

the
enquiring
classroom

Values, Identity, Exploration



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This is an extract from The Enquiring Classroom Training Manual focusing on The Rough Guide the Sacred. For the full Training Manual please visit ; <http://www.enquiring-project.eu/project-outputs.html>

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Difficult Conversations



Difficult Conversations

Exercise 1: Moments of Stuckness and Perplexity

Description:

Develop a space for discussing difficult situations and moments in classrooms is important for educators and others involved in working with children and young people. By sharing, without naming individuals, difficult moments professionally when they went sure how to respond to a situation, this opens up the opportunity for exchange and the possibility of exploring creative responses. Part of this involves working together to distinguish between: 1. Pedagogical moments; 2. Pastoral moments; 3. Judicial (or reporting) moments. These are context specific and dependent on established prior relations, however, sharing stories and strategies can capacity build in this regard. This exercise should not be introduced until the group have spent some time together and they should be able to speak in confidence. The exercises work with the assumption that the knowledge and the expertise lies in the space of the room. The creative strategies introduced through this handbook are also devised to support teachers in responding pedagogically, where appropriate, to difficult moments, and determining when and how to respond.

Aims:

The aim of this exercise is to create a space for professional sharing of practice, in relations of mutual trust.

Case Study (for Task 2)

Develop a space for discussing difficult situations and moments in In your class you notice that a 15 year old white male student is sometimes argumentative and assertive when topics relating to ethnic and religious minorities, homeless people, refugees, migrants, asylum seekers, and socio-economically disadvantaged groups are mentioned. Sometimes he stays quiet. But some of the time he expresses derogatory views often associated with what is called the alt-right. This student is a very articulate, academically capable, well-balanced, sociable and popular student. He is otherwise very polite. His tendency is to confront and challenge, in a very assertive manner, anyone whose views he disagrees with. He tends to repeat phrases like ‘that’s typical of what you liberal lefties say...you haven’t got a clue’. He sometimes repeats statistics that portray minority groups in a negative light by linking Muslims to Sharia law and the death penalty or mistreatment of women or stating what he claims are factual statistics about the amount of rapes or murders, burglaries and acts of terrorism that have been committed by asylum seekers. When peers respond to him and challenge him he says that his arguments are based on ‘fact’ whereas their response is based on naïve, uninformed ‘feeling’. The interaction becomes heated and tense. As a teacher you are very uncomfortable with this situation and you really don’t know what to do.

Discuss How and When to Respond.



Difficult Conversations (moments of stuckness and perplexity)

Exercise 1: Moments of Stuckness and Perplexity

Method:

Task 1: Sharing Stories and Practice

Step 1: In advance of the session, they should have reflected on a moment of difficulty that they have experienced in the classroom, or a story of a difficult moment which they have heard about from someone else. The descriptions offered should be anonymised and preserve confidentiality. Place the stories, on blank postcards, in the *Box of Paralysis*.

Another strategy may be to introduce a case study scenario as outlined below that distils some of the issues currently facing teachers.

Step 2: Participants create a circle, and the cards are placed with the writing side facing down in the middle of the circle.

Step 3: A volunteer chooses a card at random and reads aloud the story on it.

Step 4: The group discusses and explores the story, engaging constructively, sensitively, and thoughtfully with the topic, sharing practices and possibly shared experiences. Depending on the nature of the 'moment of stuckness or perplexity', possible responses and/or pedagogical strategies are suggested. When participants are ready, another card is chosen.

Step 5: Time is given to debrief and to reflect on the exercise.

Task 2: Difficult Conversations: A Case Study

Description: This case study example focuses on the *when* question and the *how* question in responding to difficult moments as they are live in the classroom, or relationships that have become difficult with students. How do we decide whether this is a *pedagogical* moment, a *pastoral* moment, and a *judicial* moment? When should we adopt different responses? *What* are the most effective responses in each case?

Task 3: Pedagogies of Discomfort and Empathy.

Whilst initiatives like *The Enquiring Classroom* often appeal to teachers and other educators already interested in these questions, the encounter with 'difference' can be challenging for some teachers, in particular those who operate with a mono-cultural idea of nationality and even citizenship and who may feel that newcomers should assimilate to the dominant culture. This can be the case in Sweden, Greece and Ireland, although for different reasons, and the sensitivity to local context and local reasons is essential here.

Task 3 continued overleaf

Reference:

Zembylas, M. & E. Papamichael (2017) 'Pedagogies of discomfort and empathy in multicultural teacher education', *Intercultural Education*, 28(1), pp.1-19.



Difficult Conversations (moments of stuckness and perplexity)

Exercise 1: Moments of Stuckness and Perplexity

Method:

This exercise draws in part from some of the reflections from Michalinos Zembylas and Elena Papamichael (2017) 'Pedagogies of discomfort and empathy in multicultural teacher education'. In that article they reflect on the importance of discomfort and pedagogy in anti-racist teacher education and 'decolonising intercultural education'. It can be particularly challenging to hear criticisms when teachers may not have felt that they have done something wrong. Here we reflect on the difficulties of discomfort and the opportunities for learning and connection. This is central to *The Enquiring Classroom* approach as the critical response to difficult moments needs, at least sometimes, to be complemented by the creative and imaginative response, otherwise there is a risk of retreat into defensiveness or indeed righteousness (for teacher or student).

One exercise that might help teachers could be to write in advance a short checklist to enable them to reframe what they may experience as disturbing moments of encounter with difference. This needs further development but here are some propositions for a beginning checklist, in particular in an encounter with parents or community members. This builds on the appreciative enquiry approach by re-framing what may seem like criticism or negativity into an articulation of what is valued by the person. Part of the difficulty can be a tendency to *react* to criticism, in particular when we feel vulnerable, accused of wrongdoing, misrepresented, or lacking in knowledge. This reaction may be part of histories that work with 'us' and 'them' logics, so that only some people are *really* Irish, Swedish, Greek. Sometimes it can be from fear of loss of culture, in particular in countries who have undergone colonialism. This checklist doesn't seek to ignore this but rather reflects on how it might be re-framed to enable a more productive and thoughtful engagement with the other person or people.

Suggested Checklist

- What can I learn from what this person is saying, even if I disagree?
- Can I listen to this person and enquire with them, rather than becoming defensive?
- Can I take a moment to imagine what it might be like for me to be in their situation at this time, in this society, and in this place?
- Do I have any sense of what my blind spots/habitual triggers might be in situations like this?
- Noting my reactions, what kind of response could I have that would be surprising (for me) and might help to build a connection with this other person?
- Are there opportunities to build other kinds of relations and connections and perhaps put more difficult moments on temporary hold for future conversations?
- What opportunities do I have to practice active listening and when, where and how can I practice active listening?
- What would it mean to re-frame this (difficult) encounter as a positive teaching and learning moment?
- What is my response telling me about my positive values?
- How can I re-frame these values to also be inclusive of this child and their family?
- Am I ok with accepting that perhaps sometimes I might be wrong? How does this make me feel as a human being and as a teacher?



Project Resources

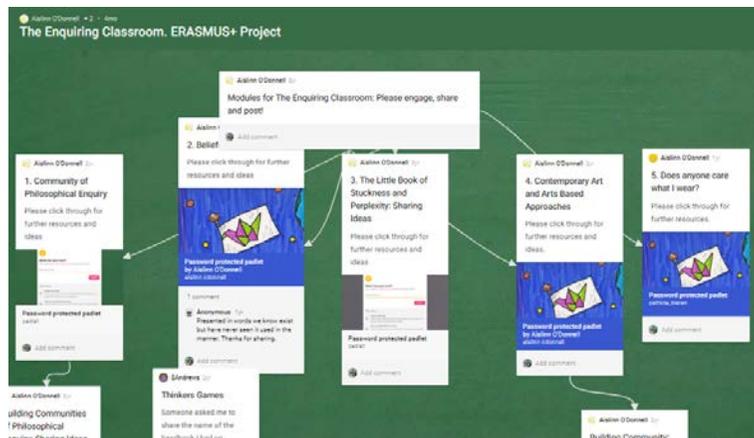
Project Resources



HOME THE PROJECT PARTNERS STRANDS TRAINING SCHOOLS OUTPUTS NEWS AND EVENTS



The Enquiring Classroom project seeks to develop strategies to support teachers and students in engaging in difficult ethical conversations about identity, religions and beliefs, democratic values, diversity, belonging and violence, in order to establish a firm foundation for inclusive and tolerant schools and classrooms.



Website

<http://www.enquiring-project.eu/>

Log on to our website to find all our downloadable resources and links to all online platforms.

Padlet

Please visit our Padlet boards. These provide a visual guide to our methodologies and we actively encourage engagement and participation.

<https://padlet.com/aislinnjodonnell/enquiringclassroom>

Password: Enquiry

Social Media Channels

Facebook: facebook.com/EnquiringClassroom/

Twitter: twitter.com/EnquiringClass

Open Discovery Space

Visit The Enquiring Classroom online hub in the Open Discovery Space Online Community:

<https://portal.opendiscoveryspace.eu/en/community/enquiring-classroom-846694>

Teachers Academy: <https://portal.opendiscoveryspace.eu/en/topic-courses/enquiring-classroom-academy>



Project Team

Project Team



Aislinn O'Donnell

Aislinn O'Donnell is Professor of Education in Maynooth University. Aislinn has developed a number of creative research and teaching projects that seek to introduce philosophy to settings like the prison, probation projects, and drug projects. She has an ongoing collaborative project in primary schools called Art and Philosophy in the Classroom with gallery educator and curator, Katy Fitzpatrick and was a founding member of Philosophy Ireland. Aislinn is interested in exploring innovative and experimental approaches to teaching philosophy, fostering cross-disciplinary dialogue between philosophy and other subject areas, such as contemporary art, and developing pedagogical strategies to help us to reflect upon ethics, inclusion, pluralism, and the global refugee crisis in educational institutions and society.
<https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/people/aislinn-odonnell>



Patricia Kieran

Patricia Kieran teaches Education about Religions and Beliefs at Mary Immaculate College, University of Limerick, Ireland. She is keenly interested in inter-belief dialogue and her current research focuses on the manner in which learners might explore deeply personal, complex and sensitive issues surrounding religions and beliefs in a multi-belief context. Her work focuses on teaching creatively, using religious artefacts in the classroom to explore complex religious themes, and on the representation of religions and beliefs in curricular programs. She has been a visiting ICUSTA Scholar to the University of Saint Thomas in Texas, USA and has published a number of books on religious pluralism in educational practice as well as inter-religious dialogue and Theology in an intercultural context.

Project Team



Lovisa Bergdahl

Lovisa Bergdahl is Associate Professor of education. She is currently conducting the research project "Lived Values: a pedagogical-philosophical groundworking of the value basis of Swedish schools" financed by the Swedish Research Council (2015-2019). The project focuses on what has become of values education in the knowledge society and its overall aim is to seek out an educational language for the formative task of schools. Bergdahl is particularly interested in the value conflicts that arise in schools in postsecular liberal democratic societies and the pedagogical questions that these tensions seem to generate for teachers and students in the classroom.



Elisabet Langmann

Elisabet Langmann is Assistant Professor of education at Södertörn University, Sweden. Placing educational practice and philosophical and aesthetical explorations at the center of her work, her research is situated within the field of ethics and values education. Langmann is particularly interested in developing innovative and creative approaches to fostering values in schools, and in seeking out affirmative ways of engaging in difficult ethical discussions in the multicultural classroom. She is currently working in the research project "Lived Values: a pedagogical-philosophical groundworking of the value basis of Swedish schools".

Project Team



Stephanos Cherouvis

Stephanos Cherouvis has a background in Linguistics and Philosophy of Science and a long interest in open access (OERs) and technology-enhanced education. He has been involved in the implementation and research of online community building initiatives in education, in the framework of large-scale Horizon 2020 & Erasmus+ initiatives (Open Discovery Space, Inspiring Science Education, CREATIONS). He is a cautious enthusiast about the role of social media in education and all things human.



Rachel Ryan

Rachel Ryan in her administrative role as The Enquiring Classroom Project Officer in Mary Immaculate College has used her skills gained working within the marketing advertising industry to design and create materials used for dissemination and publicity within this project. Rachel graduated with a B.Sc. in Multimedia with Computer and Design and has a special interest in information design and usability in both online and traditions formats.

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Disclaimer:

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THE ENQUIRING CLASSROOM



The Enquiring Classroom methodologies have been developed in collaboration with teachers and other educators. It is underpinned by a philosophy of education that has developed through this engagement. This re-articulates the relationship between values, democracy and education. The Enquiring Classroom's creative pedagogical strategies are designed to engage teachers and students in thinking and talking about the rich stories of our common world, the pluralistic nature of life and society, the existential dimensions of the human condition, and the values that hold us. By being clear about the norms and values that govern educational spaces, it can become easier to navigate difficult conversations, including those about identity, colonialism, ethics, values, religions and beliefs, diversity, belonging and violence. Educational spaces involve 'putting matters on the table' in an educational way. Through culturally responsive and culturally sustaining pedagogies, students are invited to bring their life-worlds into educational spaces, and teachers are encouraged to see this as part of the cultural and educational richness of classroom and school life. By also asking students to face historic and contemporary injustices and conflicts, educational spaces can also become spaces in which we come to understand why the world is how it is and imagine how it might be otherwise. Each new generation can thus come to take on the task of reimagining and renewing our common world.



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