Discussing sensitive topics in higher professional education, using the historicising method

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TerInfo, 2025

Utrecht University

TerInfo

Colophon

Commissioned by: Ministry of Education, Culture and Science

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Introduction

What role should teachers in Dutch education assume when discussing developments in Israel and the Palestinian territories? Since the outbreak of war between Hamas and Israel on 7 October 2023, this question has been central to teachers and to dialogue initiatives, old and new alike.[1]

Although the conflict in the Middle East has once again brought this question into sharp and painful focus, it reaches far beyond the current situation. What does it mean for a teacher to engage students in conversations about sensitive issues? And what strategies and approaches can help students express their emotions while maintaining appropriate boundaries?

Signals picked up by TerInfo[2] through its network suggest that teachers across all levels of Dutch education experience uncertainty when addressing sensitive issues. This guide focuses on one particular group: teachers in higher professional education (HBO).

The sense of uncertainty in HBO appears more pronounced than in primary, secondary and vocational education.[3] This is due to the fundamental question underlying conversational approaches and possible courses of action: what pedagogical role and responsibilities does an HBO teacher perceive and assume in offering students a normative framework?[4] Because HBO teachers generally work with adult students, this setting can create a different pedagogical dynamic than in primary, secondary and vocational education.

TerInfo has prepared this guide in response to these needs and at the request of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science to support HBO teachers in discussing sensitive and controversial topics. Throughout the guide, we use the terms 'sensitive' and 'controversial' interchangeably, while recognising that the two terms carry different connotations.[5]

First, we explore the different **pedagogical experiences** and interpretations of these by HBO teachers, before considering ways to initiate, steer and conclude **sensitive**

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[1] R. Elibol and O. Goldenberg, 'Toch weer de brug oversteken,' *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 9 October, 2024, https://www.groene.nl/artikel/toch-weer-de-brug-oversteken.

[2] TerInfo is a project of Utrecht University, founded by history professor Beatrice de Graaf, that helps schools address terrorism, political violence and other traumatic events in society. The programme takes a historicising approach, focusing on sharing knowledge and providing context in order to place contemporary moments of shock and urgency in perspective.

[3] Although university lecturers are free to use this guide, it is not specifically designed for the university context. The pedagogical structure of higher education is less well-suited to classroom discussions and traditional activities. Lecturers seeking guidance on how to conduct sensitive conversations can find more general tips and background information on the TerInfo website. See www.ter-info.nl.

[4] Seven interviews by Annelotte Janse with various HBO teachers, October-December 2024.

[5] S. Lozano Parra, B.G.J. Wansink, C. Bakker and L.M. van Liere, 'Teachers stepping up their game in the face of extreme statements: A qualitative analysis of educational friction when teaching sensitive topics,' Theory & Research in Social Education 51, no. 2 (2023): 201-232.

discussions. We then explain TerInfo's **historicising method** as one of the possible ways to structure lessons on sensitive topics. Finally, we present various ready-made **activities** that teachers can use themselves. These are available via terinfo.nl, where teachers can request an account free of charge. Although the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in 2024 was the reason for drafting this guide on discussing sensitive topics, it can be used more broadly.

The historicising method

This guide and these activities for higher professional education build on the activities and materials that TerInfo has been developing for primary, secondary and vocational education since 2018. The guiding principle here is the historicising approach to disruptive events and polarising topics. In a nutshell, we examine how a conflict or theme has evolved and changed over time, or we draw parallels with the past to contextualise intense events in the present and discuss them with less emotion. This approach helps to create a historicising context around a conflict and to shed light on the conflict from different perspectives, with the aim of better understanding the reactions, attitudes and actions of the parties involved.

Of course, there are other pedagogical methods for discussing sensitive topics. TerInfo works on the premise that providing historical context and introducing multiperspectivity can give young people a more hopeful and empathetic narrative, one that helps them make sense of complex and controversial issues and makes these topics easier to discuss.

The TerInfo method is not a standalone approach; it builds partly on two decades of international and Dutch research into historical thinking and history education.[6] We are

[6] D. Abbey and B.G.J. Wansink, 'Brokers of Multiperspectivity in History Education in Post-Conflict Societies,' *Journal of Peace Education* 19, no. 1 (2022): 67-90; K.C. Barton and A. McCully, 'Teaching Controversial Issues … Where Controversial Issues Really Matter,' *Teaching History* 127 (2007): 13-19; K.C. Barton and L.S. Levstik, *Teaching History for the Common Good* (Erlbaum, 2004); Z. Bekerman and M. Zembylas, *Teaching Contested Narratives: Identity, Memory and Reconciliation in Peace Education and Beyond* (Cambridge University Press, 2012); P. Cowan and H. Maitles, eds., *Teaching Controversial Issues in the Classroom: Key Issues and Debates* (Continuum International Publishing Group, 2012); T. Goldberg and G.M. Savenije, 'Teaching Controversial Historical Issues,' in *The Wiley International Handbook of History Teaching and Learning*, ed. S.A. Metzger and L. McArthur Harris (Wiley-Blackwell, 2018), 503-526; D.E. Hess, *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion* (Routledge, 2009); D.E. Hess and P.G. Avery, 'Discussion of Controversial Issues as a Form and Goal of Democratic Education,' in *Sage Handbook of Education for Citizenship and Democracy*, eds. J. Arthur, I. Davies, and C. Hahn (Sage, 2008), 506-518; T. Huijgen, C. van Boxtel, W. van de Grift and Paul Holthuis, 'Toward Historical Perspective Taking: Students' Reasoning When Contextualizing the Actions of People in the Past,' *Theory & Research in Social Education* 45, no. 1 (2017): 110-144; K. Kello, 'Sensitive and Controversial Issues in the Classroom: Teaching History in a Divided Society,' *Teachers and Teaching* 22, no. 1 (2016): 35-53; S. Lozano Parra and B.G.J. Wansink, 'Multiperspectivity in History Education,' in *Bloomsbury History: Theory & Methods* (Bloomsbury, 2022), 106; S. Lozano Parra, C. Bakker and L.M. van Liere, 'Practicing Democracy in the Playground: Turning Political Conflict into Educational Friction,' *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 53, no. 1 (2021): 32-46; J.L. Pace, 'Contained Risk-Taking: Preparing Preservice Teachers to Teach Controversial Issues in Three Countries,' *Theory & Research in Social Education* 47, no. 2 (2019): 228-260; P.C. Seixas and T. Morton, *The Big Six Historical Thinking*

grateful to have been able to draw on this body of work. Unfortunately, this guide is too brief to cover all of the research in detail, so we refer to several key publications in our bibliography.

While history can help us better understand situations, it is not always an effective tool. Sometimes it can even create division. In the classroom, for example, students may feel a strong emotional connection to certain historical events, making open discussion more difficult. History can also be misused in public debate, for instance to deliberately present a one-sided view or reinforce a political conviction. This is why it is important to approach the past with care. Our goal is to teach students to engage critically with history and facilitate discussions of sensitive topics.

The historicising method is closely linked to history and social studies. As a result, it is less applicable to programmes that focus strongly on a specific professional context with little connection to these subjects. To support these teachers and programmes, we have expanded on the core of the historicising method and explained its underlying mechanisms in Part 3. Our aim is to separate the method's functioning from its historical context, allowing teachers with limited historical background to use it effectively.

Reading instructions

The choice of discussion strategies, historicising approach, pedagogical tips, didactic methods and activities depends on the teaching style, learning objectives, lesson setting and composition of the student group. Not all the ideas and suggestions provided will be applicable in every context. We therefore recommend selecting the sections most relevant to your own teaching practice. The guide is intended as a toolbox from which teachers can take what they need. This approach is reflected in its structure: although the three parts build on one another, they can also be read and used separately.

Part 1 provides an initial framework for the pedagogical role of higher professional education teachers when discussing sensitive topics, based on interviews with such teachers. TerInfo operates within the boundaries of the rule of law, applying legal frameworks that enable respectful discussion in educational settings and the public sphere. However, this can create tension in higher professional education, where teachers work with adult students. This results in a different pedagogical context and dynamic compared to secondary and vocational education.

When a controversial topic arises in the context of current events, it influences the teaching approach. The main objective, then, becomes regulating emotions and

Concepts (Nelson, 2012); J. van Drie and C. van Boxtel, 'Historical Reasoning: Towards a Framework for Analyzing Students' Reasoning about the Past,' *Educational Psychology Review* 20, no. 2 (2008): 87-110; D. van Straaten, A. Wilschut and R. Oostdam, 'Making History Relevant to Students by Connecting Past, Present and Future: A Framework for Research,' *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 48, no. 4 (2016): 479-502; S. Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Temple University Press, 2001).

ensuring a safe learning environment. For this reason, **Part 2** focuses on finding a balance between 'inviting and limiting':[7] creating an environment where students feel comfortable sharing their emotions, opinions and views, while also giving teachers the tools to define the boundaries of multiperspectivity and prevent offensive language. How can teachers effectively implement this pedagogical role, striking a balance between inviting and limiting? Part 2 provides concrete tips for shaping this role in spontaneous and challenging conversations, as well as strategies for initiating and leading them.

When a controversial topic is part of the curriculum, teachers have more time to prepare and contextualise it historically. **Part 3**, therefore, shifts the focus to planned conversations. In this context, the historicising method, which requires advance preparation on the part of the teacher, is particularly useful. This section elaborates on TerInfo's historicising method and how teachers can use it to shape their own teaching, and how it compares to another common method: multiperspectivity.

Finally, TerInfo offers a range of ready-made activities on its website. Some are generic and can be applied in various contexts, while others focus specifically on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. These methods address the following pedagogical themes in a constructive way:

- Recognising and acknowledging one's own positional bias
- Highlighting different perspectives in relation to a conflict (introducing multiperspectivity)
- Putting oneself in another's shoes

As discussing sensitive topics in HBO is still relatively uncharted territory, this guide represents a first step. It does not aim to be exhaustive. TerInfo is based on the historicising method, but we recognise that there are other approaches to discussing sensitive topics. Ideally, this guide would be complemented by other guides offering additional strategies tailored to HBO lecturers. To support this, we have included an **appendix** with links to other relevant guides and websites, as well as a **glossary**, our sources and the other appendices referred to in this guide.

[7] As far as TerInfo could ascertain, Leon Meijs was the first person to use these terms in relation to the 'dialoog onder druk' (dialogue under pressure) training course. See also: https://www.schoolenveiligheid.nl/incompanytraining/training-dialoog-onder-druk/.

Methods and sources

The guide is based on:

- Existing literature on discussing sensitive and controversial topics, polarisation and educational pedagogy
- Research[8] and TerInfo's experience with sensitive and controversial topics
- Interviews conducted by TerInfo with teachers and teacher trainers in HBO for this guide

Through expert groups with teachers in HBO, TerInfo discussed the guide and the proposed activities to ensure that the material aligns with teachers' experiences and needs. We would like to take this opportunity to thank the experts involved: Aniek Draaisma, Gijs van Gaans, Koen Henskens, Pim van der Helm, Daan van Leeuwen, Saro Lozano Parra, Pieter Mannak, Jaap Patist, Léjon Saarloos, Jip Teegelbeckers, Hanneke Tuithof and Yaël Weening.

We would love to hear from you if you have any questions, ideas or other feedback! Please send an email to ter-info@uu.nl.

[8] https://ter-info.nl/over-ons/onderzoek/.

Part 1. The pedagogical role of teachers in higher professional education

The role and scope of teachers in higher professional education (HBO) have so far received little attention, and even less definition, in the available literature. This is problematic, as teachers can only develop their own strategies, roles, approaches and activities after reflecting on what pedagogy in HBO actually means to them. Although more research is needed, we conducted an initial exploration by interviewing HBO teachers. The interviews revealed that, unsurprisingly, there are as many ways of responding as there are teachers. To help you develop your own perspective, this chapter presents examples of how other HBO teachers put this into practice.

This chapter comes with a few caveats. First, we mainly spoke with teacher trainers (at the primary and secondary education levels) in citizenship and history education. Because of the professional context of this study, the teachers interviewed are likely to be more aware of their pedagogical role and how they enact it, as addressing sensitive topics is part of their curriculum.

1.1 What makes HBO pedagogy unique?

Based on our interviews, we have identified the following points:

1. A challenging age group

The age of HBO students is a distinctive pedagogical factor. Their lives and experiences are broader than those of secondary school pupils, and they have entered a more independent phase of life. Compared to secondary school and vocational students, HBO students also tend to be more steadfast in their opinions and may approach controversial issues from a strong sense of justice. As a result, conversations can quickly become emotional (1).[9] These attitudes mean that students no longer simply accept everything a teacher says.

To establish your authority as a teacher, adopting a professional and vocationally oriented approach to education can be an effective strategy. From that professional role, you can set a normative example. However, experience shows that, unlike university students, first-year HBO students often still struggle with the challenges of studying and 'growing up' (5, 1, 3, 4). This means that teachers need to adopt a pedagogical approach.

[9] The numbers in brackets refer to the relevant respondents.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What pedagogical dilemmas do we encounter when working with young adults?
- To what extent should we provide them with a normative and pedagogical framework?

2. Uncertainty about the role of pedagogy in vocational education

HBO is a form of vocational education; its aim is to train professionals (7, 4, 3, 6). Our respondents, therefore, see HBO as distinct from both secondary and university education. Notably, teachers hold different views on the role pedagogy should play in HBO. Most believe that pedagogy deserves a place, focusing on the development of skills such as social engagement and self-reflection. Others, however, feel that pedagogy has no role in vocational education.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What role should pedagogy play in HBO?
- Which pedagogical values do I consider important?
- What core values do I want to impart to my students?
- To what extent do I want to influence my students' normative framework? Do I see this as my role?
- What are my own moral boundaries?
- Have we made agreements with our teaching team about our core pedagogical values?

3. Lack of an institutional pedagogical framework

By a lack of an institutional pedagogical framework, we mean that teachers experience little clarity regarding the pedagogical policies or vision of HBO institutions. As a result, reflection on the pedagogical role is not encouraged at the institutional level and largely remains an individual matter (5). In this respect, HBO differs from secondary and vocational education, where a collective sense of pedagogical responsibility is more developed and more openly discussed (5). Areas that HBO institutions could address include discussing norms of conduct with students, clarifying mutual expectations among colleagues, handling unexpected conversations, and fostering collaborative learning (expert group). At the same time, teachers note that a stronger top-down interpretation of the pedagogical role could limit their professional freedom, making it difficult to strike the right balance.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- To what extent should an HBO institution promote an explicit pedagogical vision?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of such a vision for teacher and student autonomy?
- How could an HBO institution formulate such a vision? Who should be involved in this process?

4. Little time in the curriculum for pedagogy and teacher-student relationships

Drawing on their own and varied teaching experience, several lecturers report that curricula at HBO institutions are tightly prescribed (1), leaving little room to depart from the course material (3). The academic year – typically structured into 7-8-week teaching blocks – also leaves limited time to invest in teacher-student relationships in the classroom (according to all respondents). This makes it harder to create a sustained, safe environment for discussing sensitive topics. Many teachers compensate by checking in briefly with students during breaks or at the coffee machine. Some start each lesson by asking whether anything needs attention before moving into the lesson programme.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- Within a tightly prescribed curriculum, how can we build the relationships that enable sensitive discussions?
- How can I use a brief check-in to invite openness without compromising planned lesson time?
- How can I balance performance- and content-related targets with pedagogical attention?
- How can I put pedagogy and the teacher-student relationship on the agenda within my team or programme, despite the focus on subject matter goals?
- What practical changes could I propose to create more room for these aspects in curriculum design?

1.2 Which core pedagogical values do teachers embrace in this context?

The interviews reveal two overarching core pedagogical values that are closely intertwined.

1. **Embracing and encouraging an open, inquisitive attitude towards one another**

The idea is that teachers do not hold a monopoly on the truth. The driving force behind this core value is twofold. First, an inquisitive attitude helps students get to know and understand one another better, 'bringing them into contact with each other' (1), without 'being critical of the other by definition' (4). The aim is to discover what matters to a student and what lies 'behind a certain sensitivity' (4). Second, this attitude stems from the ideal of being a teacher who brings the outside world into the classroom and questions it with the students, for example by discussing current events (3).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- How do I create an atmosphere in my lessons in which students feel free to be open and inquisitive towards one another?
- How do I discover what is important to my students, and how do I deal with the personal or emotional issues they raise?
- What strategies can I use to explore social issues together with students?

2. **Perspective-taking and allowing room for disagreement**

Teachers tell their students that it is a shared ***responsibility*** to explore one another's standpoints, precisely because we live in a country where everyone has the ***right*** to disagree. Some teachers describe this core value in terms of mutual 'connectedness', 'collective responsibility' (7) and showing 'respect' for one another (5). By being open to and accommodating a student's beliefs, teachers allow other students to encounter different perspectives from their peers – views they may not share (1, 7, 6). Clashing opinions in class are also acceptable, because disagreement is part of what it means to live together as human beings (2).

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What strategies can I use to make students appreciate the value of different perspectives?
- How can I demonstrate respect for my students' beliefs, even when I don't share them?
- How can I help students understand that agreement is not always necessary, but mutual respect is?

1.3 Putting core values into practice

Teachers put these core values into practice in different and unique ways.

1. Leading by example

A frequently mentioned approach is 'leading by example' in relation to one's own core values. One teacher does this by setting boundaries based on his personal view of humanity and the professional focus of the programme (4). Another emphasises mutual respect, treating students (in this case, trainee teachers) as future colleagues (5). A third teacher uses current events as a didactic tool, asking questions such as, 'Why is this recent phenomenon strange?' – thereby modelling an inquisitive attitude. He reinforces this by saying, 'I don't have the answer either; let's find out together,' and shows that it is acceptable to change your mind (3).

2. Balancing your own views

A common thread in 'leading by example' is the shared view that neutrality as a teacher is both untenable and, in some cases, undesirable. Many teachers believe that, when defining one's pedagogical role and authority, it can be valuable to express personal views (1, 3, 4, 5, 6). Doing so does not necessarily mean revealing political preferences, but rather sharing one's background and experiences – and reflecting on how these may shape one's understanding of the world.

3. Setting concrete goals

Teachers can also express their core pedagogical values by clearly defining and communicating their goals for the group, explaining why these goals matter and how they will be achieved (5). This helps students understand the purpose and relevance of talking about controversial topics. Another teacher adds that it is essential to show that you have carefully considered your activity, the subject matter and the sensitivities within the group. Making this explicit demonstrates respect for students.
It can also help to show vulnerability, for example by admitting that you find certain terms difficult to use or by acknowledging that you do not wish to offend anyone, while still making clear that 'some issues cannot be left undiscussed' (6).

4. Focus on universal standards

Focusing on Article 1 of the Constitution of the Netherlands is another way to promote the core pedagogical value of 'listening to each other'. One teacher displayed Article 1 on a poster in the classroom and explained to students that it is a double-edged sword:

> ‘This part of our constitutional state gives me the right to hold my own opinion. However, it also means that you must respect the beliefs of others, even if you disagree with them. Others are entitled to have a different opinion from yours. You then have the right to try to nuance that opinion. That is the foundation of democracy. Article 1, therefore, obliges us to listen to others. This can be difficult when you have to listen to beliefs or opinions that are not your own.’ (1)

Having reflected on pedagogy in HBO and your role as a teacher, it is important to apply this in daily practice. In Part 2, we will therefore discuss how to conduct sensitive conversations.

Part 2. How should sensitive topics be discussed?

'Without controversy, there is no democracy.'[10] Controversy is an inevitable feature of a pluralistic, democratic society. Discussing controversial topics – issues that evoke strong feelings and divide communities and society – is part of that reality, but it can also lead to tension during lectures and seminars.

There are considerable educational and interpersonal benefits to addressing controversial issues in class. Such discussions expose students to new ideas and perspectives, helping them develop their research and debating skills.[11] By engaging in dialogue with each other and with their teacher, young people can explore how they want to contribute to solutions for global challenges and how they can take responsibility for their own actions.[12] In other words, when a teacher initiates and guides a discussion on a controversial topic, students can grow further as democratic citizens.[13]

However, these advantages do not change the fact that facilitating dialogue on disruptive or emotional topics can be uncomfortable, even unpleasant, for the teacher. In diverse classroom settings, such conversations can create tension when students feel personally affected by conflicts or when conflicting emotions reach a boiling point. When that tension erupts, the teaching and learning process is at risk. Out of fear of such 'hot moments', teachers may avoid the topic altogether,[14] but doing so can intensify underlying feelings and tensions. It can also leave students feeling that they are not being heard.[15] The interviews conducted by TerInfo for this guide show that 'being taken seriously' is an important need for students.[16]

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[10] D.E. Hess, *Controversy in the classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion* (Routledge, 2009), 162.
[11] M. van Alstein, *Omgaan met controverse en polarisatie in de klas* (Pelckmans Pro, 2018); H. Radstake, *Handleiding bij de docenttraining Je hebt makkelijk praten - Het begeleiden van gesprekken over maatschappelijk gevoelige onderwerpen in de klas.* Stichting School & Veiligheid, 2016. https://www.schoolenveiligheid.nl/wpcontent/uploads/2020/09/Handleiding-Je-hebt-makkelijk-praten1.pdf.
[12] J. van Ongevalle, G. Juchtmans and E. Nobels, 'Multiperspectiviteit als hefboom voor wereldburgerschapseducatie (WBE),' (HIVA-KU Leuven, 2021), 12.
[13] Alstein, *Omgaan met controverse en polarisatie*; Radstake, *Handleiding bij de docenttraining*.
[14] D. Brody and N.L. Baum, 'Israeli Kindergarten Teachers Cope With Terror and War: Two Implicit Models of Resilience,' *Curriculum Inquiry* 37, no. 1 (2007): 9-31; D.E. Hess and L. Gatti, 'Putting Politics Where It Belongs: In the Classroom,' *New Directions for Higher Education*, no. 152 (2010): 19-26; G.M. Savenije and T. Goldberg, 'Silences in a climate of voicing: teachers' perceptions of societal and self-silencing regarding sensitive historical issues,' *Pedagogy, Culture & Society* 27, no. 1 (2019): 39-64.
[15] Alstein, *Omgaan met controverse en polarisatie*; Radstake, *Handleiding bij de docenttraining*.
[16] Interview Annelotte Janse with 1, 8 October 2024.

In this section of the guide, we focus on spontaneous conversations about current, highly emotional and controversial issues.[17] In this context, TerInfo distinguishes between 'cold' and 'hot' topics. More information about this distinction can be found under section **3.4.2 From cold to hot**.

We address the following questions:

1. What challenges do teachers encounter when it comes to spontaneous conversations?
    - How can teachers anticipate this spontaneity?
2. What strategies and options can a teacher use in spontaneous and difficult conversations?

To conclude, we discuss how teachers can guide, steer and close such conversations in ways that put their pedagogical role into practice.

2.1 What dilemmas do teachers encounter?

Teachers in higher education regularly face challenging dilemmas in their classes, especially when dealing with controversial topics. Research by both TerInfo (among primary and secondary school teachers) and by VU University Amsterdam (among university lecturers) reveals a range of dilemmas that arise when facilitating conversations on sensitive subjects where 'hot moments' may occur.[18] One of the biggest problems is a **lack of sufficient factual and contextual knowledge**. Having the facts at hand leads to better discussions, but that requires time and preparation.[19]

In addition, many teachers experience **pedagogical uncertainty** about facilitating discussions on complex issues. How should they respond to strong statements from students? How can they introduce multiple perspectives when emotions run high? Recognising that such discussions **require considerable energy, improvisational skills and time** – resources already stretched by **overloaded curricula** – many teachers ultimately choose to avoid them.

The **teacher's position as a moral agent** can also create uncertainty. How can you remain neutral while offering students an ethical compass? Research by De Ruyter et al. among HBO teachers showed that they sought to fulfil two roles that are difficult to

[17] TerInfo has published several background articles and developed teaching materials related to the war between Israel and Hamas. For more information, see: https://ter-info.nl/dossier/israel-palestina/.

[18] M. Bammens, D. van Alten, L. Bucher, B. de Graaf and B.G.J. Wansink, 'Teaching terrorism: Evaluating a historicizing pedagogy in times of crisis and disruption,' *Historical Thinking Culture and Education* 2, no. 1 (2025): 110-128; S. Muftugil-Yalcin, N. Willner Brodsky, M. Slootman, A. Das and S. Ramdas, 'Managing "Hot Moments" in Diverse Classrooms for Inclusive and Equitable Campuses,' *Education Sciences* 13, no. 8 (2023): 1-15.

[19] TerInfo, 'Do's and Don'ts,' https://ter-info.nl/dos-donts/.

reconcile.[20] On the one hand, they wanted to be a 'moral role model' for their students, embodying certain norms and values as 'professionals with a well-developed ethical compass'. On the other hand, they wanted to appear 'neutral' to avoid imposing their own standards and values, and thereby 'manipulating' their students' ethical development.[21] The teachers in the study reported feeling pressured to temper their reactions in order to act as objective discussion leaders.

While the desire to appear neutral in times of conflict is understandable, a muted or distanced response can make it harder to read the classroom atmosphere and tension, and therefore to respond appropriately. A more tailored and authentic response can, in fact, create greater scope for constructive discussion.

At the same time, the tension between the 'neutral position' and the 'moral role model' can itself serve as a learning opportunity. By openly expressing discomfort or sharing confusion about controversial topics, teachers can show that these feelings are precisely what make discussion necessary. This requires intuition and sound judgement, and depends heavily on the atmosphere within the group at that moment.

One respondent from the VU study developed lecture material that challenged several cultural norms. Although she initially doubted whether to use it in her lecture, the outcome was positive. She described her experience and the role of intuition in achieving positive learning outcomes as follows:

> 'There was such a lively discussion. It was great. I also presented it in terms of: "I'm not sure; I just don't know what to think about it. But it's something we need to discuss." I had the intuition that it might offend some people. So (...) I introduced it that way. I said, "Maybe it's offensive to some people. But that's exactly what we need to talk about in our society right now."'[22]

An important underlying cause of the dilemmas and feelings of uncertainty described above is a **lack of regular experience** with such conversations. The question, then, is how teachers can structure and facilitate discussions on sensitive topics, where conflicting feelings and opinions are inevitable and there is no clear 'right' or 'wrong', so that they become opportunities for learning. Teachers who do not shy away from these conversations indicated that, fortunately, **practice** helps. Conversations about complex issues can indeed be practised. We will discuss this below.

[20] L. van Stekelenburg, C. Smerecnik, W. Sanderse and D.J. de Ruyter, 'Teachers' ideas about what and how they contribute to the development of students' ethical compasses. An empirical study among teachers of Dutch Universities of Applied Sciences,' *Journal of Academic Ethics* (2024).
[21] Van Stekelenburg et al., 'Teacher's Ideas,' 13-14.
[22] Muftugil-Yalcin et al., 'Hot Moments in Class,' 15-16.

2.2 How do you prepare for the discussion?

Some of the dilemmas discussed above, such as the teacher's role as a moral agent, can be addressed by reflecting in advance on how you wish to fulfil your pedagogical role, as well as on your own position as a teacher. You can also prepare for pedagogical uncertainty and strong statements by anticipating different conversational scenarios. In the context of 'engaging in conversation', we propose several anticipation strategies below.[23]

2.2.1 Determine your own position

Start by reflecting on your own opinions and emotions about the topic. This helps you anticipate situations in which differing views, opinions and explanations about a conflict may clash. It is essential to focus on the similarities rather than the differences and to continue listening to one another. In this way, your awareness also contributes to a safe classroom environment. The following questions can help you determine and reflect on your position in relation to a conflict. TerInfo used these questions in a lesson plan about the **Utrecht tram attack on 18 March 2019**, but they can also be applied more broadly.

- What **emotions** do I feel in relation to this conflict?
- How can I **regulate** these emotions during discussions?
- What **values** underlie my emotions?

How might **my emotional response** to this conflict resemble or differ from that of my students?

- How might my feelings about the conflict influence my students' experiences?
- How might my students' own life experiences shape how they perceive this conflict?

What **perspectives and experiences** shape my perspective on this conflict?

- Where did I first learn about this conflict? Did I already have certain feelings or ideas about it at that time?
- How has the conflict's development since its outbreak shaped my perception?
- What is my opinion on the conflict?

[23] B.G.J. Wansink and B. Timmer, *Short handbook: COVID-19 Narratives that Polarise*. Radicalisation Awareness Network, European Commission, 2020. https://dspace.library.uu.nl/bitstream/handle/1874/415332/ran_paper_covid_19_stories_that_polarise_20201112_en.pdf?sequence=1; Alstein, *Omgaan met controverse en polarisatie*; Radstake, *Handleiding bij de docenttraining*.

How can I **create space** in the classroom to discuss this conflict?

- To what extent will I share my opinion with the students?
- How can I ensure that I maintain an open attitude and stay engaged with the students' world?
- Am I aware of what is permitted and possible within the law?

2.2.2 Determine the initial situation of the class

Once you have determined your own position as a teacher, it is important to consider the initial situation of the group of students in front of you. Who are the students you will be engaging with? What are their backgrounds, and what experiences do they bring with them? Thinking in advance about the reactions and questions you can expect from the group will help you anticipate how the conversation might unfold.

Where possible, be aware of **what may be going on among students**. For example, check in with them informally now and then, such as at the coffee machine.[24] Do you expect that some students might find it very difficult or uncomfortable for you to discuss this topic in class? If so, speak with them outside the lesson context, explain what you plan to do and ask if they are comfortable with it. The following questions may help:

- How does this conflict affect you?
- What questions do you have?
- Is there anything you would like me, as your teacher, to know?

Consider student feedback when choosing your approach.

2.2.3 Strengthen your own position

Discuss with your colleagues and the educational management team how to address sensitive issues. Ensure that your managers are aware of your approach to handling these topics in class, so they can provide you with support. This strengthens your position as a teacher and ensures that you are not working in isolation.

The following questions can help you strengthen your position:

- How do I communicate my approach to discussing sensitive issues to colleagues and managers, and how can I ensure their support?
- What concrete agreements can we make within our team about addressing sensitive topics, so that we have a joint approach and support one another?

[24] Interview Annelotte Janse with 4, 14 November 2024.

- Is there someone in our team who is particularly experienced or skilled in discussing controversial topics, and how can we learn from each other's strengths in this area?
- How can we support each other as colleagues when facilitating controversial discussions?
- How can we align our positions and approaches as a team so that everyone feels comfortable with how responsibilities for these issues are shared?

2.2.4 Check your own knowledge

Having the facts at hand allows for more productive discussion. Solid knowledge of the subject can also boost your confidence and help you anticipate students' questions. Try, therefore, to familiarise yourself in advance with the facts and background of a recently emerged conflict or, more broadly, a disruptive event. In the context of the war between Hamas and Israel, for example, you can use **teaching materials and articles** from TerInfo. However, we recommend consulting multiple sources. See **Appendix 1** for an overview.

Always check the reliability of the sources you use. You can do this by asking the questions below, which also apply when students bring in new or alternative information and sources.

CHECKING THE RELIABILITY OF SOURCES

Analysis and interpretation of the source:

- Who wrote or created the source?
- What is the author's or creator's background?
- Why was the source created, and what might the author's motives be?
- When was the source created?
- What evidence supports the content of the source?
- What type of source is it (news item, social media post, eyewitness account)?
- What does the title suggest, and what does the full article actually say?

Comparing sources:

- What do other sources say?
- What are the similarities between the sources?
- What are the differences between the sources?

2.2.5 Use the Response Quadrant to anticipate unexpected questions or statements

Students may ask unexpected questions or make comments about controversial topics that you cannot immediately answer. This is not a problem, but it is important to think in advance about how you will respond in such situations. When should you address these comments, and how can you prevent a polarising topic from deepening divisions within the group? The Response Quadrant can help guide your approach.[25]

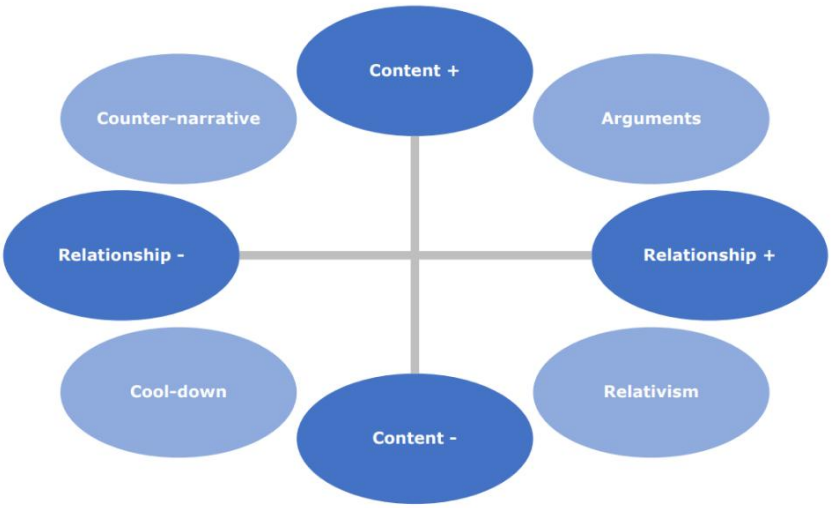

Figure 1. Response Quadrant

Figure 1 shows the relationship between teacher and student on the horizontal axis, ranging from 'weakening (-)' to 'strengthening (+)'. The vertical axis represents the degree of content engagement, ranging from 'high (+)' at the top to 'low (-)' at the bottom. Each quadrant corresponds to a particular response strategy, each with its own advantages and disadvantages that influence both the relationship with students and the content of the lesson. There is therefore no single best way to respond.

How would you respond if a student made the following statement about the restrictions imposed by the Dutch government during the COVID-19 pandemic? First read the text, then answer the questions. Examples of possible responses are provided in the explanation of the Response Quadrant.

'I don't trust the government, and I think they're trying to control us. I've seen many people online (e.g. influencer X) claiming that the government isn't being transparent about how serious the virus really is. If you look at the figures, the restrictions aren't effective enough to justify the burden they place on us young people. I'm young, and I'm fed up with all these restrictive rules, and I'm not going to comply with them any longer. I'm going to party with my friends.'

[25] J. Patist and B.G.J. Wansink, 'Lesgeven over gevoelige onderwerpen; het aangaan van het moeilijke gesprek in de klas,' *Kleio* 4 (2016): 44-47; 'Omgaan met controversiële onderwerpen in de klas,' TerInfo, https://terinfo.nl/omgaan-met-controversiele-onderwerpen-in-de-klas-vier-strategieen/.

- What is the opening sentence of your response?
- What goal do you want to achieve with this student?
- Where do you place your response on the Response Quadrant?

Cool-down

With the cool-down strategy, you either ignore the student who made the provocative comment or ask them to leave the classroom. This has a negative impact on both content and relationship: the student cannot express his emotions or share his perspective, which harms his relationship with you as a teacher. Moreover, the topic remains undiscussed. You can also temporarily ignore the comment. In that case, make it clear that you are postponing the conversation rather than avoiding it altogether.

This shows the group that you do not accept this behaviour. Asking the student to step outside also gives you time to prepare your response and regain composure, giving yourself a chance to cool down. In some cases, engaging immediately may also undermine your position, for example if you have limited knowledge of the topic.

EXAMPLE RESPONSE

'I hear what you're saying, and this is an important subject. But this isn't the right time to go into it in depth. I suggest we discuss it later, so that I have time to prepare properly, and we can talk about it constructively.'

Counter-narrative

The counter-narrative strategy focuses on presenting the content that the teacher considers correct. Using this strategy, you immediately offer an alternative narrative based on rational and factual criteria to convince the student that their narrative is incorrect. However, this confrontational approach can overlook the student's perspective and emotions, potentially damaging the teacher-student relationship. An extreme version of this response, which can undermine trust, occurs when the teacher dismisses the student's story as nonsense and explains why. There is also a risk of failing to explore the reasons behind the student's statement. After all, many such statements are rooted in emotion or concern.

One advantage of this strategy is that it allows you to stay in control of the conversation while letting other students hear your perspective. Using rational arguments and reliable sources can help you steer the discussion on content. Teachers often adopt this strategy when they want to make a particular point themselves. The question, however, is whether that point will actually reach the students, especially if the student concerned feels they are not being taken seriously.

EXAMPLE RESPONSE

'I understand that you're concerned about how the government is handling the situation, and that you find the measures challenging. However, it's important to consider the facts and figures established by independent researchers. Studies show that the measures have significantly reduced hospital admissions and mortality rates, for example. Although they're difficult, these rules help us protect the most vulnerable in our society. What do you think about that?'

Relativism

The 'relativism' strategy focuses on highlighting different perspectives within the group. With this strategy, you start the conversation with open questions that give the student in question a chance to speak. It is also important to encourage other students to share their thoughts and feelings, for example by asking them to write down their standpoints and arguments. This strategy strengthens relationships because students feel that they are being taken seriously.

The disadvantage of this strategy is that it can give the impression that all standpoints and arguments are equally valid. In this approach, you do not provide a counterpoint, and as a result, students may be influenced by ideas based on conspiracy theories or misinformation ('low' content engagement in Figure 1). Still, to start a conversation, it is important to understand students' prior knowledge and assumptions. Another challenge is pedagogical: when students are free to say anything, their comments may affect others in the group. For this reason, it is always wise to agree with students in advance on how the discussion will be conducted before using the 'relativism' strategy. See also the box 'The limits of multiperspectivity' in section **2.5.5 Ask follow-up questions actively** for guidance on setting boundaries and preventing relativism.

Although this strategy gives students ample room to share their experiences, TerInfo emphasises that it should be followed by argumentation. When a topic feels particularly relevant to students, they often want to share their own stories first. In such moments, there is little space for others or for listening to alternative viewpoints. This strategy can therefore serve as an outlet for releasing tension and can also help pave the way for the next step: developing arguments.

EXAMPLE RESPONSE

'Interesting that you say that. Can you tell me more about why you think this and how you came to this conclusion?'

Other ways of asking questions from a relativist perspective include:

- Open the conversation **without judging the sources**. 'Where did you find this information? What appealed to you about it?'
- Encourage the student to consider **different perspectives**: 'How do you think others in your situation would deal with this?'
- Encourage a first step towards **critical thinking** and a sense of responsibility: 'What do you think would be a better solution to this situation?'
- Invite the student to consider **alternative standpoints**: 'Do you think there are people who see this differently? Why might that be?'
- Seek to understand the student's **personal motivations**: 'What makes this topic so important to you?'

Arguments

The 'arguments' strategy enables students to critically evaluate their own standpoints and those of others. To guide such a discussion effectively, the teacher needs sufficient knowledge of the topic. A class discussion can help students reconsider their perspectives. For instance, you could ask: 'Can we find fact-based information about the conflict or topic and see whether we agree with the statement, or do we feel the need to revise it?' It is important that the discussion remains open, with listening at its core, and that it does not become a matter of convincing one another.

Furthermore, students should have a basic understanding of concepts such as facts, opinions, reliability (both of traditional and online sources), unequal power relations and argumentation. This means that teachers should not treat all perspectives as equally valid – or even reliable – by definition, but should interpret them and place them in context. Classroom discussions about arguments and the credibility of sources can encourage students to reconsider their standpoint in light of their peers' arguments.[26]

[26] B.G.J. Wansink and B. Timmer, *Short handbook: COVID-19 Narratives that Polarise*. Radicalisation Awareness Network, European Commission, 2020.

EXAMPLE RESPONSE

'Interesting point. Let's look at the facts together to see what they tell us about the measures and their effectiveness. For example, how could we measure the impact of the rules on hospital admissions or on the well-being of young people? What do you think about balancing the protection of vulnerable groups with the impact on young people like yourself? Perhaps we can examine sources to see which information is reliable, and whether your arguments are based on it.'

Or: 'Let's see if we can find factual information about COVID-19 and decide whether we agree with the statement, or whether it needs adjusting. And as we look at this information, what should we consider reliable sources, and why?'

2.2.6 Creating space and time for yourself after a strong statement

After a student makes a strong statement, both you and the student may need time and space to process it and to respond, or de-escalate, appropriately. That is not unusual. Below are several strategies and practical tips for creating time and emotional space for yourself (and your students) in such situations.

To prevent escalation, it is important to remain calm, even if the statement affects you personally. Remind yourself that your response largely sets the tone for the atmosphere in the classroom. A reaction driven by immediate emotion can further increase the tension.

Addressing the situation directly in front of the class can help create a brief pause for reflection. For example, you might say: 'That's a strong statement, and we can't simply ignore it. I'd like to think carefully about how we discuss this.' You could also emphasise the rules of conduct (see also **2.3.1 Establish rules for discussion together**). For example, say: 'We'll only discuss statements that treat everyone in the group with respect. Together, we must be able to examine how reliable each statement is.'

You can also address the emotions that strong statements evoke in students. For example, you might say: 'I can see that this topic evokes strong feelings in you. I also notice that it evokes reactions in me and others in the group. In my view, the words you're using may be hurtful to others. Can we rephrase them so we can continue the discussion? I'm curious to hear your thoughts and how you arrived at this conclusion.' This approach allows you to create space for yourself while showing students that you take the issue seriously. It also reflects several steps from Marshall Rosenberg's model of non-violent communication: first, observe what is happening and express it; then describe your feelings; next, articulate your needs; and finally, make a request. We recommend reading this book if you would like to learn more about how to respond to controversial comments.[27]

[27] M.B. Rosenberg, *Geweldloze communicatie: ontwapenend, doeltreffend en verbindend*, translated by P. van der Veen and C. van Soelen, tenth edition (Rotterdam: Lemniscaat, 2022).

To help channel and regulate your emotions and give yourself time to respond, you can create a collective moment of reflection by setting an assignment. Depending on the type of comment (for instance, discriminatory remarks, denial of established historical facts such as the Holocaust or conspiracy theories), you could approach this reflection in several ways:

- Ask students to complete a **writing or drawing assignment** in which they answer questions individually, such as: 'What do you think about what was just said? Why do you think that?' or 'What do you think is important in how we deal with this?' Writing gives students space to express and regulate their emotions without exposing themselves to the group.
- Introduce a **silent pause** of 2-3 minutes during which students can reflect on the statement and decide how they would like to discuss it.
- Ask the students to work in pairs to **discuss** questions such as: 'How can you respond respectfully but critically to such statements?' or 'What might be some reasons why someone would make such a statement?'
- Have students **fact-check** by looking up three reliable sources on the topic or statement. Ask them to answer the following question: 'What do the sources say about the statement?'

How would you resume the lesson after such a statement? Sometimes, a strong statement can offer an opportunity to make the discussion more constructive, especially if you can separate the statement from the individual student. You can do this in the following ways:

- Connect the statement to the lesson content: 'Let's discuss why such ideas exist and how we can look at them critically.'
- Place the statement in a broader social context by asking questions such as: 'What impact could such a statement have on society?'
- Place the statement in a historical context: 'There have been moments in history when these ideas were used. What can we learn from that?'

2.2.7 Postponing the conversation

It may also happen that a student raises a topic you are not prepared to discuss at that moment. As mentioned above, it is better to have the conversation when you have all the facts. In line with this, TerInfo's rule of thumb is that it is better *not* to have a difficult conversation than to conduct it poorly. In the meantime, you can read up on the facts, ask colleagues how they approach conversations on such topics and work on your relationship with the class or student. It is helpful to have a few ways of postponing the discussion ready, without disappointing or rejecting the student:

- **Be honest** and explain that you do not have the necessary information at that moment. This shows transparency and promotes a culture of critical reflection rather than quick judgements. For example: 'That's a good question, but I don't know the exact answer right now.' You can also indicate that you would like to prepare more thoroughly for the conversation.
- **Offer follow-up options**. Promise to return to the question later if you need more time. Alternatively, invite students to look for the answer together or in small groups.
- **Explain that you are not the right person for this particular conversation**. You may sometimes genuinely feel uncomfortable discussing a certain topic with a class. For example, this may be because you do not know the class yet and have not built up a trusting relationship with them, or it may be for personal reasons. If this is the case, explain to the class that you are not the right person, but that you do think it is important for them to be able to discuss the issue. You can then indicate that you will ask your colleagues who would be able to lead the discussion.

2.3 How do you prepare the group for the discussion?

A safe learning environment is crucial for engaging in dialogue about sensitive topics that evoke emotions and tension. Mutual trust and a positive atmosphere among students are key to developing meaningful dialogue. It is therefore advisable to establish these two elements before entering into the discussion. At TerInfo, we distinguish between the terms 'safe space' and 'brave space'.[28]

- A **safe space** is a secure learning environment in which topics are discussed openly yet respectfully, and within certain limits.
- A **brave space** is a learning environment that invites and encourages students to share different perspectives, even when this causes discomfort or friction.

As a teacher, it is important to strike the right balance between 'safe' and 'brave', so that students feel able to share opinions and emotions that may conflict with those of their peers without causing offence. The friction that can arise from this is challenging for both students and teachers.

[28] B. Arao and K. Clemens, 'From safe spaces to brave spaces: A new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice,' in *The art of effective facilitation,* L.M. Landreman ed. (Routledge, 2023), 135-150.

2.3.1 Establish rules for discussion together

In practice, it works best when you draw up rules for discussion together with the students. Doing so also allows you to assess the balance between 'safe' and 'brave' in consultation with the students. As a teacher, contributing to the creation of a positive learning environment also has a proactive purpose: both students and teachers have a clear framework to fall back on when a challenging situation arises.

Involve students in drawing up rules for discussion based on the following questions, preferably at the start of the academic year:

- How do we ensure respect when discussing difficult topics on which we do not all agree?
- What are some important guidelines that you think we should follow to engage in discussion and promote understanding of one another's standpoints?
- Are we allowed to disagree, and how do we deal with that?
- How do we proceed when heated discussions arise?
- What values do we share as a group, and how can we protect them together during a discussion?

Make the social norm explicit in the answers to these questions and include the outcomes in a group agreement. You might display this agreement as a poster in the classroom or include it as a slide in a presentation. Whenever a discussion arises and the conversation rules are broken – for example, when a student makes a heated remark – you can refer to the agreement that you drew up with the students. This keeps the agreed discussion framework within reach as a shared reference point when a discussion takes an undesirable turn.[29] The rules may vary from group to group and evolve over time. Below are some rules for creating a safe space:

- Do not interrupt each other
- Criticise opinions, not people
- Listen actively to one another
- Avoid using judgemental language (e.g. adjectives)

And for a brave space:

- Recognise that differing opinions are not necessarily right or wrong
- Understand that disagreement offers an opportunity to learn from one another.
- Support your opinions with evidence and examples
- Speak for yourself, not for others.
- Acknowledge that making mistakes is part of the process and that there is room for correction.
    - Sections **2.2.5 Use the Response Quadrant to anticipate unexpected questions or statements** and **2.5.1 Setting boundaries** address how to set limits in a discussion.

[29] A.L. Moore and M. Deshaies, 'Ten Tips for Facilitating Classroom Discussions on Sensitive Topics,' https://bento.cdn.pbs.org/hostedbentoprod/filer_public/SBAN/Images/Classrooms/Ten%20Tips%20for%20Facilitating%20Classroom%20Discussions%20on%20Sensitive%20Topics_Final.pdf.

- Inciting ethnic, racial or religious hatred that could lead to discrimination, hostility or violence is prohibited by law. As a teacher, you must actively refute such statements.[30]

2.4 How do you start the discussion?

The way a conversation about a sensitive topic begins and unfolds is crucial. When students feel that their identity is under threat, it becomes difficult to have an open exchange. Research has shown that this feeling can make students increasingly closed to other perspectives and more inclined to defend their own views and narratives on moral grounds.[31]

Below are some tips for starting such conversations in a constructive and safe way. Sections 2.4.1 to 2.4.3 describe several simple, broadly applicable activities.

- **State the reason for and purpose of the discussion.** It may be helpful to acknowledge from the outset that the topic can evoke strong emotions and may lead to friction or conflict between students. However, this tension is precisely why the topic should not be avoided: it offers an opportunity to discover and recognise each other's different perspectives rather than defend one's own truth.[32]
- **Avoid using intense images** to start the discussion. These can disrupt group dynamics, provoke strong emotions, and make students feel cornered based on their identity.
- **Take a break** if emotions run high or if the discussion rules can no longer be upheld (see section **2.2.6**). During this break, invite students to write down and reflect on their emotions. Encourage them to think about how to express their feelings respectfully.
- **Divide the class into smaller groups.** In large groups, it is more challenging to ensure students' sense of safety. You will also be less familiar with the students' backgrounds.
- Allow students to discuss in **pairs** first. Give them space to share their views, or not. Do not force this.

[30] For more rules on conducting conversations, see: https://therulesofcivilconversation.org/.
[31] B.G.J. Wansink, H. Mol, J. Kortekaas and T. Mainhard, 'Discussing controversial issues in the classroom: Exploring students' safety perceptions and their willingness to participate,' *Teaching and Teacher Education* 125, no. 3 (2023): 1-17.
[32] Interview Annelotte Janse with 2, 23 October 2024.

THE BALANCE BETWEEN SAFE AND BRAVE SPACES

Some students no longer experience Dutch educational institutions as 'safe spaces' due to the behaviour and attitudes of their peers. The following excerpt from the weekly magazine *De Groene Amsterdammer* illustrates the challenges teachers face in striking a balance between 'safe' and 'brave' spaces.

'We understand that a major problem in the Netherlands is that people do not feel welcome or at home at universities, for example. That is an awful feeling, and it is unacceptable. If a Jew is asked to remove their Star of David, that is a problem. Likewise, if a Palestinian is told not to come to university wearing a keffiyeh because it is considered radical or supportive of terrorism, that is not okay. Because that is their culture. Teachers should create an atmosphere in which everyone feels safe, where political criticism is not used as a weapon. Otherwise, conversation is stifled. Students should be able to say things like "I support Palestine" or "Free Palestine" without offending others. That's okay.'

'But how can you make someone feel at home if they feel uncomfortable as soon as someone says "Free Palestine"?' asks Noa. 'How do you create a safe space for everyone? That seems almost impossible these days; a safe space is subjective.'

'If someone says, "I don't feel safe because he's wearing the Israeli flag," then we need to address that. It's okay to live in a space where a range of opinions are expressed. It's important to realise that you're not made of glass and can handle hearing different opinions. There's a generation that feels unsafe. We have to ask ourselves why. But we also have to equip them with the tools to navigate a world where seeing the Star of David or the Palestinian flag is normal.'

Source: Rasit Elibol and Or Goldenberg, 'Toch weer de brug oversteken', 9 October 2024.

2.4.1 Emotion Quadrant

The Emotion Quadrant helps students channel heightened emotions and provides a space for self-expression.[33] The quadrant functions as an emotion map, giving students insight into the range of feelings that exist within the group. Visualising these emotions without judging or problematising them encourages open dialogue.

- **Objectives**: Create emotional and visual space for different perspectives.
- **Why**: The quadrant shows how people can experience the same topic in very different ways, prompting students to reflect more deeply on their own views. It is also a safe activity, as students decide for themselves what they wish to share. Finally, the Emotion Quadrant allows students to express their emotions non-verbally and to see which classmates share similar feelings.
- **Who**: The activity can be adapted for different groups by adjusting the complexity of the case study.
- **When**: The Emotion Quadrant can be used before and after an activity about a conflict. After learning more about the background to the conflict, students can revisit where they placed their Post-it notes and discuss how their emotions have changed. This encourages reflection on both their own and others' feelings in light of new information.

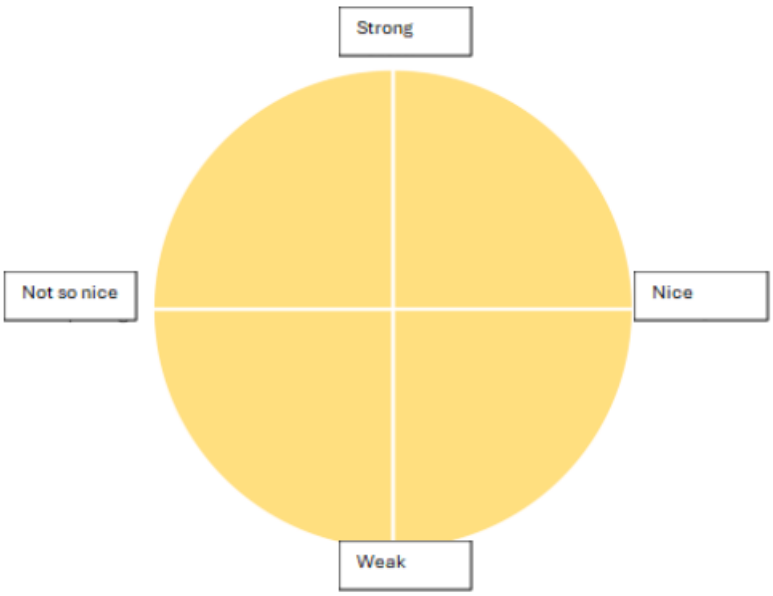

Figure 2: Emotion Quadrant

[33] This quadrant is based on 'emotion networks', as developed by the De Reinwardt Academie (H. Dibbits) and Imagine IC (M. Willemsen). See also https://www.reinwardt.ahk.nl/lectoraat-cultureelerfgoed/emotienetwerken/.

Implementation

Step 1. Draw a quadrant with two axes on a large sheet of paper. The horizontal axis represents unpleasant and pleasant emotions. The vertical axis represents the intensity of those emotions (strong or weak).

Step 2. Ask students to write down their personal thoughts and feelings about a current topic, such as the situation in Gaza, on Post-it notes.

Step 3. Have students place their Post-it notes in the relevant quadrant, according to how they categorise their emotions. This helps them organise their feelings visually and share them within the group.

2.4.2 Word web

A word web can be an effective way to start a conversation about a sensitive or polarising topic, encouraging critical reflection and engagement. Ask students to share the words or associations that come to mind when they think of the conflict.

One potential challenge with this method is that students may express provocative, inaccurate or inappropriate views. As the teacher, it is your responsibility to decide how to respond. Writing such statements on the board can give the impression that they are acceptable or that all information carries the same weight, so be mindful of this.

- **Objectives**: To activate prior knowledge, stimulate reflection, understand different perspectives, and promote open and respectful dialogue.
- **Why**: To enable students to share their thoughts, feelings and knowledge in a structured way, and to explore the subject from multiple viewpoints.
- **Who**: Students and the teacher, with the latter acting as discussion leader and facilitator.
- **When**: At the start of a discussion on a sensitive or polarising topic to activate prior knowledge and provide a framework for further discussion.

Implementation

Step 1. Begin with a brief introduction to the conflict, for example in response to something a student has said or a recent news event. Explain that the purpose of the activity is to explore thoughts, feelings and associations around the topic without passing judgement or provoking confrontations.

Step 2. Place the sensitive topic in the centre of the paper or board.

Step 3. Work from associations. Ask the students, either individually or in small groups, to name words or short phrases that come to mind when they think of the central concept. These might include:

- Feelings: fear, sadness, powerlessness
- Images in the media: news, refugees, destruction
- Perspectives: politics, religion, culture
- Causes and consequences: colonialism, economic interests, humanitarian crisis

Step 4. Write down the students' contributions as keywords. Then let them connect their associations using lines. This visualises the complexity and layered nature of the topic.

Step 5. Ask students to explain the connections. They should clarify why they chose certain words and how these relate to other terms in the word web.

Step 6. Ask open questions to explore particular aspects of the conflict in more depth. For example, use the questions below to encourage students to listen to one another, explore different perspectives and exchange ideas:

- What impact do you think this aspect of the conflict has on the people involved?
- Why do you think this word has an important place in the overall picture?

Step 7. Discuss how the word web shapes understanding of the conflict. What have the students learned, and how has their perspective changed? You could also invite them to reflect on how the conflict and its associations relate to the programme or topic.

2.4.3 Thinking, sharing, exchanging

A variation of the word web is the 'think, share, exchange' activity. The aim is for students to arrive at a joint answer, thereby developing a broader understanding of, and perspective on, the issue or conflict in question.[34] If desired, students can use a digital canvas (e.g. Microsoft Whiteboard) to share their answers.

[34] Interview Annelotte Janse with 1, 8 October 2024; 'Denken, delen, uitwisselen,' Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences, https://activitool.nl/werkvormen/denken-delen-uitwisselen/.

- **Objectives**: Work together to reach a joint answer, develop a broader understanding and explore different perspectives on the issue.
- **Why**: Encourage students to think critically, share ideas and work together to deepen their understanding of the subject.
- **Who**: Students work individually, in pairs or in small groups and then share their answers in a plenary discussion led by the teacher as facilitator.
- **When**: During the exploration or deepening of an issue or conflict, particularly when collaboration and perspective-taking are central.

Implementation

Step 1. Ask students to reflect individually on a statement or question.

- What do you think is happening in ..., or what do you think lies at the root of the conflict?
- Why do you think this issue feels so intense for certain minority groups or parties involved?

Step 2. Have students discuss their answers in small groups. Ask them to note similarities and differences between their answers and to discuss the various perspectives that emerge.

Step 3. Have the groups share their collective answers. The groups should then discuss the answers they have found. Make sure the spokesperson presents the group's position, not their personal opinion. This can help to quickly introduce nuance and moderation.[35] Have the groups analyse and question each other's answers critically. If relevant, invite them to relate their findings to those of other groups.

2.5 Guiding the discussion by facilitating

As a teacher, it is important to be an active discussion leader who guides the discussion and encourages active listening.

2.5.1 Setting boundaries

When students make provocative or controversial comments, it is important to set clear boundaries. This can be done in various ways, depending on the type of behaviour.

- **Indicate** that not all perspectives can be expressed freely within the law. Students are allowed to express anger,but this must remain within the

[35] Interview Annelotte Janse with 1, 8 October 2024.

framework of the pre-agreed discussion rules. The boundaries of the democratic constitutional state can also serve as a reference point for setting limits in an educational context.[36] Article 1 of the Constitution grants rights but also imposes obligations (see section **1.3 Putting core values into practice**).

- **Maintain a distinction between opinion and fact.** Recognise the right moment to intervene: give a student space to express their feelings before correcting any misconceptions or factual inaccuracies that may influence their emotions and opinions.[37]
- **Apply clear and consistent boundaries** when it comes to offensive, discriminatory or racist language. You might say, 'I'd like to listen to you, but I can't do that if you use these words. That's a shame, because I think you've thought carefully about this subject.'[38] This shows the student that you are willing to listen. Often, a provocative statement stems from an underlying concern, and the student is usually aware that it is confrontational.
- Limit provocative or hurtful comments to what is relevant to the students in a **professional or subject-specific context**.[39] For example, you might respond, 'This opinion or statement is not acceptable from a professional perspective; it would not be appropriate in practice.' Then invite the class to reflect on why it is necessary to end the discussion after such a remark from a professional or subject-specific perspective by asking fellow students to share their thoughts.
- **Set boundaries based on your own view of humanity**, for instance by saying, 'This is not how we treat each other. I'm drawing a line here.' You can also do this if you notice that a comment has made other students feel that they 'should not be here'.[40]
- At the same time – and although this may be somewhat at odds with the above and depends on the specific situation – it is also important not to **punish a student immediately**. Instead, ask them to explain their reasoning with arguments or say how they arrived at their standpoint, and highlight what their comment or standpoint means for their peers.[41]

2.5.2 Invite

Encourage an open exchange of ideas and respect for differing opinions by inviting students to engage in conversation. You can do this in the following ways:

- **Take a positive approach to disagreement:** emphasise that differing opinions provide an opportunity to broaden one's knowledge.
- **Provide students with a safe space to speak.** For example, avoid asking students from marginalised groups or those who may have experienced trauma (e.g. refugees) to represent the experiences or perspectives of 'all' members of that group.

[36] Interview Annelotte Janse with 1, 8 October 2024.
[37] Radstake, *Handleiding bij de docenttraining*.
[38] Stichting School en Veiligheid, 'E-learning Dialoog onder druk,' https://www.schoolenveiligheid.nl/elearning-dialoog-onder-druk/.
[39] Interview Annelotte Janse with 4, 2024.
[40] Interview Annelotte Janse with 2 and 4, 2024.
[41] Interviews Annelotte Janse with 4, 5, and 7, 2024.

- **Do not immediately dismiss provocative statements** if they remain within the agreed framework. Such statements often reflect a student's need to be seen and heard.[42] Instead, point out that the language used is inappropriate or unnecessarily provocative, and ask what concerns, frustrations or fears lie behind the remark. If the student clearly recognises that they have overstepped, invite them to rephrase their question or comment. If the group reacts to the comment, you can address this collectively:
    - Can we explore why X's initial wording felt so problematic?
    - X said this, and I sense that it has offended some of us. Why might that be?

Be careful not to fall into the trap of **relativism**. As a teacher, you must also know where to draw the line. It is not the aim to treat conspiracy theories as equally valid to other ideas. There is a limit to multiperspectivity. Where and when you set that boundary depends on whether a topic is open or closed. This will be discussed further in the section on the **limits of multiperspectivity**.

2.5.3 Move the conversation to the middle ground

When differing opinions dominate, discussions can become heated. The most outspoken views are often voiced by a minority. In such situations, it can help to shift the focus to the middle ground, where more moderate perspectives are likely to emerge. Emphasise the similarities between standpoints rather than highlighting the differences to help prevent polarisation.

One possible discussion format is as follows:[43]

- When I listen to you from your perspective…
- And when I listen to you from your perspective…
- And when I put those two perspectives side by side, I realise that you both agree on…
- Who else recognises these similarities?

Be mindful here, too, of the **limits of multiperspectivity** and the risk of **relativism**.

2.5.4 Involve the silent majority

Most students remain silent not because they have no opinion, but because they are uncertain, unfamiliar with the issue or because their standpoints are more nuanced.

- **Recognise nuance**. Acknowledge the value of nuanced opinions. Point out that not everyone feels comfortable taking extreme standpoints and that these more balanced perspectives often lead to deeper insights.
- **Encourage reflection**. Give students time to think before responding. Silence is not necessarily a sign of unwillingness, but rather a sign that someone needs

[42] 'Six Ways to Handle Student Challenges,' Learning for Justice, https://www.learningforjustice.org/professional-development/six-ways-to-handle-student-challenges.
[43] Interview Annelotte Janse and Bjorn Wansink with Deel de Duif, 30 October 2024.

time to formulate a well-considered opinion. Allowing a brief pause after a question gives everyone space to contribute.

- **Create smaller groups**. Students often feel more comfortable expressing their opinions in smaller groups. By initially dividing the class into pairs or groups of four, you can encourage the silent majority to participate more actively in the discussion. Change the composition of the groups regularly so students are exposed to different perspectives.

    - Working in smaller groups can contribute to a safe learning environment, as students often feel more comfortable speaking openly than in a full-class discussion. Forming these groups sometimes requires careful consideration on the part of the teacher. One key consideration is whether to pair students with familiar classmates or with those they know less well. Both options have advantages: familiar groups provide comfort, while more diverse groupings encourage a wider exchange of perspectives. Finding the right balance is essential. Think about this in advance.

- **Confirm that silence does not mean that someone has no opinion**. Make it explicitly clear that silence does not imply the absence of an opinion. For example, invite students to write down their opinions. Let them know that you are genuinely interested in hearing from those who have not yet spoken and that you value their contributions.

2.5.5 Ask follow-up questions actively

As the discussion leader, you can encourage critical thinking by asking follow-up questions such as:

- Why do you think this?
- How did you come to this conclusion?
- Can you give an example?
- Is this always the case?

The questions below can help you create space for perspectives that have not yet been voiced.[44]

- What do you think is missing from the discussion?
- How has your own thinking on this issue developed?
- Words are powerful: who do you admire for the way they have spoken about the conflict, and why?
- What question should we ask that has not yet been asked?
- What role could our university play in this conflict?

[44] 'Teacher Guideline: Israel-Palestine discussions in the classroom,' VU, 25 October 2023, 4, https://vu.nl/en/news/2023/teacher-guideline-israel-palestine-discussions-in-the-classroom; 'Making the Most of "Hot Moments" in the Classroom,' Northern Illinois University, https://crlt.umich.edu/sites/default/files/resource_files/HotMomentsHandoutcrlt.umich.edu.pdf.

- Whose perspectives have we not heard? Why might that be, and how can we include them in the conversation?

THE LIMITS OF MULTIPERSPECTIVITY

Not all topics are suitable for open dialogue. Researchers Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy distinguish between open and closed topics.[1] With **open topics**, you can facilitate a discussion in which students present legitimate arguments for and against. These types of topics are also the subject of lively debate in wider society or academia.

Closed topics require a different approach. As a teacher, you need to take a clear position on these topics, as there is an established, widely accepted answer. Although some people may hold alternative views, such perspectives should not be presented as valid within the classroom. Never frame a known falsehood as a reasonable alternative when the evidence is conclusive. This helps students learn how to evaluate evidence and understand that strong evidence justifies acceptance of a conclusion. The Holocaust is an **example** of a closed subject that is not open to debate. While Holocaust denial can be addressed as a phenomenon, but it should never be presented as 'another perspective' on the event itself. Therefore, do not give deniers a platform; instead, explain why Holocaust denial is criminal.

Hess and McAvoy also distinguish between **empirical and political topics**. The former can be answered through systematic scientific research. However, political issues cannot be resolved simply through empirical research, as they involve moral and subjective dimensions.

Type of topic	Definition
Open empirical question	A question that can be answered with evidence, but which remains the subject of ongoing scientific debate.
Closed empirical question	A question that has largely been settled by scientific evidence.
Open political question	A question about which differing opinions exist in society regarding the policy to be pursued.
Closed political question	A question about which there is broad consensus regarding the policy to be pursued.

Examples of open topics:

- The closure of schools during the COVID-19 pandemic (open political)
- The origin of the COVID-19 virus at the start of the pandemic (open empirical)
- The nitrogen policy (open political)

Examples of closed empirical and political topics:

- Condemning terrorism (closed political)
- The existence of the Holocaust and Holocaust denial (closed empirical)
- The existence of climate change and climate issues (closed empirical)
- The unacceptability of racism and discrimination (closed political)
- The existence of the COVID-19 virus (closed empirical)

The open or closed nature of a topic may also depend on time and context. For instance, while gun ownership is a closed topic in the Netherlands, this is not the case in the United States.

Source: D.E. Hess and P. McAvoy, *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education* (New York: Routledge, 2015): 159-181.

2.6 Concluding and evaluating the discussion

2.6.1 Evalueren met de klas

At the end of the discussion, it is important to summarise the main points once again.[45] This lays the foundation for reflecting together on how the discussion went. Use the following questions to explore how students experienced the discussion:

- How did you feel about talking about this topic?
- How did you find the discussion itself?
- What did you take away from it?
- Have we come closer to answering the question…?
- Are there any specific questions that we did not address?
- Are there any questions that remain unanswered?
- Would you like to continue the conversation at a later date, and if so, how?
- Who would like to take active steps on this topic? (Dutch democracy offers students various ways to exert influence. It is important that students are aware of this, as it strengthens their democratic engagement.)
- I found this conversation quite challenging; how did you experience it? I would appreciate your feedback.
- How did you experience the discussion overall? Were there any moments that you found pleasant, challenging or valuable?

[45] L. Meijs, F. Nollet and B. Brinkman, *Reader training Dialoog onder Druk! Begrenzen en uitnodigen: de docent als regisseur van de dialoog in de klas* (Stichting School en Veiligheid, 2018); Van Alstein, *Omgaan met controverse en polarisatie in de klas.*

- Did you feel there was enough room to share your opinion or feelings? Why or why not?
- How would you describe the atmosphere during the conversation? What, if anything, would you change?
- Which points or perspectives are you still thinking about, and why?
- What did you think went well in the conversation? Are there things that could have been done differently or better?
- Did you learn anything new, or did the conversation change the way you think about the topic?
- How can we improve future discussions to make them more valuable and respectful for everyone?

Finally, your answers to these questions will also provide a basis for follow-up conversations.

2.6.1 Evaluating for yourself

It can also be helpful to take a moment afterwards to reflect on the conversation and consider what you would like to do the same or differently next time. The questions below can guide your reflection:

- How did I feel while discussing this topic, and how did that affect my teaching?
- Did I give students enough room to share their opinions, emotions or doubts? How could I tell?
- Which reactions from students stood out to me, and how did I respond to them? Could I have handled these moments differently? Use the **Response Quadrant** for this.
- Were my instructions and ground rules at the beginning of the conversation clear enough to create a safe environment?
- Did I notice any signs of discomfort, tension or misunderstanding among the students? How did I address this?
- What feedback did I receive from students about their experience of the conversation? What can I take from this for future lessons?
- What went well in the conversation, and where do I see room for improvement? What support or knowledge would help me strengthen my approach?

SHARE THE DOVE

Share the Dove (Deel de Duif) is a dialogue initiative founded by four young people, two Muslim and two Jewish. On 11 October, Boaz, Noa, Oumaima and Selma met at the official residence of Amsterdam's mayor, Femke Halsema. They were invited to discuss the Hamas terrorist attack of 7 October 2023 and Israel's subsequent military operation in Gaza, drawing on their background in interfaith dialogue. Since then, Share the Dove has been visiting primary schools and universities to highlight the common ground between people of all ages and backgrounds – Muslim, Jewish and others. They promote the idea that, even when people hold different truths, it is possible to disagree respectfully and stand together against civilian suffering, working towards a just solution for all. For this guide, we spoke to Boaz about what HBO teachers can learn from their approach to discussing sensitive topics.

How does Share the Dove work?

Share the Dove works intuitively, constantly seeking the right balance while staying aware of developments in the war between Hamas and Israel and the potential spread of conflict involving Lebanon and Iran. They visit lecture halls and seminars in pairs, often beginning with the message that students can ask them anything. They then invite discussion with questions such as: 'What do you know about Islam? What do you know about Judaism? What are the differences and similarities?' Next, Share the Dove gauges the audience's existing knowledge of the conflict in the Middle East and builds on it where necessary. The conversation then shifts to religious communities in the Netherlands. 'Why is this a sensitive issue for Muslims in the Netherlands? Why is it a sensitive issue for Jews in the Netherlands? Why might it be a sensitive issue for others?' Finally, students are asked questions such as: 'What have you seen on social media about this?' and 'Do you find it difficult to talk about this yourself? Why or why not? Do you discuss this with others?' The goal of these conversations is not to reach agreement, but to engage in dialogue – so that 'you at least understand each other a little better'.

Share the Dove's Six Rules of Conversation

1. Speak from your own, personal perspective.
2. Look for similarities despite differences of opinion.
3. No one has a monopoly on the truth. Multiple truths can coexist.
4. Genuinely listen to each other during the conversation. This is not a debate or a competition to convince.
5. Remain respectful and show understanding.
6. Allow others to express their emotions and have their own perspective.

What challenges does Share the Dove face?

Pedagogical vulnerability

Share the Dove faces challenges as well. Sometimes, students ask pairs what they think of the conflict and whether it constitutes genocide, or whether they have a solution. When that happens, the pairs first speak from their own perspective, and then from their connection with the other person. They might say, 'From my perspective, it's this and that because of…' and 'From my perspective, it's this and that because…', before concluding, 'But we both believe that…'. The same question applies to teachers: 'How vulnerable do you make yourself?' Sometimes, conversations can be uncomfortable or painful. A teacher can acknowledge this sensitivity by saying, for example: 'Everyone here has good intentions, but emotions may also be involved.'

The role of language

Language plays a crucial role in keeping a diverse group of students engaged. Specific word choices can be a prerequisite for engagement, but they can also be divisive. For some students, using terms such as 'genocide' or the phrase 'Free Palestine' may be a prerequisite for participating in a discussion. But for others, these words can be off-putting, causing them to withdraw. Such word choices can make Muslim students feel that 'they are not allowed to talk about the issue,' while Jewish students may feel misunderstood if the conflict is framed in a certain way. Language, then, is never neutral, and word choice matters. Teachers need to be aware of this. As Boaz's examples show, teachers can address this explicitly by clarifying why certain terms are sensitive and how they have chosen to use or avoid them.

The role of history

Because the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is long-standing and complex, historical narratives can also be divisive. Emphasising multiple perspectives may therefore be more productive. As Share the Dove puts it, they grew up 'with certain stories, with a certain truth, and with a certain history.' By naming this, they invite others to share their own narratives and highlight perspectives that are often underrepresented.

Conclusion

Share the Dove's dialogue-based approach emphasises the importance of creating a safe and open classroom environment and making careful language choices to promote mutual understanding without polarising the conversation. In this way, Share the Dove's approach offers a valuable framework for engaging in difficult discussions. By opening up the dialogue and actively inviting students to share their questions and emotions, teachers can create an environment where understanding, rather than consensus, is central. This means that teachers are not only transmitters of knowledge, but also guides who facilitate complex conversations in which emotions and perspectives diverge.

Interested in learning more about Share the Dove?

Check out the following links:

- Website: www.deeldeduif.com
- Insta-account: @deeldeduif
- LinkedIn: https://www.linkedin.com/company/deel-de-duif/

Part 3. What is the historicising method, and how is it applied?

3.1 What is the historicising method?

Recent research into the effects of TerInfo's historicising method on secondary school pupils showed that increasing their factual and historical knowledge of terrorism – how it arises, how it can be countered, and how police and security services prevent attacks – can reduce their fear of it.[46] By reflecting on the historical development of a conflict and providing examples from the past, teachers can help create a sense of distance between young people and the present moment. The past then comes into view, softening some of the immediate pain and confusion.[47] This distance helps to take the edge off discussions and reduce intense emotions such as shock, anger and panic.[48]

When an attack occurs, a war breaks out or another disruptive event takes place, people experience shock and urgency – the feeling that something must be done *now*. Such events often seem unprecedented. In these moments, students are bombarded with information on social media. This flow of information is difficult to filter, and they may cling to familiar interpretations or assumptions. TerInfo's approach offers an alternative by providing a historical framework. Taking a step back allows us to place events in a historical context. We then realise that terrorist attacks or the outbreak of war have had a long build-up. This perspective reveals connections between the past and the present, helping to place the shock of current events into context. We refer to this process of zooming out and placing events in time as historicising.

Using the historicising approach, we show that terrorism and violence are not new phenomena but have evolved over time, and that society can learn from how earlier generations responded to them. By asking what happened previously in the history of a conflict or type of disruptive event, the historicising method helps to create distance and perspective.

You can also use the historicising method to explore historical analogies. These are comparable events from the past, such as **student protests** or **farmer protests**, which can be placed alongside contemporary developments. In TerInfo's **lesson on cross-border memes**, for example, students draw analogies between today's online memes and historical cartoons. This helps them understand that people in the past also

[46] Bammens et al., 'Teaching Terrorism'; P. Krause, D. Gustafson, J. Theriault and L. Young, 'Knowing is Half the Battle: How Education Decreases the Fear of Terrorism,' *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 66, no. 7-8 (2022): 1147-1173; J. Theriault, 'Know Thy Enemy: Education About Terrorism Improves Social Attitudes Toward Terrorists,' *Journal of Experimental Psychology* 146, no. 3 (2017): 305-317.
[47] B.G.J. Wansink, M. Herinx, M. van der Werf and B. de Graaf, 'Leerlingen weerbaar maken,' *Kleio* 1 (2024): 14-17.
[48] B. de Graaf, N. Sterkenburg, J. Dijkstra and T. Glas, 'Discussing Terrorism in the Classroom – Adopting an Empathizing and Historical Perspective: A Research Note,' *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 47, no. 1 (2024): 98-114, 101.

struggled with similar issues. However, it is important to avoid presentism by paying attention to the differences between past and present.

The historicising method provides tools for placing current events within a broader historical framework and interpreting them as the result of past developments. This opens the way to ask what, if anything, can be learned from the past. Thus, the historicising method helps young people to see moments of acute conflict in context, to better understand what is happening around them, and to feel less anxious about it.[49] In this way, students learn to think historically, enabling them to better understand society.[50]

3.2 How to place an emotionally charged current event in historical perspective?

Putting a complex conflict in historical perspective helps students approach an event from multiple angles and understand how different perspectives on it have developed over time.

Step 1. To apply this effectively in the classroom, first determine your own position on the issue (**2.2**).

Step 2. Next, gauge how the topic resonates with your students. What facts or rumours have they heard? What emotions does it evoke? If the topic feels too sensitive to address directly, use de-escalation strategies before delving into the content. One way to do this is by identifying common ground and what unites the group.

Step 3. Our research and experience show that it is crucial to create a **shared background and context** immediately when discussing a controversial issue. at the start of any discussion on a controversial issue. Providing historicising context helps students see the broader picture and view current events, including highly controversial issues, in perspective. You can achieve this by first sketching out the bigger picture and showing what has happened before. You can do this by outlining what has happened before and then moving to the present issue on a factual basis. Ask students what they already know about a specific issue. For example, what do they know about the country where an attack occurred, the groups involved or similar incidents in the past?

[49] Bammens et al., 'Teaching Terrorism;' B. de Graaf, 'Op zoek naar historische betekenis in tijden van terreur. Terrorisme bespreekbaar maken in de klas,' 18 November 2018.
[50] C. van Boxtel and J. van Drie, 'Historisch denken en redeneren onderwijzen,' *Kleio* 60, no. 5 (2019): 26-29.

Step 4. You can then discuss the event in question by asking:

- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Why did it happen?
- Who was involved?

Step 5. Next, help students place the event in context and on a timeline:

- Have similar events occurred before?
- How did people respond at the time?
- How did they experience the event?
- Are there historical explanations for it?

The historicising method attempts to create a historical context for a contemporary event and map out cause and effect, as well as change and continuity, based on these questions.

Step 6. For certain attacks or controversial issues, you can combine the historicising method with an educational discussion about the norms and values that were challenged. If your topic lends itself to this, the following example may help.

Example for Step 6. After the 2020 attack on French teacher Samuel Paty, TerInfo recommended asking students what they know about how **fundamental rights and freedoms**, such as freedom of expression, are regulated in the Netherlands. Ask them to list these rights, and to consider what is and is not allowed. Students' awareness of what is punishable or can lead to prosecution is often surprisingly low. It is also important to mention that within these frameworks, power relations can be questioned and criticised in a democracy. Possible questions include:

- Why is it important for citizens to have freedom of expression?
- Why is it permissible to insult someone on the basis of religion in a democratic constitutional state?
- How is the relationship between religious communities and the state regulated in the Netherlands?
- How should intolerant opinions be dealt with in a democracy?
- Why is it important that people in a democracy can question those in power?

Adapt these questions to fit the issue you want to discuss.

Key ingredients: When historicising a violent event, it is **essential** to establish two things with your class. First, agree that violence, extremism and terrorism must always be rejected. Second, discuss the rule of law carefully, including the distinction between criminal offences and perceived insults. Feelings of offence or anger about criticism of religion or beliefs must be processed and expressed in a constructive and peaceful way. Any principles or rules expressed on the basis of faith, belief or ideology must always respect the boundaries and freedoms of the democratic constitutional state.

In summary, the historicising method serves four larger purposes. It creates a **shared frame of reference** for actual events, helps students **interpret** them, sets a standard for the use of violence, ideology and discrimination, and encourages reflection on what individuals can do to help keep their community and society humane and safe.

3.2.1 Multiperspectivity

By asking about people's involvement in, responses to, and experiences of the event or conflict in both the past and the present, the historicising method also seeks to introduce multiperspectivity. **Multiperspectivity** involves becoming aware of different perspectives and recognising that we each see only one side of a conflict. It teaches students to examine issues from multiple angles, adding nuance and depth to their understanding.

The aim is not to prove ourselves right or to convince others, but to develop an understanding of the diversity of standpoints. TerInfo illustrates this with the metaphor of the number six (see Figure 3): viewed from one side, it is a six; viewed from the other, a nine. Both are valid, yet they are diametrically opposed. To see and understand each other's standpoints, students must literally take a step toward one another. Our standpoint – and the context that shapes it – influences how we perceive the truth.[51]

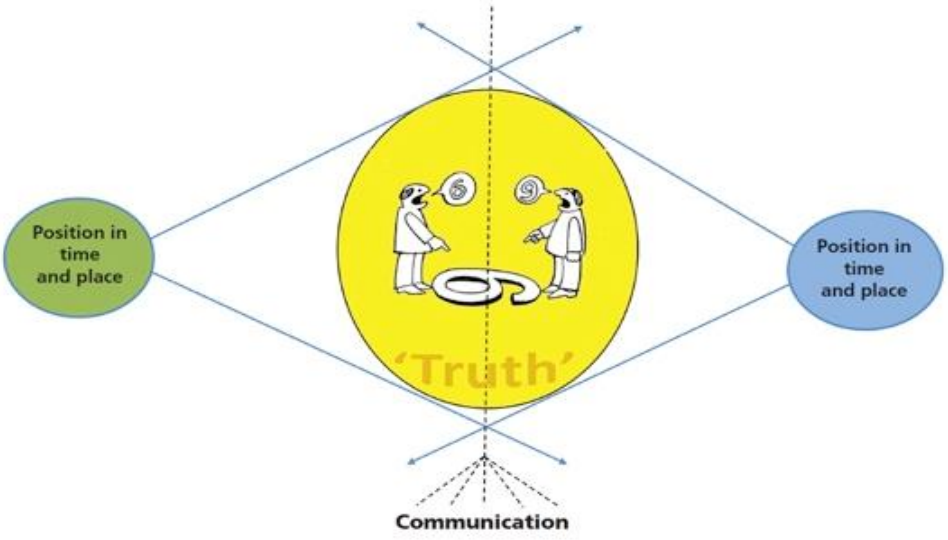

Figure 3. Location-boundness and multi-perspectivity in practice

[51] Patist and Wansink, 'Lesgeven over gevoelige onderwerpen,' 44-47.

When it comes to multiperspectivity, it is crucial to always consider students' emotions. It is therefore important to discuss how emotions and the rule of law can clash. The historicising method can help make this clash more accessible for discussion by showing how terms, definitions, organisations and people change over time. After all, constitutional frameworks are not set in stone and can change in response to societal pressures. For instance, in 1994, the US State Department removed the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) from the US list of terrorist organisations, despite it having been internationally regarded as such until then. The Oslo Accords also led to Israeli and American recognition of the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinians.

What is considered true can also depend on time and place. TerInfo's **activity** around the case of Yasser Arafat and Nelson Mandela, who are sometimes considered either terrorists or freedom fighters, offers insight into this.

By creating multiperspectivity on the past and present, the historicising method counterbalances overly simplistic explanations and arguments. This not only reduces the potential for polarisation but can also promote perspective-taking. Indeed, research shows that a better understanding of the different views on a complex conflict can motivate young people to change their preconceived standpoints about others. Understanding other people's positions can therefore increase tolerance and combat prejudice against other groups.[52]

Once emotions have been expressed, heard and 'placed' in the broader context of the conflict, this can help facilitate teaching about the conflict in question. A discussion about a complex conflict can encourage critical thinking tolerance.[53] The distance created by knowledge of different perspectives can also establish a shared, factual basis for classroom discussions about terrorism and conflicts, free from normative prejudices or stereotypes.[54] Thus, historicising a complex conflict can create a constructive learning opportunity.

[52] J.F. Dovidio, S.L. Gaertner and K. Kawakami, 'Intergroup Contact: The Past, Present, and the Future,' *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 6, no. 1 (2003): 5-12; Hess and Gatti, 'Putting Politics Where It Belongs,' 19-26.
[53] M. van Puymbroeck and W. Taelman, 'Controversiële onderwerpen in de klas: Informatief pakket rond het behandelen van heftige meningsverschillen in de klas (lager en secundair onderwijs)' (Vormen vzw).
[54] De Graaf et al., 'Discussing terrorism in the classroom,' 98-114.

3.3 Does it always make sense to use the historicising method?

As described above, the historicising method can help create distance from the emotions evoked by an incident, draw parallels with the past and identify lessons to be learned from it.[55] However, we must also acknowledge that history itself can evoke strong emotions and divide people. When students are overwhelmed by emotion, there is little room for considering historical analogies. In some cases, history can touch directly on a person's identity. It is therefore important that teachers understand the composition of their class (see section **2.2.2**). In some situations, it may be advisable to speak with certain students individually first, explaining why the topic is being approached from a historical perspective.

The composition of the student group also affects how the historicising method can be used. If a particular event or historical period is sensitive for students, consider discussing a similar event from the past to which they are less personally connected. For example, teachers in the former Yugoslavia often avoid focusing on their own civil war and instead discuss the conflict in Northern Ireland – a clear analogy, but one with greater emotional distance.[56] This creates space for reflection. Moreover, the example of Northern Ireland also offers a message of hope.

Activities using the historicising method sometimes require students to provide **contextual information**. If this is lacking, the assignment should be adapted. For example, you could add additional sources and guiding questions that supply background information. As an intermediate step, students can exchange their answers to fill gaps in each other's understanding. It is also important to emphasise that the historicising method is not suitable for every topic. TerInfo applies it to analyse **current, disruptive events** such as terrorism and political violence, as it helps primary, secondary and vocational students interpret these events and the fears associated with them.[57] However, the method appears less effective for topics such as climate change, sexuality and gender diversity.[58]

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[55] M. de Winter, 'Pedagogiek over Hoop. Het onmiskenbare belang van optimisme in opvoeding en onderwijs,' (Farewell Lecture, Utrecht University, 31 May 2017).
[56] J. Savicka, D. Marić, A. Radaković and B.G.J. Wansink, Teachers' Guide for Teaching Sensitive and Controversial Issues in the Post-Yugoslav Space. *EuroClio – European Association of History Educators* (2025).
[57] Bammens et al., 'Teaching Terrorism.'
[58] Various organisations offer teaching materials on this subject. For climate change, for example, see www.klimaatklas.nl. For materials on sexuality and gender diversity, see, for example https://shop.rutgers.nl/nl/webwinkel/handreiking-sekse-gender-en-seksuele-diversiteit/51576, https://www.gendi.nl/lesmaterialen/, https://seksuelevorming.nl/lesaanbod/, https://www.nji.nl/seksualiteiten-gender/hoe-maak-je-seksuele-en-genderdiversiteit-bespreekbaar-op-school, https://www.sensoa.be/lesgeven-over-gender-en-genderrollen, https://www.leraar24.nl/69817/maakseksuele-diversiteit-bespreekbaar/.

3.4 Generic formats for putting the historicising approach into practice

Whether or not to use the historicising method depends on the learning objective, the teaching context and the teacher's style. When the emphasis is on knowledge transfer and creating distance from an event or conflict, the historicising approach can be valuable in achieving this goal.

When **cognitive learning objectives** are involved, the main goal is knowledge transfer. In this case, the focus is on fostering an understanding of the historical developments and processes that led to the emergence of a conflict. Activities that encourage students to make connections between events can be used, such as creating a timeline or comparing different sources. Multiperspectivity also plays a role: by approaching an event from different angles, students learn that history is often dependent on perspective and context.

Encouraging **reflective skills** emphasises critical thinking and self-reflection. Students think not only about historical facts, but also about how their own history and background shape their views. This learning objective goes beyond mere knowledge transfer; it is about developing critical thinking skills. By reflecting on historical sources – who wrote them and for what purpose – students learn that history is never neutral but shaped by those who tell it.

In the case of **social learning objectives**, the main goal is to improve understanding of social issues or ethical dilemmas such as decolonisation, the so-called refugee crisis and discrimination. Activities focus on informing students and encouraging them to consider other perspectives. Historical case studies or role-playing exercises, in which students empathise with different historical figures or groups, can be effective. By drawing parallels with current issues, students learn not only about the past but also how it continues to shape the present.

The generic activities below emphasise the importance of placing events and conflicts in their historical context and paying attention to how changes unfold over time and to their consequences. They also emphasise the importance of multiperspectivity, in which different points of view are considered to form a more complete picture of history.

3.4.1 What the fairy tale of Little Red Riding Hood is really about

How can conflict, and the notions of right and wrong, be discussed with students? Conflicts often make people take sides quickly and start thinking in terms of 'right' and 'wrong'. This tendency can partly be explained by the fact that children learn from an early age to see the world in simple moral terms. Such scripts provide reassurance by implying that the world is a just place. In many societies, this idea is reinforced through the telling of fairy tales and folk tales. However, the world is far more complex and cannot always be neatly divided into right and wrong. This generic activity encourages students to consider more complex moral issues without referring directly to a specific war or conflict.

Time

45 minutes

- **Objectives**: This activity teaches students to consider complex moral issues without immediately thinking in terms of 'right' and 'wrong'.
- **Why**: To make students realise that terms such as 'right' and 'wrong' are insufficient for understanding and discussing conflicts.
- **Who**: Students and the teacher.
- **When:** This activity is best introduced during a relatively quiet period so that it can be used later when a disruptive situation arises.
- **Preparation**: You may wish to read the fairy tale of *Little Red Riding Hood* beforehand.

Implementation

Step 1. Tell the fairy tale (5-10 minutes)

Tell the students the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*. You can give a brief summary if everyone already knows it.

Here is a summary:

Grandmother is ill, so Little Red Riding Hood goes to take her some food. On the way, she encounters the wolf, who persuades her to pick flowers for her grandmother. Meanwhile, the wolf eats the grandmother.

Little Red Riding Hood arrives at her grandmother's house. The wolf is dressed as her grandmother and tries to eat her. A hunter arrives and frees the grandmother and Little Red Riding Hood. They fill the wolf's stomach with stones, and eventually the wolf drowns in the well. After telling the fairy tale, ask the following question: What do you think about the wolf drowning in the well? What about the wolf eating Little Red Riding Hood?

Step 2. Question round 1 (5 minutes)

Tell the students that you have only told part of the story. Then ask: What if it turns out that Little Red Riding Hood's father has shot all the wolves in the forest? How do you see the wolf's behaviour now? And what about the fact that Little Red Riding Hood's family has weapons while the wolves do not?

Step 3. Question round 2 (5 minutes)

Explain that the story continues. Then ask: What if it turns out that the wolves ate Little Red Riding Hood's grandparents because they didn't want her family to move into the forest? How would you describe the behaviour of the wolves and of Little Red Riding Hood's father now?

Step 4. Question round 3 (5 minutes)

Continue the story: What if Little Red Riding Hood's family had been bullied everywhere else, and they actually found the forest to be a peaceful place to live? How do you now view the behaviour of the wolves and of Little Red Riding Hood's family?

Step 5. Zoom out (5 minutes)

Invite the students to consider the situation from different perspectives, and then take a broader view. How would the wolves view this situation, and what image would they have of Little Red Riding Hood's family? And vice versa?

Step 6. Consider different perspectives (5 minutes)

Zoom out on these perspectives. Ask the question: Why is it difficult to say who is right in this story? Does the way the wolves and Little Red Riding Hood's family view the situation (and each other) help to find a solution?

Step 7. Introduce the forest ranger (5 minutes)

Introduce a third party. Imagine a forest ranger arrives who is responsible for ensuring everyone in the forest is safe. What would be a fair solution to the dispute between the wolves and Little Red Riding Hood's family? What would the forest ranger need to do to achieve this?

Step 8. Conclusion (5 minutes)

Conclude by briefly summarising what has been discussed and adding any questions you may have.

3.4.2 From cold to hot: when history divides

One method for historicising your lessons is to classify topics into the categories 'cold' and 'hot,' as shown in Figure 4.[59] Cold topics generally do not trigger identity threats, whereas hot topics do. When students feel threatened, their emotions run high, as shown on the vertical axis, making it difficult to have a constructive discussion.

As Figure 4 illustrates, a 'hot' topic combined with heightened emotions leads to greater polarisation in practice. This can intensify differences and tensions between groups[60] and may also occur in the classroom when students become entrenched in their views.

To prevent this discussion dynamic, start with 'cold' topics. Consider similar events that took place in another country or at a different time, for instance. Use these 'cold' topics,which evoke fewer emotions, as practice and as a prelude to discussing 'hot'

[59] B.G.J. Wansink, 'A Pedagogy of De-Polarisation for Education, From Cold to Hot Topics,' *Spotlight on Schools and Education* (2022): 36-41.
[60] J. den Ridder, E. Miltenburg, E. Steenvoorden, T. van der Meer and P. Dekker, 'Burgerperspectieven 2020|4,' Sociaal en Cultureel Planbureau, https://www.scp.nl/publicaties/publicaties/2020/12/28/burgerperspectieven-2020-4.

topics.[61] The composition of the student group determines what constitutes a 'cold' or 'hot' topic.

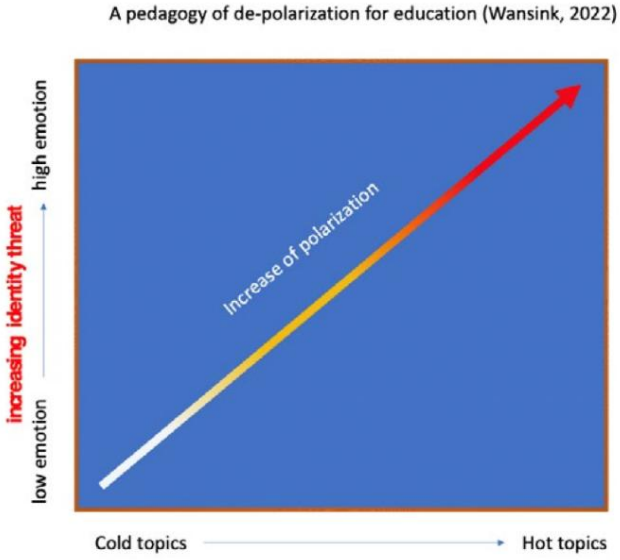

Figure 4. Wansink, 2022.

THE 'HOT' CURFEW RIOTS AND OTHER 'COLD' EXAMPLES

The TerInfo **lesson plan about the curfew riots** (23 January 2021) illustrates how to move from 'cold' to 'hot'.[1] The aim of this activity is not to downplay the event, but to put it into perspective. The media often claimed that the riots were 'un-Dutch', but is that really the case? What riots have taken place in the Netherlands in the past, and how did they unfold? By examining photos of the 1980 squatters' riots in Amsterdam and the storming of the U.S. Capitol in Washington, D.C. on 6 January 2021, the lesson plan highlights similarities and differences between recent and historical riots and how society has responded to them. For example, tanks were deployed by the government during the 1980 squatters' riots. This comparison sheds light on the scale and intensity of government intervention during the curfew riots and other protests against the measures introduced to combat the COVID-19 pandemic.

Hot	**Cold**
Independence and decolonisation processes after 1945 (Indonesia, Algeria)	Decolonisation processes before the 20th century (Belgian independence; American independence)
Israeli-Palestinian conflict; Nagorno-Karabakh (Azerbaijan vs Armenia)	Cyprus (Greece vs Turkey); Kosovo (Serbia, Albania)
Dutch farmers' protests 2024	Dutch farmers' protests 1971
Pro-Palestinian student protests 2024	American student protests against the Vietnam War (1968)
Contemporary conspiracy theories (Great Replacement; Holocaust denial)	Old conspiracy theories (e.g. concerning cholera pandemics in the 19th century)

3.4.3 From a single narrative to multiple narratives

You can introduce multiperspectivity by adding simultaneous events and different points of view ('at the same time', 'meanwhile', 'while x was happening in A, y was taking place in B') to a single chronological narrative ('and then, and then, and then'). The Israeli-Palestinian conflict shows how adopting multiperspectivity can improve our understanding of different experiences and perspectives within the same historical moment, and explain why these differences often lead to violence. A good example is the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. For the Jewish community, this marked the beginning of a safe homeland; for Palestinians, however, it signified the loss of their homeland. Mapping these opposing experiences and their consequences helps explain why both groups feel deeply unsafe and distrustful of each other. These feelings of insecurity continue to shape the reactions of both sides.

APPLICATION OF MULTIPLE NARRATIVES

'The establishment of the State of Israel in 1948 marked a crucial moment in history. ***While*** Jewish Holocaust survivors settled in their new homeland and established the first kibbutzim, Palestinian families experienced displacement as they were forced to leave their villages or flee violence (the Nakba). ***At the same time,*** international leaders at the United Nations were seeking a diplomatic solution, ***and*** fierce fighting broke out along the borders of the new country between the founding armies and Arab states. ***Meanwhile***, in the streets of Jerusalem, the various population groups encountered each other daily, often in a climate of both hostility and attempts at peaceful coexistence.'

See also our ***teaching materials*** on two opposing perspectives on the founding of the State of Israel.

3.4.4 Parallel timelines

In this activity, multiple events from different perspectives or contexts are juxtaposed to provide a broader picture of a specific period or situation. This helps students identify connections between different events themselves. They map out multiperspectivity, analyse the contexts of various events and compare them, and practise their research and source analysis skills.

- **Objectives**: To gain insight into how circumstances and events converge; to map out multiperspectivity and conduct research; to establish connections and compare contexts.
- **Why**: To help students develop a broader and more nuanced understanding of a particular period, event, conflict or group; to improve their research skills; and to foster reflection and empathy.
- **Who**: Students can work in groups or individually, with teacher guidance if necessary.
- **When**: Use this activity when analysing complex historical or contemporary events related to (inter)national politics or society, where different perspectives converge or clash.

Example: NATO, Russia, the war in Ukraine

As a teacher, you can use this example to discuss international geopolitical developments and crises involving NATO since the start of the Cold War. This helps contextualise NATO's role in Russia's war against Ukraine.

Implementation

Step 1. Introduction by the teacher

Ask the students to read the TerInfo **lesson module on 75 years of NATO** in preparation for the lesson. Begin by briefly reintroducing NATO to refresh their memory of what they have read. For example: NATO was founded in 1949 as an alliance to guarantee the security of its member states. Over the past 75 years, NATO has adapted to changing threats and geopolitical shifts. A recent example is the war in Ukraine, which has once again brought NATO's role into the spotlight.

Step 2. Divide the students into groups and assign perspectives

Divide the class into groups and assign each group a specific perspective.

Examples of perspectives:

1. **NATO:** Focus on the strategic and organisational developments within the alliance.
2. **NATO member states** (e.g. Germany, the United States and Eastern European countries): Their interests, contributions and involvement in NATO over time.
3. **Russia**: How has Russia responded to NATO's expansion and actions since 1949? What is its relationship to recent conflicts, such as those in Ukraine?
4. **Ukraine and other former Soviet Union countries that are not NATO members**: How does NATO influence non-member countries such as Ukraine, and what is their perspective on the alliance?

Step 3: Drawing up the timelines

Students examine key moments in NATO's history and link them to the broader geopolitical context of their assigned perspective. They then record these moments on a timeline. Each group selects events from the lesson module relevant to their perspective, then reflects on what each event meant from that perspective. They can indicate this with a + or – next to the event. For example, from NATO's perspective, '1967: The Soviet Union deploys tactical nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe' would be a -, but from the Soviet Union's perspective, it would be a +.

Possible key moments include:

- 1949: NATO established
- 1952: The Marshall Plan ends
- 1955: The Warsaw Pact established
- 1962: Cuban Missile Crisis
- 1967: The Soviet Union deploys tactical nuclear weapons in Eastern Europe
- 1979: NATO deploys American nuclear weapons in European countries
- 1987: The Soviet Union and NATO sign the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty
- 1991: Fall of the Soviet Union and NATO enlargement
- 2000: Vladimir Putin elected President of Russia
- 2002: NATO-Russia Council established
- 2008: NATO summit in Bucharest
- 2014: Russian annexation of Crimea and war in eastern Ukraine
- 2022: Russia invades and wages war on Ukraine
- 2022–2024: NATO's support for Ukraine
- 2024: Donald Trump elected President of the United States

Step 4. Discussion in small groups
Ask the groups to compare and discuss their timelines and perspectives, analysing both differences and connections. For example, ask them to explain how the actions of different parties influenced one another.

Step 5. Joint reflection

- How has NATO influenced geopolitical stability over the past 75 years?
- What role has NATO played in times of crisis, such as the Cold War and Russian aggression against Ukraine since 2014?
- How have countries inside and outside NATO perceived the role of the alliance?
- What will NATO mean for international security in 2025?
- What is the future of NATO in an increasingly complex world order?
-

3.4.5 Parallel lifelines

A variation on the parallel timeline is the parallel lifeline. This activity depicts the lives of several individuals in relation to the same events, showing how these events influence their experiences, choices and actions. This activity emphasises personal stories and how events influence people differently, rather than the events themselves. It helps students develop empathy and understanding of different perspectives, while also connecting personal experiences to broader social themes.

You can either use existing historical figures, as in the example below, or create fictional characters. If you choose the latter, be careful not to generalise; instead, develop specific roles and backgrounds based on news articles, interviews and other sources. For the Dutch pro-Palestinian student protests in May 2024, for example, you could adopt the perspectives of 'a university administrator', 'a riot police officer' and 'a pro-Palestinian student demonstrator'.

The way the activity below is structured can be used by teachers to discuss, for example, the different perspectives and dynamics surrounding the **Dutch student protests in 2024**.

- **Objectives**: To contextualise different views on a conflict and to gain insight into how the same events affect individual lives differently, thereby exploring and promoting multiperspectivity. The activity also aims to foster empathy by helping students connect political and/or social developments and events with the formation of personal standpoints (positionality).
- **Why**: To help students understand how the same events can affect people from different backgrounds in different ways, leading to varying responses. This gives students insight into the origins of social division and polarisation. It also helps them develop understanding and respect for different perspectives.
- **Who**: Students work in groups or individually, with teacher guidance if necessary.
- **When**: When discussing historical or current events that have a major impact on the lives of individuals and communities in society, such as wars, terrorism, migration or profound social change.

Example: The left-wing protest movement in West Germany around 1968

Implementation

Step 1. Introduction

As a teacher, you can choose to introduce the social and political context of 1960s West Germany. Students can also look up and read background articles that explain this information. They can then use this information to add relevant events and developments to the timeline.

- **Political context:** The Grand Coalition between the SPD and CDU raised concerns about a democratic vacuum. Students and left-wing activists demanded political reform and greater participation.
- **Cultural influence**: Protests against the Vietnam War and inspiration came from international movements (e.g. the May 1968 protests in France and anti-Vietnam protests in America).
- **Key moment:** The visit of the Shah of Iran in June 1967 and the death of Benno Ohnesorg during a demonstration acted as catalysts for the protest movement.
- **Consequence:** The radicalisation of the *Rote Armee Fraktion* (RAF).

Step 2: Selection of historical figures

Students are asked to study the lives and perspectives of historical figures from this period. As a teacher, you can decide which individuals they should analyse. These may include historical figures, literary characters or real-life case studies.

Examples of historical figures involved in the left-wing protest movement in West Germany in the 1960s include:

1. **Rudi Dutschke**: Student leader and figurehead of the *Sozialistischer Deutscher Studentenbund*.
2. **Ulrike Meinhof**: Journalist and later member of the RAF.
3. **Willy Brandt**: Then Foreign Minister and later Chancellor, who struggled with social unrest.
4. **Benno Ohnesorg**: Student killed by police violence, whose death marked a turning point for the protest movement.
5. **Kurt Georg Kiesinger**: Chancellor and symbol of the Grand Coalition, criticised by left-wing activists and students for his rigid politics.

Step 3: Drawing up and examining lifelines

The students map out the lifelines of the historical figures by drawing them on a timeline on a sheet of paper. They then place the different lifelines side by side, connecting historical events with personal choices and actions. They analyse the context of each figure, including the period in which they lived, their social circumstances and their personal background. They then link these to key events of the time. For each event, the students provide a short description of what happened and how it affected the individual concerned. They can indicate the effect with **+** and **–** symbols on the timeline. Examples include changes in behaviour, new choices or long-term consequences. Students should also discuss how certain events in the life of one historical person may have influenced other people, for example when their paths crossed because of a shared event.

- Benno Ohnesorg (student):
    - 1967: Fatally shot by police during a demonstration against the Shah. His death became a symbol of police violence and systemic injustice.
    - After his death: His name became a rallying cry for the protest movement, intensifying the debate on the West German state's use of force.
- Rudi Dutschke (student leader):
    - 1967: Organised protests against the Shah's visit. Following Benno Ohnesorg's death, he began advocating systematic reforms through action.
    - 1968: Survived an assassination attempt, becoming a martyr for the movement and reinforcing activists' sense of urgency.
    - 1969: Left the country, disillusioned by the escalation of violence within the left-wing movement.
- Ulrike Meinhof (journalist):
    - 1967: Wrote critically about Ohnesorg's death and police conduct.
    - 1968: Participated in debates on radicalisation within the student movement while continuing to advocate peaceful reform.
    - 1970: Abandoned her journalistic role and joined the RAF, disillusioned with the political system.

- Willy Brandt (politician):
    - 1967: As Foreign Minister, sought to manage international criticism of Germany while addressing domestic unrest.
    - 1968: As leader of the SPD, he attempted to channel social unrest through reform.
    - 1969: Became Chancellor and launched his reform agenda, including his *Ostpolitik*.
    - Kurt Georg Kiesinger (Chancellor):
    - 1966: Became Chancellor of the Grand Coalition, a period marked by political stability but also criticism for the lack of opposition.
    - 1968: He faced left-wing protests and criticism, partly due to his Nazi past, which undermined his legitimacy.
    - 1969: Lost the election to Willy Brandt, who promised reform.

Step 4: Presentation and discussion

Each group presents its lifelines and discusses the following:

- How historical figures reacted differently to the same events.
- How personal beliefs and social context influence choices.
- The role these figures played in shaping social and political history.
- How the lifelines of these historical figures intertwine, for example through the criticism of Kurt Georg Kiesinger's Nazi past by both Rudi Dutschke and Ulrike Meinhof, and how this criticism contributed to the radicalisation of the RAF in 1968-1969, leading to alienation and fragmentation within the protest movement and ultimately to Rudi Dutschke's departure.

What similarities and differences stand out? How did external factors, such as socio-economic conditions, play a role? What can we learn from these comparisons about the influence of personal choices versus social circumstances?

Step 5. Reflection

Ask students to reflect on:

- How the actions of individuals influence historical developments.
- How the context of the 1960s shows parallels with contemporary protest movements.
- How different perspectives can enrich our understanding of complex periods.

3.4.6 Standpoint statements

Standpoint statements promote multiperspectivity by making students aware of how their own demographic characteristics influence their views on complex and sensitive topics. By sharing and comparing their standpoints with others, students discover the influence of different backgrounds and learn to treat diverse perspectives with respect. This deepens their understanding of diversity in experiences and opinions, which is essential when analysing complex social issues.

- **Objectives**: To make students aware of the influence of personal backgrounds on their perspective; to promote multiperspectivity; and to foster understanding of diversity in experiences and opinions.
- **Why**: This activity helps students analyse complex issues from different angles and prepares them to engage with social diversity.
- **Who**: First individually, then in groups. The teacher may briefly join the groups or participate in the discussion.
- **When**: At the beginning of a discussion to explore perspectives.

Implementation

Step 1. Write down demographic characteristics

Students write down four or five demographic facts that characterise them, such as ethnicity, gender, religion, age or place of birth. They then consider **how** these characteristics **shape their view** of the conflict being discussed and their self-image.

Step 2. Answer questions

Students then answer three questions in writing:

1. Which elements of your standpoint do you share with people who have similar demographic characteristics?
2. Which elements of your standpoint are unique to you?
3. Which demographic characteristics have had the greatest influence on shaping your standpoint?

Step 3. Discussion in small groups

Students discuss their answers and standpoints in small groups. They explore how demographic factors influence communication and understanding, and identify any stereotypes embedded in their views. They also consider which experiences confirm or challenge these stereotypes. They can focus on factors such as gender, ethnicity, or place of birth or a combination of these. The aim is to raise awareness of their identity and the factors that shape it, as well as the differences and connections with others.

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Appendix 1. Usefull websites

- https://www.schoolenveiligheid.nl/po-vo/kennisbank/handleiding-hebtmakkelijk-praten/
- https://teachingcontroversies.com/
- https://www.kis.nl
- https://www.socialestabiliteit.nl
- https://www.annefrank.org/nl/
- https://mensenrechten.nl/nl/op-school
- https://www.diversion.nl
- https://www.devreedzame.school
- https://nivoz.nl
- https://www.stichtingvreedzaam.nl
- https://union.sites.uu.nl
- https://www.zeteenstreepdoordiscriminatie.nl/wat-kan-mijn-organisatiedoen/tips-om-discriminatie-aan-te-pakken
- https://www.euroclio.eteaching
- https://www.teachingcontroversies.com
- https://www.tolerance.org
- https://www.facinghistory.org
- https://www.daretobegrey.com
- https://www.wijzijndrog.nl
- https://prodemos.nl
- https://www.expertisepuntburgerschap.nl
- https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-wedo/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network_en

E-Learning

- https://www.schoolenveiligheid.nl/e-learning-dialoog-onder-druk/

Guides

- https://edoc.coe.int/en/human-rights-democratic-citizenship-andinterculturalism/7738-teaching-controversial-issues.html
- https://www.euroclio.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Learning-to-Disagree_Teachers-Guide_Web.pdf
- https://euroguide-toolkit.eu/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Flanders.pdf
- https://www.hva.nl/binaries/content/assets/subsites/urbaneducation/projecten/urban-education_controversieleonderwerpen_interactief-gesprekssjabloon_2020.pdf

Appendix 2. Commonly used terms

Term	Explanation of terms
Complex conflict	A complex conflict is characterised by the coexistence of different 'truths', the absence of a clear 'right' or 'wrong', and the fact that a solution is not readily or easily available. The complexity arises from people's diverse backgrounds (e.g., culture, religion, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation), which determine how they view events.
Controversial topic	Topics that evoke strong emotions can divide communities and society. In a pluralistic democracy, controversy is inevitable. While controversial topics can create tension in the classroom, the challenge lies in turning these moments into valuable and constructive learning opportunities.
Dialogue	An open and empathetic conversation, not aimed at winning or persuading through arguments, but at understanding other people's standpoints.
Disruptive moment	A disruptive moment refers to a sudden, shocking event that puts existing norms, values and institutions in politics and society under pressure.[62]
Introducing multiperspectivity	To show that multiple perspectives on an event exist simultaneously and side by side, shaped by different factors (such as culture, country, language, family, friends and school). The aim of introducing multiperspectivity is to recognise the value of other perspectives and to develop empathy for them.[63] In the classroom, it is important to approach events from multiple perspectives, as students may have different cultural or religious backgrounds that shape how they view an event.
Polarisation	The intensification of differences between groups.

[62] C. Christensen and M. Overdorf, 'Meeting the Challenge of Disruptive Change,' *Harvard Business Review* 78, no. 2 (2000): 67-76; B.G.J. Wansink, B. de Graaf and E. Berghuis, 'Teaching under Attack: The Dilemmas, Goals, and Practices of Upper-Elementary School Teachers When Dealing With Terrorism In Class,' *Theory & Research in Social Education* 49, no. 2 (2021): 489-509.

[63] P. Janssenswillen, B.J.G. Wansink and G.M. Savenije, 'Multiperspectiviteit als vliegwiel voor historisch denken,' *Hermes* 23, no. 2 (2019): 15-20.

Appendix 3. Interviews

Interviews were conducted by Annelotte Janse, unless otherwise stated.

Respondent	**Date**
1	8 October 2024
2	23 October 2024
3	7 November 2024
4	14 November 2024
5	26 November 2024
6	27 November 2024
7	22 November 2024
8 Interview with Boaz Cahn (Deel de Duif), conducted by Annelotte Janse and Bjorn Wansink	30 Oktober 2024