



Project 2021-1-BG01-KA122-ADU-000035679 Safety and success, Erasmus+



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STIMULATING CRITICAL THINKING TO FIGHT RADICALISATION

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this presentation is to provide you with the opportunity to reflect on several aspects associated with controversial issues related to citizenship and rights, providing practical approaches and activities which allows us to explore delicate topics which can arise in the daily debates in society, at home, with friends, but in a safe and critical way.

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When dealing with controversial and sensitive issues, it is crucial to recognize that what is controversial and sensitive to one person, is not necessarily controversial to someone else. This is a fundamental insight that the teacher must recognize, to stimulate the same awareness of the students. What is felt and seen as controversial is related to a person's biographical history, experiences and viewpoints, the person's position, and experiences in society as a majority or a minority in terms of class, ethnicity, religious orientation, gender, and sexuality, as well as other complex and intertwined aspects.

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Controversial issues can be defined as issues which create strong feelings and tensions in society.

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When someone talks about something being controversial, it usually means that it involves more than just simple disagreement between people. This presentation has proposed the following division regarding what kind of issues can be considered controversial

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- **Issues that deeply divide society** – such as euthanasia, economic cutbacks, social welfare payments, immigration and so on;
- **Issues that challenge personally held values and beliefs** – strong political positions, racism, gay rights;
- **Issues that generate conflicting explanations** – historical events;
- **Issues that evoke emotional responses** – crime and imprisonment, education, abortion, disability;
- **Issues that may cause students to feel threatened and confused** – where their families have very strong views on an issue, where peer pressure is strongly in favor of one side of an argument.

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TO ADDRESS THESE KINDS OF ISSUES IT IS FUNDAMENTAL TO CREATE A “SAFE” SPACE.

In this context, the concept of “safety” refers to:

- An approach which allows people to explore a range of perspectives on an issue but does not expect them to disclose personal information or encourage them to feel exposed because of their views.
- Within the context of discussing controversial issues in, one first obstacle is to decide what stance to take.

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There also will be times when personal views need to be challenged and someone should act as **devil's advocate** – particularly when the people appears to hold the same view. In this case you can deliberately inject controversy to ensure that participants are exposed to a wide range of perspectives. On the contrary, it can be necessary to **support** the views of a person who holds a minority view within the group, to ensure his or her view is given due weight.

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The activities proposed in this situation have no topic pre-set, but they are usable and adaptable to any controversial issue, since they aim to facilitate and guide the exchange of ideas between students in a critical and safe way. Therefore, before starting, the moderator should identify the topic to be addressed.

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TO DO SO, MODERATOR CAN:

- Choose the topic according to specific needs of the classroom or, more in general, to address issues particularly relevant for the public opinion in a certain moment in a certain context.
- Propose a set of topics for students to choose from, according to their interest.
- Leave students free to propose any topic by themselves.

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ACCORDING TO THE CONTENT OF THE ACTIVITY AND THE SPECIFIC OBJECTIVE THAT MODERATOR WANT TO ACHIEVE, HE/SHE CAN DECIDE TO:

- Ask participant to deepen the topic by making personal research looking for information in newspapers and websites or talking with their friends and families.
- Ask participant to do group research
- Provide material for documentation already prepared for them. In both cases, the analysis of the data should follow the steps for critical thinking presented.
- Initiate the activities without any preparation, to investigate the pre-existing knowledge of the students.

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SETTING OF GROUND RULES

Before starting discussion about controversial issues, it can be important to set some ground rules, to make sure to create a “safe” space for everyone. Therefore, it is strongly recommended that students spend some time in developing a sort of agreement, defining common values and behaviors to be taken during the discussions, such as listening, respect etc. Participant can be invited to create this agreement in a creative way, drawing, using mind-maps, creating a catch phrase or an acronym etc.

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THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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