

ConCitizen

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW FINDINGS



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Methodological frame for focus group interviews with schoolteachers

- **Method:** Jointly developed interview guide for semi structured interviews
- **Interview length:** approximately one hour per interview.
- **Sample:**
 - Northern Ireland (NI) n=8 , Norway (NO) n=2, Lebanon(LB) n=23, Cyprus (CY) n=4, Denmark (DK) n=3
 - Primary and secondary school teachers
- **Analysis:**
 - The analysis focus on key tendencies
 - Due to the sample's limited and varying number of informants, the analysis focus on key tendencies and not deduce significant differences between the national contexts
- **Abbreviations:**
 - Contested narratives (CN)
 - Controversial issues (CI)
 - Question (Q)

Key transnational topics

Q: Please give some examples of contested narratives/controversial issues in your subject area(s)

Transnational analysis: Most frequently occurring themes:

CN:

- Use of history / dealing with the past (CY, LB, NI, DK, NO)
- Wars and conflicts: CN in a national context (CY, LB, NI)
- Imperialism, wars and conflicts: CN in a global context (DK, NO)
- The Middle East: Israel / Palestine conflict (LB, DK, NO)

CI:

- Sexual/gender identity (CY, LB, NI, DK, NO)
- Racism (DK, NO)
- Freedom of speech vs Freedom of religion/ conflict of rights (CY, DK, NO)
- The Muhammad caricatures / the cartoon crisis (DK, NO)
- Migrants/refugees (CY, LB, NO)
- Russian/Ukrainian war (DK, NO)
- Confessional politics / politics and religion (LB, NI?)
- National identity (CY, NI?)

Key transnational topics

Q: Please give some examples of contested narratives/controversial issues in your subject area(s)

Transnational analysis: frequently occurring themes:

Contested narratives:

- Use of history / dealing with the past (CY, LB, NI, DK, NO)

➤ The teachers introduce CN/CI related to the subject content e.g. use of history, colliding rights, minority/majority questions

(NO)

➤ The students raise CN/CI related to identity: racism, sexism, and current conflicts: Russian/Ukrainian war

➤ The teachers expresses a need for discussing/reflecting on own praxis and cases from teaching

(CY, DK, NO)

the Muhammad caricatures / the cartoon crisis (DK, NO)

- Migrants/refugees (CY, LB, NO)
- Politics and religion (LB, NI)
- National identity (CY, NI)

Teaching CN and CI examples of best practices

Q: Which pedagogical approaches do you find more effective to facilitate teaching in Contested narratives and controversial issues? And why?

The most frequently mentioned approaches:

Classroom discussions CY, LB, NO, DK

- *"Maybe there shouldn't be class discussions ... better some questions that they ... discuss in pair"* DK

Group work NO, DK

- *"I often have discussion groups where each group is given one point of view, and then they have to find arguments for that point of view. Then it does not matter whether they think so or not. Just to create some distance between the claims and the individuals. [...] Then the more argumentative part is included: How do you build an argument?"* NO

Role play CY, LB, NI, DK

Argumentation exercises NO, LB, DK, CY

- *"To be a kind of 'Socratic cling' and ask annoying questions... I understand what you mean. But why? Why do you think so?" And then just continue in a way, and that applies to the Israel-Palestine conflict as well, since this is one of many controversial topics where students come up with very steep preconceptions"* NO

Multiple perspectives CY, LB, NI, NO, DK

- *"I try to adopt the 'different viewpoints' strategy, where students are allowed to express their own opinions on a certain topic, and where I, myself, try to present the different angles of a certain issue/topic"* LB

Other

- *"Use of music and stories or bring parents in to discuss issues"* CY
- Include audio visual resources and real stories NI
- *"First watch a video and then after discussion ask students to create their own written contribution"* CY
- To work counterfactual – what if? And challenge the dominant narrative DK

Barriers teaching contested narratives (CN) and controversial issues (CI)

Q: What are the barriers
teaching controversial
issues? Why?

The most frequently mentioned
barriers:

Time LB, CY, DK

- *"Lack of time to go in depth and such issues require in depth discussions or otherwise they could do more harm than good" CY*

Lacking knowledge LB, DK

- *"I think you have to know your teaching materials very well before it becomes really clear where the different narratives are" "It is probably not often a field you include if the material doesn't" DK*

Lacking confidence

Protecting students NO, DK, LB

- *"Since they are too young for heavy discussions, I barely include controversial topics in my teaching." LB*

Anxious for the reactions from parents or school leaders NI, CY, LB

- Bringing in a controversial speaker to his class, one teacher explained how he organised for the speaker to come to a nearby Catholic school (beside his own protestant school):
- *"Everybody else [parents, students, senior leaders] knew [about the speaker], you know, but let's just say certain people in the school didn't know so, 'cause it just would have caused quite a ruckus." NI*

Enablers/ opportunities in order to teach CI

Q: What are the enablers/opportunities in order to teach controversial issues? Why?

The most frequently mentioned enablers/opportunities:

Safe Classroom/relations LB, NO, DK

Time LB, DK

Pedagogical strategies LB, NO, CY, DK, NI

- Changes to the curriculum and exam specifications. Online 'visits' and guest speakers. NI

Knowledge LB, NO, CY, DK

Other

- *“Even when I am observing kids in the playground, I take these as opportunities to teach something later in the classroom e.g. when I see kids arguing, and I do it in a way that prevents them from feel targeted (they don't realise it's about them)”* CY
- When controversial issues are raised in the media. NO

Situations where CN/CI are avoided

Q: Are there situations, where you want to avoid CN and CI in your teaching?
In that case, why?

The most frequently mentioned reasons to avoid teaching CN/CI:

Time DK

Lacking knowledge LB, CY, DK

Lacking confidence

Protecting students LB, NO

- *"And then we ended up right in a discussion about the Muhammad caricatures and whether we would show them to our students or not. And there, there we were very divided. Some thought it would offend [...] so many of our students that it was completely unacceptable" NO*

Anxious from the reaction from parents and school leader CY, LB NI

- *"Fear of reactions by colleagues e.g. when it is related to the use of national symbols (Greek or Cypriot flag?), the national anthem, use of language)" CY*
- *When the parents refuse to discuss such subjects with their children at home + refuse that they discuss it at school. LB*
- *"It is quite nerve wracking that you don't want to upset the students, obviously, but you also don't want to upset your teacher (Head of Department), so there's also quite a fine line between that as well" NI*

Benefits of teaching CN/CI

Q: What are the benefits of teaching CN/CI?

The most frequently chosen answers:

Critical thinking LB, CY, DK, NO

- Especially related to discussing real life situations. LB

Empathy LB, CY, DK

Prepares for a diverse society CY, DK

- *“We have students from 40 countries in our school. They should be allowed to immerse themselves in topics related to their parents' country of origin. [...] The Cold War had huge consequences in Africa, fx it can be useful for the students to understand a conflict there in the light of the dynamics of the Cold War (or South America or South East Asia). The important thing when teaching history is to understand the cause and effect mechanisms and driving forces”* NO

Conflict management LB, CY, DK

Communication skills CY, DK,

- *About classroom dialogues: “coach them a bit in how they verbally go to a classroom conversation because otherwise they become very confrontational ...so ‘disarmament’ methods to manage a classroom conversation. I think it is very important to exercise this because it is not something you right away become a master of. It is something you have to practice”* DK
- *“I think young people are very much like “either – or”. Israel is either kind or bad. Our job is to nuance this much more than that. That applies to a lot of questions. These Muhammad drawings as well. It is not necessarily like either – or.”* NO

Democratic education CY, DK, NO

Equipment to teach CN/CI from teacher education and additional training

Q: How did your initial teacher education equip you to teach CN/CI?

- Teachers from **Lebanon** mention different skills learned at teacher education and additional training
- Teachers from **Cyprus** : Teacher education did almost not equip them for teaching CN/CI – only few workshops. Additional training equipped them with pedagogical strategies but often seminars are focused on theory and not practice
- Teachers from **Northern Ireland**: For experienced teachers not at all. For early to mid career very much. The teachers mention that additional training contributed with knowledge, resources and network.
- Teachers from **Denmark**: Teacher education did not explicitly equip them for teaching CN/CI. CN/CI was only directly addressed in citizenship education. The teachers stresses the need for focusing on practice not only theory: "*We didn't learn how to **deal** with these situations.*" DK
- Teachers from **Norway**: No answers to this question - see the survey results for more information.

Need for training and resources

Q: What type of training resources would be useful to support you in dealing with CN/CI in the classroom?

The most frequently mentioned resources

Manage classroom discussion LB, CY

Develop a safe classroom LB

- *“The main support required by teachers is training on how to create a safe environment to deal with these issues. There is also a constant need for knowledge workshops/training sessions” LB*

Deal with biased or offensive comments LB, DK

- *“Role play based on cases from the classroom”*

Provide multiple perspectives LB, CY, DK (NI)

Other

- How to deal and manage controversial discussions LB
- Examples of how other teachers have engaged successfully with CN/CI DK
- Practice not just theory CY, DK, NI, LB
- *“I actually think like micro teaching - other teachers watching teachers deliver on certain issues ...it could be extremely valuable - not creating 5 new principles that teachers must do, but rather just have a look at a few great teachers doing 5 or 10 minutes and just saying look, this is how I did this” NI*
- *“We don’t want just another ‘educational package, but we want training, and we want strategies and concrete examples aligned with the curricula and approved formally so that we feel safe teaching these topics” CY*

Needs analysis main conclusions:

- **Consideration of context**
 - the impact of context on the perception of CI/CN
 - the place of CI/CN in the (statutory) curriculum
 - the time available to deal with these issues
 - the support from school leaders, colleagues and parents to address these issues
 - the advantage or disadvantage of including personal stories
- **Clear need for**
 - addressing CN/CI in initial teacher education
 - space/tools for discussing/reflecting on own praxis and reflecting on other teachers' cases fx videos of teaching CN/CI
 - teaching material with subject content on key CN/CI
 - ideas for implementing aesthetic approaches and multimodality in teaching of CN/CI
 - strategies for scaffolding explorative student dialogues
 - strategies for including multi-perspectivity
 - strategies for developing critical thinking and argumentation

