social security was fiercely contested through the mid nineteenth to the mid twentieth century, and the controversies are by no means laid to rest.

**Conflicting interpretations of values**

If we look at the Statement of Values on p 148 of the 1999 National Curriculum, we may feel quite comfortable with the commonality of values. For instance, who seriously believes that we should NOT value truth, freedom, justice, human rights, the rule of law and collective effort for the common good. The controversies come from the interpretations, which vary with different value systems.

Take the broad and rather bland normative statement about 'collective effort for the common good'. Suppose we believe kindness, generosity, promoting individuality contribute to the common good and we try actively to live this way. Fine, till we encounter a group who (in our view) is being harshly punitive, suppressing individuality. We find out that these people do not consider their actions in a negative light, but believe *they* are acting in the common good and that *we* are misguided. Underlying such different positions are very different interpretations of the common good - 'to teach through punishment', 'to make people stand on their own two feet', 'to let the market take its proper course', 'to keep Britain white', ‘to have citizens who conform to certain religious precepts’ vs a variety of liberal alternatives.

Different communities will try to induct their children and instil their specific ethical positions in their members. Take for example the conflicting values of ‘turn the other cheek’ vs ‘fight back’. Here different cultural traditions and ethical positions as well as pragmatic considerations underpin a controversy about ‘what’s right and good to do.’ Attempts at resolution will need to recognize that this isn’t a question of insisting that one or other side is right, but consider the underlying pragmatic and ethical arguments about escalating the violence, courage, facing up to bullies and so on.

**Ends and means**

Disputes about ethical behaviour often reflect differences about ends and means. It can be helpful to distinguish situations where values themselves are at the heart of controversy, and those where the differences of opinion are not so much about core values, as about programmes to achieve the desired goal. To be strongly against blood transfusion on religious grounds involves core values, whereas objecting to MMR for children because of fear of unwanted side effects, is not about disputed values but about the quality of the argument and the evidence about the intervention. In this case, having agreed that we want healthy children, we can untangle the pros and cons – and the risks involved - for the various procedures available.
Or consider the kind of psychological research done in the aftermath of the second world war, where the participants were ‘tricked’ in order to establish whether people could be persuaded to harm another person, through obedience to authority (eg Milgram\(^2\)). Was it ethical to use underhand means to reveal something very important about human nature, as people evaluated the behaviour of those who said ‘they had just obeyed orders’ under Nazism? Did the ‘need to know and understand’ in order to do something about such human tendencies justify the deception? Another dispute about ends and means: how should we behave to beggars on the streets – ignore them and do nothing; give only to legitimate charities; approach them and give money personally? There may well be no differences between people's concerns about suffering and hardship and their desire to help (ie they have the same values at that level) but huge differences in proposals for how to deal with the issue.

**Conflicting ethical positions**

There can be controversies between two conflicting ethical concepts - eg keeping your word or 'telling' to improve the situation. On a personal level this is more of a dilemma than a controversy. If a friend tells you, in confidence, about abusive behaviour she is enduring, you are in conflict about honouring your promise or helping by revealing information to someone else. If you transfer this into the public realm you get a controversy. In the public domain, where a person is faced with a situation in which they find themselves out of step with a powerful group - and possibly the law - we sometimes talk about an ethic of ‘moral courage’ in the face of ‘unethical behaviour’. Militant protesters against animal experiments or GM crops see themselves as part of a morally courageous brigade, but there is considerable controversy about whether the stand is really morally courageous, or misguided and illegal.

Even if people don't engage in public demonstrations or action because of their moral values, there can still be controversy. Suppose I believe that it is not just ‘good’ to grow organic, but ‘wrong’ to use pesticide. My idea of ‘the good life’ may not be illegal, but may get right up the nose of others who share my airspace, my weeds and my snails!

So far all my examples have come from situations in which people feel personally implicated by the way values are lived out. There are many examples of people not being directly involved, but feeling very strongly about the justice or rights of others, and their responsibilities to a wider community than just themselves and their families or neighbourhood. This dimension of controversy is, I believe, extremely important for citizenship education - moving into the domain of statements within the Breadth of Opportunities (p.141) in the NC, particularly 5d, 5e, 5f.

Examples might be where people take a stand about exploitation of workers in Free Trade Zones and challenge the flooding of the Western market with cheap goods, or about racism and sexism which they don't personally suffer (eg the British anti apartheid movement), or political issues like conflicting Israeli and Palestinian claims to territory, or the British and American government’s invasion of Iraq in 2003. The posters and demonstrations ‘Not in my name’ had a compelling connection to citizens’ own
understanding of citizenship – in ways which the authorities bemoaning apathy had not anticipated.

Students need to consider where they stand and how they will deal with such controversies, since children in schools will know about them about through television and their families; children will bring them into school, or as teachers, they may wish to introduce issues themselves.

Absolutism and relativism
At a theoretical level, another way to think about some of the issues discussed already is in terms of absolutism and relativism (‘consequentialism’). An absolutist may believe that ‘you should always tell the truth’ or ‘you should never kill another human’ or ‘an eye for an eye’. Absolutist value systems tend to be rooted in religion and notions of a higher power. ‘Live and let live’ may be the resolution to dealing with the controversy, in that (provided the proposal is not illegal) there may be little chance of changing the other person’s mind. However, where one absolutist position clashes with another (as in fundamentalism), not just controversy, but violence may flare. It is worth engaging in debate with absolutists since the request to offer persuasive evidence over and above their personal belief may shift their opponents’ views, or indeed modify their own – particularly where false/prejudiced evidence is at the heart. They may see their way to compromise on the basis of some more important value. (For example, you should not tell lies, but it would be alright to lie to a Gestapo policeman if you were hiding a Jew, since you were trying to save a life.)

Relativist or consequentialist values – as the terms suggest – tend towards examining each case on its merits, and look towards the possible outcomes of actions rather than appealing to a moral law. A relativist will avoid ‘you should never… or you should always’ statements. They may be utilitarian – that is concerned for the greatest good for the greatest number, or may be concerned about minority people or life forms. With consequentialists, it is always worth pushing the argument towards clarity of the possible consequences – listing them for example, and then discussing each in terms of its likelihood and the value that people place on that outcome. For this, the protagonists need evidence to support their cases. So knowledge becomes not just part of political literacy, but part of rationality.

It’s probably transparent that I personally think that consequentialism is a better basis for compromise and a just society than absolutism. So I strongly advocate facilitating students’ engagement with these ideas so that at least they are familiar with them.

Justice, ethics of care and compassion, the golden rule
(I discuss these issues at greater length in ‘Not Aliens’ 2001, chapter 6.)

Some years ago, research seemed to suggest that ethical positions were gendered, and that men were more likely to follow a rule-based ethic of justice, (eg Kohlberg) and women were drawn to care and compassion (Gilligan, Noddings, Larrabee). Though it would seem now that strict gendered divisions between ethics of justice and care and
compassion do not necessarily hold up, the categories themselves can still help students understand how and why values can differ, and where controversy may lie.

Without being absolutist, some people are drawn to a rule-based value system and anxious to implement impartial justice in a controversy. Others, looking for solutions which take personal circumstances into account, will not only look for justice for an individual but may cite care and compassion as the basic ethics which guide them.

John Rawls’ ideas about ‘a veil of ignorance’ are very interesting in working towards justice in controversy. Rawls suggests that the way to find just resolutions to conflict would be through people acting as if ‘they did not know who they were’. ‘The veil of ignorance’ is a way to try and keep in mind all the different perspectives and interests and is supposed to lead to imaginative, lateral thinking. Imagine that controversy has arisen because there is considerable disruption to a programme – which needs continuity – because the main workers are young women of child bearing age, on short term contracts, who become pregnant and leave. Rawls would say that the way forward is to find a solution which is satisfactory whether we were a young woman, or someone running the programme. This might lead us away from fruitless (and illegal) arguments about women not having babies while they’re employed, or not hiring women, to considering whether it’s the low pay that is attracting short term female contract workers, or requiring the government to cover the absences through funding.

Lastly, some people’s ethical position and values may be based on the golden rule, namely do unto others as you would have them do unto you. The golden rule is not restricted to any religious faith; indeed, atheists, humanists and agnostics may well live by it. The golden rule can work for people who hold an ethic of care and compassion and for those who strongly advocate rule-based justice; but it leads to the same clashes. However, the compromises suggested by Rawls’ ideas also fit with the golden rule.

In summary, student teachers need the opportunity to consider the ways in which values and ethics differ between individuals and groups. They should think how these operate as agreed norms within certain sub groups or in wider society. They need to develop their understanding about the values which are essential to the coherence of a democratic society and those which are very important to the people holding them, but will not lead to a breakdown in society if there are differences. Many students are anxious that debating and accommodating divergent values (as opposed to suppressing them) will undermine democracy: we can help them recognize that a strong democracy depends on just such mature accommodation.

Rights and responsibilities

The interpretation of how one should exercise one’s rights and responsibilities in a democracy is not value free. Basic values like ‘freedom to’ must live alongside ‘freedom from’ which means there have to be limits to prevent the exercise of freedom impinging on other people’s freedom and rights. Smoking is a case which points up the links between rights and responsibilities, and an example of values which have dramatically changed in the last decade or so. The ‘freedom from’ lobby’s demand to be spared
‘passive smoking’ has largely won out against the ‘freedom to’s’ right to inhale and exhale as much nicotine as they like in public places. Like obesity, smoking has also become a matter of social responsibility – smokers (and fatty-foods eaters) are enjoined to consider the burden on the national health system of diseases caused by smoking or obesity and take responsibility for the health of young children or the unborn. There is also an economic argument: high taxes on cigarettes are intended partly to contribute to some of the costs to the NHS, but also to discourage smoking.

Sometimes, as in the earlier historical examples, claims to ‘rights’ turn out to be about the defence of privilege and power. Recognizing responsibility as the other side of the coin to rights, alters the strength of the argument. When we work with students we can go beyond appeals to moral values (‘you ought to’) and ethics (it’s a good thing) and encourage rational discussion using evidence. For example, ‘how far should car use be curtailed in the cities to keep down pollution which affects the health of people who cannot escape’ is a very different debate when social responsibility is at issue, and evidence expected, rather than opinions about rights, however strongly held.

Acting responsibly is not just about refraining from breaking laws, or ‘being grown up’. The extent and boundaries of responsibility can reflect different political and ethical values, particularly where ‘taking responsibility’ leads to a perceived need for intervention. Expectations about taking responsibility for the welfare of others can be interpreted as unwarranted interference in privacy, or unreasonable. Social workers, and sometimes teachers find themselves caught up in these controversies. People can become angry and self righteous about the necessary negotiation of boundaries about both rights and responsibilities.

Some relevant concepts from economics
Many controversies in the modern world are about government responsibilities towards its citizens and citizens’ beliefs about their rights. Some conflicts arise from different perspectives not just on what are desirable outcomes, but on who should pay – the individual or the state. The swing in values during the Thatcher years, or current disputes about fee-paying within HE are examples.

The quality of students’ debate will improve if they consider that many official decisions and policy hinge on economic concepts of scarce resources, opportunity costs, cost effectiveness and social benefits. Realising when one side is using economic arguments, while another is relying on more emotive value judgements can contribute to the ability and willingness to move out of deadlock. Since a familiar position is ‘we want everything’, two very basic ideas of economics need to be thoroughly understood - you can’t eat your cake and have it, and there are no free lunches! If we want the government to provide, taxation will have to reflect it - thus taxes on cigarettes and petrol. In practice where resources are scarce, choices must be made about what to fund. People's views about such choices can be very polarised.

Economic concepts are not themselves value free, as the following examples illustrate: a person might argue that in the long run, it is cost effective to spend more to keep young
offenders out of prison rather than administer seemingly inexpensive ‘short sharp shocks’. Or someone might say that it is cost effective (and that there are social benefits) to provide hip replacements for every elderly person who needs it, rather than spend the money on treating a few expensive and rather rare conditions.

**Prejudice, stereotypes and bias**

So far I have discussed situations where conflict may be built in because values and attitudes reflect diverse cultural/social contexts (even if self interested), or entrenched absolutist values. Mutually acceptable compromises must be sought (for example whether Sikhs should have to wear crash helmets on a motor bike, or the legality of abortion or euthanasia).

Prejudice, stereotyping and racism regularly emerge in controversies between children; students should learn to recognize when these underpin their own, their peers’ or their pupils’ positions and learn a variety of strategies to counter them.

These are not situations in which people are arguing from a rule-based position of ‘this is my truth’ nor to defend or challenge power, but because they are locked into prejudiced thinking which prevents them recognizing the validity of other people’s values and experience. Racism, sexism, ethnocentrism and parochial thinking are all variants on this and notoriously difficult to work with. In some (but not all) inner city universities since the70s these problems have been recognized and strategies introduced to challenge and change stereotypical and prejudiced attitudes. It is sadly the case that few non-urban universities and teacher training establishments have seen these issues as particularly relevant to their communities. For the purposes of this report, all I can do is point out that racism and sexism (and all other –isms) are undemocratic, illegal and undermine the very concept of citizenship. When prejudice and racism are at the heart of controversy, then carefully considered and coherent programmes of action must be put in place, permeating the whole student experience. A little tokenism here and there, mediated through a course on citizenship is unlikely to do anything to change deep seated attitudes. In fact in my experience, such tokenism does more harm than good.

**Tolerance and the limits of tolerance in a democratic society**

One of the most controversial issues that faces us in a plural society is where to draw the line in respecting and tolerating other people’s values. Few of us believe that there are no limits and that ‘anything goes’. The philosopher Mary Midgley has suggested that we need to agree on a core of values about human rights and they help us find a way through conflicts about tolerance. If we take just a sample from the ‘Convention on the Rights of the Child’ we can see that things are not totally simple. Article 3, for instance, states that the best interests of the child shall be the primary consideration. Article 5 states that the responsibilities, rights and duties of parents as provided for by local custom, legal guardians etc shall be respected, but .. ‘in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child, appropriate direction and guidance in the exercise by the child of the rights recognized in the present Convention’. Article 14 complicates matters further - recognizing the rights and duties of parents (and legal guardians) to provide direction to the child … in a manner consistent with the evolving capacities of the child. Articles 28
and 29 refer to the child’s right to education, on the basis of equal opportunity, and the importance of an education which develops the child’s full potential. What does this mean? Will we or will we not support a parent (or community) whose wishes would result in restricting educational opportunities for girls? Obviously, a sensitive and sensible way forward would be to see if there was a possibility of meeting the parent’s objections about something specific and still fulfil the child’s right to education.

Sometimes the law itself helps us with problems about the limits of tolerance – for example racism is illegal, so for a parent to object to her child sitting next to a person of a different ethnic group would not be admissible, and we would not want to compromise with a parent’s racism.

iii) Critical Thinking Skills and Skills of Persuasive Debate

There is a considerable literature on thinking skills and some discussion in Chapter 6, and a bibliography, in ‘Not Aliens’ (Claire, 2001).

Critical thinking skills are essential to approaching controversial issues with students because rational discussion depends on knowing how to develop convincing arguments in support of one’s position and seeing the flaws in one’s opponents’ position. Students should come to expect that a controversy will be handled with logic, evidence, convincing arguments and not through emotional tirades or weak unsubstantiated claims ‘well I just think this, and that’s it’. They may need help with enquiry skills – involving the collection and sifting of evidence, problem solving, integration of a variety of data. As I describe in a later section of this report, my experience has been that some students need considerable support with unpicking the issues and working through them rationally and logically.

Moving beyond ready-made, unthought-through positions

Just as individual values will be part of one’s national/community/institutional identity, so specific arguments and ways of thinking about those values, including those that are prejudiced, will have been learned in a social context. Rational approaches which help students to identify ‘where they are coming from’ using some of the concepts in the previous section, will need to be supported by learning how to stand back and treat conflicting positions rationally. This is where a contained and managed system which asks them to consider and list pros and cons and perspectives, and look for the flaws in their own and others’ arguments will be important in moving towards less heated and emotional and more objective thinking.

In a student group (and with pupils too) the conventional techniques of dividing groups up to represent different perspectives and then share these, can actually work to reinforce specific positions rather than move towards mutual understanding and open mindedness. It may be more important to get students to mount a rational argument for the opposing position to their own, or to set out all perspectives of an argument, putting Rawlsian ideas into practice.
I have found that it can be helpful to get students to practise rational thinking in contexts which no longer have their original emotional power, because though the issues are serious, they have largely been resolved in this country. Because History is my subject, I try and use opportunities within that curriculum (for example the debates about child workers in factories in the C19th, or Luddism), but each of you will be able to think of opportunities from your own subject areas. Good fiction is a particularly rich resource for contemporary and historical dilemmas and controversies.

**Manipulation of arguments**

Students need to appreciate how arguments can be manipulated or falsified and teach this in their own classrooms. Some examples are:

*Making a special case* about something or someone on the basis of information which isn’t strictly relevant. This itself can be controversial: for example, some would say that the ‘special case’ of the Holocaust should not be invoked in discussion about Israeli policy in Palestine. Others would say that it is absolutely central to the debate.

*Using false analogies* – in a recent discussion about global warming, someone told me he didn’t believe there was any problem from the ice cap melting, because if you melted cubes of ice in a glass, the eventual water level was the same.

*Ad hominem arguments* – very common this, using one example to generalise to a whole community (‘I know someone who isn’t like you say, so your argument must be false’. Or ‘I know one child who does so and so, so I have proved my point about ‘children’.) An argument cannot depend on one example; rather, though there may be exceptions, a significant mass with particular points of view/experience will be more convincing.

*Referring to an expert out of context* – this is a hard one, because we all rely on people we respect and admire to help us think through our positions. The difficulty comes where the expert’s viewpoint is used to justify a position without us bothering to think through arguments oneself, specific to the issue. For instance without finding out anything about Britain adopting the Euro, you are ‘anti-Euro’ because x is against it, and you agree with her on immigration policy.

*Polarised arguments* – failing to recognize that there is a continuum of views about something, and drawing all the examples quoted from an extreme position, ignoring more moderate positions and suggesting that there are only two possible choices.

*Caricaturing your opponent* – an effective strategy for satirists and television personalities to draw attention to the weaknesses of public figures but unfair in a serious discussion, because, like visual caricatures, it depends on exaggerating some qualities, ignoring others and playing down the nuances and complexities of a position. A recent example was Julie Burchill’s article in the Guardian about people who were against the Iraqi war. She described them in derogatory terms which drew attention to face piercing, wearing sandals or living in Surrey, rather than offering a considered argument for or against British involvement in the war.
Appeals to emotion/tradition/patriotism – Value laden arguments about controversial issues draw on emotional positions, including ‘knee jerk’ reactions. Sometimes, an emotive example which is hard to challenge without appearing to be uncaring, is used without real justification to stop discussion in its tracks. For instance, someone might introduce the actions of Nazis in the concentration camps in a discussion about the ethics of euthanasia or keeping seriously damaged neonates alive on machines. To equate euthanasia with ethnic genocide is to beg the question and prevent further rational discussion; secondly, the introduction of this emotionally laden argument unfairly prejudices the case against euthanasia. People can also use patriotism to prevent rational discussion, through implying that a position is somehow treacherous to one’s traditions and country. As Susan Sontag reflected in a powerful polemic published in the Guardian (26.4.03, Review Section, pp4-6), in the climate of the Iraqi war or Israeli policy in the settlements ‘to speak for peace is to be jeered, harassed, blacklisted[^11] in short, reviled as unpatriotic’. For draft dodgers or pacifists this is nothing new; the important point is that the assumptions about patriotism close down discussion about the ethics of war, or the validity of involvement in any specific military conflict.

Border crossing
This connects with the Rawlsian ideas already discussed and is a way forward in situations where people have become locked into emotional, irrational or illogical thinking. There are two aspects to ‘border crossing’: first to move one’s concerns from one’s own group to include those of a wider community and see what ‘the whole picture’ might look like. Secondly – and this is implied in the first – to try and step into other people’s shoes, see things through their eyes. It’s both about the way you can train people to think, but also about personal qualities which I discuss in the next section.

2. APPLICATION

Controversy, Citizenship and the National Curriculum
There are a number of official statements which are explicitly about controversy or which can be interpreted in this way, for example, the Values Statement at the beginning of the 1999 National Curriculum, the statement on page 19 about promoting spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and the Statement of Values on page 147. The QCA/DfES 'Teacher's guide to Citizenship'[^12] offers guidance on teaching sensitive and controversial issues in Appendix 6. The Crick Report[^13] has a useful section (pp56-61) dealing explicitly with the teacher's role in managing controversial issues in the classroom.

The 1996 Education Act contains a number of statements which preclude indoctrination, promotion of partisan political views and require that schools take all reasonable efforts to offer balanced presentation of opposing views (QCA: 2000). Appendix 2 in the QCA document emphasises that pupils should be taught to understand and recognize bias and how to evaluate evidence, consider different interpretations and give reasons justifying
their ideas and actions. In italics, this same document emphasises that balance does not imply toleration of racism or other forms of discrimination.

I will not include material here, which is available elsewhere, so please do check the bibliography.

**Interpersonal qualities and ground rules**

So far I have argued that recognizing the variety of concepts and the kinds of values that people may be calling on, and developing critical thinking skills are essential to dealing with controversy. Interpersonal qualities constitute the third essential leg to the triangle, and are, actually, implied in the Citizenship guidance.

Controversy upsets people – we get angry and emotional, we can feel personally under attack if someone seems to disregard our deeply felt convictions and values. Ground rules are imperative to protect personal sensitivities, but more than this, students need to develop diplomacy, tact and empathy, so that controversial discussion does not rub feelings raw. Respect for other people’s views and feelings is essential, even if one disagrees with them. It is possible to show respect while asking for evidence, or challenging a position. Much of it is conveyed in body language, in paying attention, not interrupting, checking that some one has completed their train of thought, in tone of voice as well as the actual words one uses. I have found that making this explicit with students is necessary, and that requiring them to follow a rubric for how they conduct themselves – whether its presenting their own argument, listening and responding to others, disagreeing or extending, helps avoid some of the more difficult behaviour one can encounter when values differ and feelings run high. Appendix 5 of the QCA Teachers’ Guide has some child-centred ground rules, but they are not sufficient for adults. It may sound formulaic but it can help for students to use the sorts of phrases recommended for Philosophy for Children such as

- I agree with what x says but I would like to argue that…
- I accept and understand that this is what y believes, but on the other hand I think that…
- Can I check that I have understood z correctly. Did you mean that…

As for ground rules, it is best, if you have time, for students to develop these themselves, much as you would encourage them to do with their pupils, but if you are short of time, you might offer them a ready made set (see The Teaching of Controversial Issues, QCA Guidance, and Onesko 1996) which they can adapt.

**Choice of subject matter**

In addition to programmes and degrees which do not lead to qualified teacher status (eg science, political science or oceanography) there is a considerable literature, largely web based, about the kinds of controversial issues which teacher educators and classroom teachers engage with. In the first section of this report I have already drawn on a variety of issues which might be broached, though it is wise to prepare material for use with students with an eye to what is currently happening in the wider world, and what they are concerned with, rather than imposing the subject matter. Broadly, one might choose from
Contemporary issues related to current affairs: eg. environment, local, national or international conflict, economic or social issues.

Contemporary issues related to the nature of our society including religious and cultural differences and controversies from the classroom and school.

Historical issues including those related to science and war, punishment and crime, state intervention, principles and moral courage (eg draft dodging and Vietnam, Sir Thomas More, Josephine Butler’s campaign against the CD Acts).

Processes
In addition to thinking skills and the importance of personal qualities of diplomacy, respectfulness, empathy and tact, it’s important to deal with controversy in an atmosphere encouraging enquiry and open mindedness. The ground rules for managing controversial discussion partly cover this, but you may need to go further. Tutors need to model democratic processes themselves and work towards building trust and mutual respect. Initially, this may require plenty of small group discussion with like-minded peers, rather than asking people to reveal their position in the whole group. A 3rd year B.Ed class of more than 50 students were discussing their feelings about homosexuality in a session on equal opportunities principles. A few students were confident and outspoken but it was clear that there were groups of students who felt embarrassed, disempowered and not at all ready to talk openly. It was important to recognize the pressure to be ‘politically correct’, and create a climate in which these students could feel they could speak honestly. Small self chosen groups were the solution, providing solidarity for more reticent students.

As a corollary, some students will need support and practice not just in critical thinking, and being prepared to speak their thoughts, but in persuasive and fluent debating techniques. Most of us are familiar with the students who find it hard to talk in public, often getting one of the few men in the cohort to speak for them, even when they are aware that this would be poor practice in their classrooms. I have used the techniques of jigsaw grouping to break down this reluctance and get students to present arguments and take positive speaking roles or diamond ranking with ready made statements and some blanks which the students themselves fill in. One can work towards the reticent students presenting to the whole group, though there is no need to rush into this.

The tutor’s role
So far I have discussed the tutor’s role in helping set ground rules, teaching the students techniques of debate and critical thought, and establishing a non threatening climate which is intellectually and emotionally safe, conducive to free expression of ideas. It may be necessary to ensure confidentiality and set boundaries about disclosure as well as make it clear that no one will be forced to talk publicly about personal issues. Tutors will also want to protect their own privacy. (See QCA guidance, Crick, the Flinders site and Lockwood).

Neutrality or subjectivity?
This in itself is controversial. One rule doesn’t fit all circumstances. Honesty is important but it may be more important to present a neutral position in order to encourage as many
different views and participants, particularly if you are a strong personality, or it is difficult to contradict you, since you may stifle thinking and expression. We sometimes forget that our own position may be controversial and coming on too strong may silence the very people we would like to encourage to think again. We may need to find ways to help students to challenge us without anxiety about the consequences, and share our own uncertainty and sense of the ambiguities. As well as being honest, this acknowledges the complexity we often encounter and moves people from either/or thinking.

Acting devil’s advocate can be thought provoking for students who have not considered alternative positions, even if this is not your own view and helps to ensure a full range of perspectives. A possible way to extend discussion is to quote another authority/writer.

Chairing the discussion and providing information
You may find it helpful to maintain focus, summarise and keep track of the discussion and the different points made, using the whiteboard, flipchart or OHP. If I am team teaching, we usually have one person chair and the other keep the public notes.

As I describe later, it can be helpful to organise categories which students have introduced, or make a public mind map of the discussion.

Providing information is an important role for the tutor, particularly if the content and issues have been decided by you in advance (as opposed to the spontaneous discussion which I describe below). For a session where students were asked to consider Free Trade Zones and buying Fair Trade Coffee (See the Appendix), I printed factual material off the web to augment personal views and values.

Playing games
I like to use games with my students to keep matters light hearted, to establish ground rules in relaxed, unthreatening circumstances and give them practice in debating. There are a number of publications which offer activities designed to promote tolerance and understanding between groups. Many seem designed to avoid controversy rather than tackle it! An exception is Cathie Holden and Nick Clough’s book (Education for Citizenship: ideas into action, 2002). In one game - ‘The Great Divide’ students pick a card from a ready prepared set with quite innocuous statements such as ‘dogs are better than cats’ working towards more controversial ones like ‘we definitely need tolls on our motor ways’. Students arrange themselves on one side or the other of a dividing line, depending on how far they agree with the statement (being near the dividing line implies you are fairly neutral). I either ask individuals to justify their position, or I ask them to form a huddle of strong negatives, neutrals and strong positives. In the groups they must put together a convincing argument for their position and choose two or three people to speak for them. We then hold a quick debate and based on the persuasiveness of the arguments, the students quickly regroup around the middle line. To find yourself on the same side of the line on some issues, but not others, is itself a useful lesson! Other activities I have used are in the Appendix, and the bibliography gives references.
Working with student groups – responding to issues raised by them and introducing issues myself

The next part of this report describes some examples from B.Ed classes invited to engage in debate about controversial issues or where the discussion arose spontaneously and needed management. The first two examples arose spontaneously in class sessions; I introduced, resourced and managed the last two as part of a set programme of activities.

1. Small group of 8 History subject specialists, Final year B.Ed.

We had been talking about designing our own schemes of work, and issues that we would like to introduce into the KS2 unit on Victorian Britain. One student wanted to introduce the experience of the very poorest, the recipients of charity or those sent to work houses. I asked about links with contemporary issues within the citizenship curriculum and we segued fairly smoothly into a discussion about beggars on the streets, homelessness and national charities. Suddenly one of the students became very animated. I only have space for a short extract, (which I wrote down verbatim at the time) but it shows the variety of positions, values and issues which were waiting there to be unpacked. Proper evidence was sadly missing in this case, which doesn’t mean that on another occasion one couldn’t have provided it.

Sally: I hate it when these women with babies accost you on the tube. I just think it’s really wrong. It just is. I get really angry. Pressed to try and say what she thought was wrong she went on:
They shouldn’t have their kids with them. They’re manipulating us. Then this one woman was really abusive to me when I said no I wasn’t able to give her anything.

Penny: But what should they do? Some of them are asylum seekers and they’re not getting any social security.

Maggie: I heard that they get sent out by their men and they get beaten up if they come back with nothing.

Sue: That’s really not our problem. We shouldn’t be picking up the pieces individually. I never give to beggars.

Joanne: I don’t believe this. How can you be so hard hearted?

Sue: Didn’t you see? At Christmas, Shelter was saying don’t give to beggars, give to the charities who will look after them.

Sally: Well I wish I had confidence in them – they just spend all their money on admin and advertising. Just a tiny fraction goes to the people you’re trying to help.

Chantel: So are you saying you might as well give direct? And half of them just go straight out and buy booze or drugs.

Joanne: No, no. I saw a programme. It showed that most of the young people begging on the streets had been in care and didn’t have families to turn to.

Chantel: That doesn’t change my argument about them spending what you give them on drugs and drink.

A quick analysis reveals strongly held values about begging, charity, asylum seekers, possible corruption or financial waste in charities, the role of the state and the individual towards the poor or children without support, substance abuse. Given time, this is what I would have unpacked – asking the group to consider the issues carefully and
methodically, probably with mind mapping, and potentially, getting more evidence for their positions from the web or charities themselves.

2. **B.Ed Final years, whole cohort of 55 students reviewing their recent block practice**

Arising from a discussion about how one should deal with pupils with challenging behaviour, one student proposed a document which recorded the pupil’s misdeeds and took points off, like the penalties on a driving licence. Losing a certain number of points led to real trouble and potentially exclusion.

Harvinder: My headteacher would go ballistic if I suggested something like that. It’s absolutely against the ethos of our school. There’s just nothing positive about it.

Natasha: Well it works. I saw how it worked. There’s this boy that there’s nothing touches him. Nothing gets through. He doesn’t care.

Carol: But how can you say that. Everything we’ve learned is about managing behaviour through rewarding the positive, not being punitive. It sounds as if you’ve given up on this kid. It would just make him worse I would think.

This continued for a bit, with more evidence of polarised views emerging which revealed strongly held opposing values about the psychology of behaviour management. Listening, I found myself thinking about C19th positions about the necessity of punishment to ‘cure’ the crime, until a visiting teacher stepped in to back Sharon’s position. She summarised the reasons why her school favoured positive management. I am not sure that Natasha changed her mind, however I did feel that people listening had a chance to consider their own attitudes and values, even if they did not speak out on this occasion.

3. **Small group of second year B.Ed students given a range of statements by children and asked to choose one they would like to consider (see Appendix)**

In the following example, I explore some of the difficulties and problems for the tutor and for the students themselves in teaching them to move beyond unadorned statements of belief to arguments which are based on evidence and rational attempts to justify values.

From the choices, one group opted for:

‘**My Uncle says they’re holding us back and they get all the council houses.**’

Their task was to develop a strategy through which issues and attitudes could be unpicked and debated.

a. **I asked students to brainstorm what they thought the controversial issues were here.**

I suggested that the students start themselves off with the phrase ‘this statement is about..’ and expected that they would offer:

- attitudes to asylum seekers, refugees or immigrants
- scapegoating
- racism
anxiety about people ‘not like us’

drawing on the authority of ‘my Uncle says’ and the difficulties this posed for a teacher where home and school values conflicted

However, this group found the task very difficult and were not able to stand back or focus in a general way on issues. Instead, they tended to paraphrase the original statement or offer circular arguments. Moreover, they seemed reluctant to explore the underpinning attitudes. It is possible that they feared that being able to identify these might suggest that they shared them.

Lee: It’s about people not being able to speak good English.
Josie: Yeah, it’s about not wanting people to come in as refugees.
Hilary: Good, so can we identify some of the reasons people might not want refugees to come in.
Josie: It’s because they are pulling standards down in English.
Hilary: Any other reasons?
Group: No.
Hilary: Do any of you agree with the statement?
Group: No we don’t.
Hilary: Could anyone try and tell me why?
Janey: It’s just wrong to say that. It’s prejudiced.

This last statement, incidentally, was quite common in student groups – namely avoiding the controversy at the heart, and falling back on a general statement of morality, as if no further debate was necessary (absolutism).

b. I try to provide categories for discussion and move the debate on

I then wrote on the whiteboard a variety of statements which have been used to argue that refugees should not be admitted. I explained that I was acting as devil’s advocate to try and help them think through their own position, that these were not my personal opinion but examples of the kinds of negative things children might say:

- This country is too crowded
- They get the good houses and the people who have been here all the time get pushed to the bottom of the council lists
- Our taxes are paying for strangers and not helping our own families
- They can’t support themselves and they start begging on the streets.

I asked them to comment and also to suggest some counter arguments, which challenged these positions, came from a positive position and gave reasons why they thought that such views were wrong and prejudiced.

This line of reasoning did not seem to help them, and I decided that some direct teaching of strategies was essential. I have not got space here to develop this fully, but for this purpose, indicate headings that I put on the white board, and invited the group to consider:
i. What this statement is about? You have to ‘unpack’ its different elements, some of which are about the factual basis (which is not necessarily incorrect), some about preconceptions and possible prejudices, and some of which will be about values.

ii. What’s the factual basis of statements and can we check them?
How would we know the country was ‘too crowded’? What would that mean in practice, and what statistics would we need to back our case, or dispute it. Could we back up the statement about ‘they get the good houses’ with factual information?

iii. Where do our ideas come from?
Could we identify emotive statements in the media which might account for particular attitudes? Why did we think some people might hold ideas like this, even if the facts were debatable?

iv. What are our values about support for people who apply for help? Some questions to help us think about this are:
- Should some people be helped?
- Are some people manipulating the system, and if so, how should we sort the wheat from the chaff?
- What measures, if any, do we think the government should take to support refugees?
- Why do we believe these things?

v. Can we challenge parents’ views?
In primary schools, we are quite often faced with children who repeat what their parents/carers say and sometimes such views are very prejudiced. We are often reluctant to challenge these because we hold a strong view about respecting parents’ views. Students are also, rightly, concerned not to make judgements of parents’ cultural practices from an ethnocentric position.

I asked the students to discuss and decide if there were ever situations in which as a teacher they would not accept a view presented as held by a parent.

This group ran out of time but other students who have been asked to consider this, have themselves suggested that where parents’ views transgress principles of equal opportunities, are racist or sexist, we would not endorse them.

4. Small group within whole cohort of B.Ed Third year students
The group chose the scenario ‘We don’t eat chicken or lamb.’ They identified animal rights as the main issue underpinning the first child’s statement and were concerned about the mocking response of the class mate. They also extended the statement to include the use of leather and fur.
Unlike the students discussing asylum seekers, this group was more able to identify salient issues that they would want to discuss with the class:

They listed these on sugar paper and presented them to the rest of the group:

- Is factory farming cruel? If so, why and what are the alternatives?
- Given that factory farmed meat/eggs etc are considerably cheaper than free range, and many people have limited budgets, their real options may be dependant on economic considerations.
- What alternatives are there to meat which still meet dietary needs (healthy vegetarianism).
- Cultural and religious differences in attitudes to different foods
- Fashion in food and fashion in clothes
- The necessity to consider the livelihoods of people who depend on tracking animals for fur as well as issues of fashion.

3. EVALUATION AND CONCLUSIONS

I have only had the opportunity to work with students on controversial issues for two academic years. I’ve had to ‘steal time’ and make decisions about substitution of content in sessions.

The spontaneous debates have contrasted significantly with the ones introduced and managed by me. The latter have been characterised by opportunities to spell out issues with students, for them to argue rationally, focusing on evidence, different values and constructive ways forward. The example from the group who discussed animal rights (see 4 above) is typical and also striking, that without prejudging the issues, or foreclosing by statements such as ‘this is wrong’ this group could see how to open up debate. They were able to offer a range of issues and perspectives, which included economics, cultural and religious difference as well as moral values about the ‘goodness’ or ‘badness’ of eating meat.

Spontaneous debates exemplified by 1 and 2, do not have this neat and satisfying quality. Being ‘real’, they are messy, emotional, difficult to track and categorise. Nevertheless, they have, I believe, enormous value in that they embody the students’ own concerns. Through making space for these, and not cutting them short, or insisting that we stick to the agenda we have come with, we give students a strong message about the value of such discussion. But they are also test how effective our teaching has been. It’s a bit like the difference between learning football skills and playing a real game. We need to do both, and the game will be immeasurably improved by the amount of skills practice, discussion of strategies, and making things explicit. So my own intention, next year, is to continue with the managed scenarios (adding to them from real situations I encounter or am told about in schools, and from current affairs). These teach skills of discussion, help students recognize specific concepts and values, get them used to considering more than one perspective.

But I also intend to find more opportunities to encourage discussion based on controversies raised by students’ themselves, and to try and make notes about what is
happening. It seems to me from the notes taken during the spontaneous discussions, that not only was my own role negligible in managing the discussion, or in pulling together the issues, but that it probably couldn’t be otherwise. What I hope is that the work done in managed sessions where I am quite clearly in role as tutor will spin off into the real situations and that when students find themselves in classrooms, they will remember and use the strategies that we have worked on together.

(The endnotes to this report come right at the end, after the bibliography.)

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Appendix

Examples of games and scenarios with PGCE and B.Ed students on controversial issues.

PGCE PRIMARY GROUP - JANUARY 2003

Broad areas of work:

- POLITICAL LITERACY
- AGREEING TO DISAGREE, NEGOTIATION AND COMMUNICATION
- EXPRESSING AN OPINION ABOUT AN ISSUE RATIONALLY
- TACKLING ETHICAL DILEMMAS

"Taking Sides"
In the game we will literally 'take sides'. We will imagine that we are members of a political party or pressure group which needs to persuade others. We will try and justify our position without offending others, being rational and logical, acknowledging difference and being prepared to change our minds. The following statements were written on cards and students chose one out of a hat to work on.

1. RED IS A NICER COLOUR THAN BLUE
2. DOGS ARE BETTER THAN CATS
3. IT IS WRONG TO EAT OTHER ANIMALS
4. CHILDREN SHOULD HELP EARN MONEY IN THE FAMILY WHERE POSSIBLE AND NECESSARY.
5. FOX HUNTING SHOULD BE LEGAL
6. UNMARRIED COUPLES SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO HAVE THE SAME LEGAL RIGHTS AS MARRIED COUPLES.
7. THE GOVERNMENT SHOULD PROVIDE FREE ACCOMMODATION FOR REFUGEES.
8. NO PRIVATE CARS SHOULD BE ALLOWED INTO THE CENTRE OF LONDON - IT SHOULD BE RESERVED FOR BUSES, TAXIS AND TWO WHEELED VEHICLES.
9. TRANSPORT INTO THE CENTRE OF LONDON SHOULD BE FREE, AND THE COSTS COME FROM TAXES.
10. THOSE WHO USE THE MOTORWAYS SHOULD PAY TOLLS TO SUPPORT THE COST
11. YOU SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO RETALIATE (HIT BACK).

B.ED YEAR 3 AND YEAR 4, 2002-3
ADAPTED FROM PARTNERS IN RIGHTS (SAVE THE CHILDREN)

The statements

1. Everyone should have to go to school
2. Everyone should be able to talk in class whenever they wish
3. Pupils should be able to know about decisions that affect them
4. Pupils have the right to make mistakes
5. Teachers should be obeyed at all times
6. Everyone should be able to say or write what they really think
7. Pupils should not have to go to lessons they don’t enjoy.
8. Pupils should have a say in what they learn about.
9. Everyone should be treated equally in all circumstances.
10. Pupils should be able to miss doing homework if they have special or extra home commitments
11. Teachers should always listen to children
12. Adults should never raise their voices to children

1. First sort the statements into agree, disagree not sure
2. Choose a few that you would like to discuss and in your group talk about the 'yes buts' that apply to the statement (even if basically you agree or disagree).
3. You are trying to move away from black and white thinking into greater subtlety and recognition of varieties of viewpoints. You might, for instance, discuss what the consequences would be if the statement was carried out exactly as it stood. Change the words on the statements to suit your evolving ideas.
4. Lastly, choose one statement that you would like to defend or argue against (possibly one that you have amended). Put together a group statement, appoint a spokesperson and together draw up your argument.

This activity is designed to help you (or children in your class)
- Collaborate
- Think rationally about different positions and arguments
- Develop skills of arguing assertively and rationally to try and persuade other people
- Think about changing your mind.
Workshop For B.Ed and PGCE primary students –
Teaching about controversial issues as part of citizenship education

Work in groups of 3 - 4. Choose one of the following scenarios. The last set is most relevant to Key Stage 2 geography.

Using the 4 points below as your framework, discuss your chosen scenario/issue in your group and produce a diagram of ideas to present to the whole group.

1. What's the controversy (or potential controversy) here? Try and be succinct, eg this is about sexism, or this is about individualism vs responsibility in a wider context.
2. What management issues might you face, including confrontations, hurt feelings, self esteem issues?
3. What is the range of issues that you want to bring out? (eg different perspectives, points of view, factual information etc.) Draw up a chart if you want to.
4. How will you take this forward in a practical context?

FIRST SET OF SCENARIOS - CHILD INITIATED WORK

You have overheard one of the following comments, or it has been made directly to you and you decide to follow it up through curriculum work in the classroom as part of Cit. Ed (ie not just through talking to an individual or small group.)

Asylum seekers and refugees
'My uncle says they shouldn't go to our school because they're holding us back and the council gives them houses before us.'

People seeking to live permanently in Britain
'What do you think about people wanting to live here doing an English test miss?'

In the wake of 9/11/Bali bombing
*Chanting in the playground to a small boy called Ibrahim* 'you're Al Qaida, your Dad's Al Qaida.'

Palestine/Israel hostilities
Small group of Muslim boys mutter to each other when teacher attempts to teach about Chanukah - 'evil people, evil people of the Menorah.'

November 2002, adoption bill going through House of Commons
'My dad says it's good that gay people might adopt babies. 'That means your Dad's gay.'

Animal rights
*Two Year 4 girls overheard talking* -
'We don’t eat chickens or lamb in our family cos factory farming is cruel.'
'That's stupid. You've got to eat. We need meat.'
Global issues

Two Year 2 children overheard talking
Child A: My Nan says she doesn’t want to buy me a [brand name] sweater because the people who make them in the Phillipines get treated so badly.
Child B: Well I don't know anyone who comes from the Phillipines so I don't have to worry about that.

Global issues (Year 5 child)
Child: Mum, I just got to have [brand name] trainers. All the boys in my class have got them and I feel really shown up if I go out in these.

TEACHER INITIATED WORK AS PART OF KEY STAGE 2 GEOGRAPHY

Globalisation and our wider responsibilities as consumers.

Your class has started to research these issues on the web and has found a number of useful websites. You are aware, however, that the information they have obtained does not represent the full range of views, including how some of the children (and/or their parents) may feel about the issues. You are keen to avoid indoctrination, and to promote genuine research and thought. You need to plan your next sessions. Use points 1 - 4 above, and the handouts about the Free Trade Zones and Price Crisis for Coffee to develop your ideas.

Handouts (from web):
Coffee - Starbucks
Free Trade Zones - Nike/Tommy Hilfigger/Gap

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1. Recommended adult material not included in references within text

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Levstik, Linda and Barton, Keith, 1997, Doing history: investigation with children in elementary and middle schools, Ch 10: Oh good! We get to argue: putting conflict in context, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates
Parekh, B, 2000, The future of multi-ethnic Britain, particularly Chapter 3: Identities in transition, and Chapter 4: Cohesion, equality and difference, Runnymede Trust

2. Websites
www.runnymedetrust.org/islamophobia/islamreport.pdf – responding in the wake of Sept 11th, Al Qaida and the war in Iraq
www.citizen-pieces.org.uk – good practical advice for dealing with issues in school from Tower Hamlets Learning Resources centre
www.data.teachers.org.uk/pdfs/iraq5 - advice from NUT about teaching about the Iraqi war
www.onlineethics.org – good material on teaching about ethics in scientific contexts
www.globalethics.org – theoretical and practical discussion about values and controversies
www.flinders.edu.au/teach/teach/inclusive/controversial - excellent on ground rules and strategies with students and children
www.indiana.edu/%7Essdc - excellent article by Diane Hess, 2001, Teaching students about controversial public issues
www.britkid.org – a British site devoted to dealing with racism among young people – good strategies for working with students
www.becal.net – Belief, culture and learning information gateway - based in Bristol university dealing with values education
www.nationalmocktrial.org/cases/index - this is where I found a wonderful mock trial based on Goldilocks vs the three bears!

Activities for students and children

SCF, 2000, *Partners in Rights – creative activities exploring rights and citizenship for 7-11 year olds*, Save the Children Fund

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13 Crick, B., 1998, Education for citizenship and the teaching of democracy in schools, Final report of the Advisory Group on Citizenship, QCA,
Onesko, J. 1996, Exploring the issues with students despite the barriers, Social Education, Vol 60, pp 22-27

Students go initially into self chosen groups of 4 or 6 and discuss the issue at hand. Then each member of each group is given a number from 1 to 4 (or 6) and all the 1s, 2s, 3s etc form a new group, with each explaining the perspectives and discussion from their original group.

Working in pairs or threes, students first rank their statements, and then join with another pair or trio, explaining their decisions to each other. The statements are then arranged in a 1 – 2 – 3 – 3 – 2 – 1 pattern, with the most important at the top.