

Educating for Democracy and Human Rights

THE EUROPEAN
WERGELAND
CENTRE



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

The European Wergeland Centre (EWC)

- We promote education as a path to democracy, human rights and intercultural understanding.
- The center was established by The Council of Europe and Norway in 2008.
- Our work is based on Council of Europe standards and materials. We bridge policy and practice.
- We work with 50 partners in the field ranging from authorities, universities, teacher training centers, to NGOs/CSOs.

HOT OR COLD

Climate change

Abortion

Woke

Gaza

Russia

Sex

Feminism

Charles Kirk

Migration

Trump

Racism

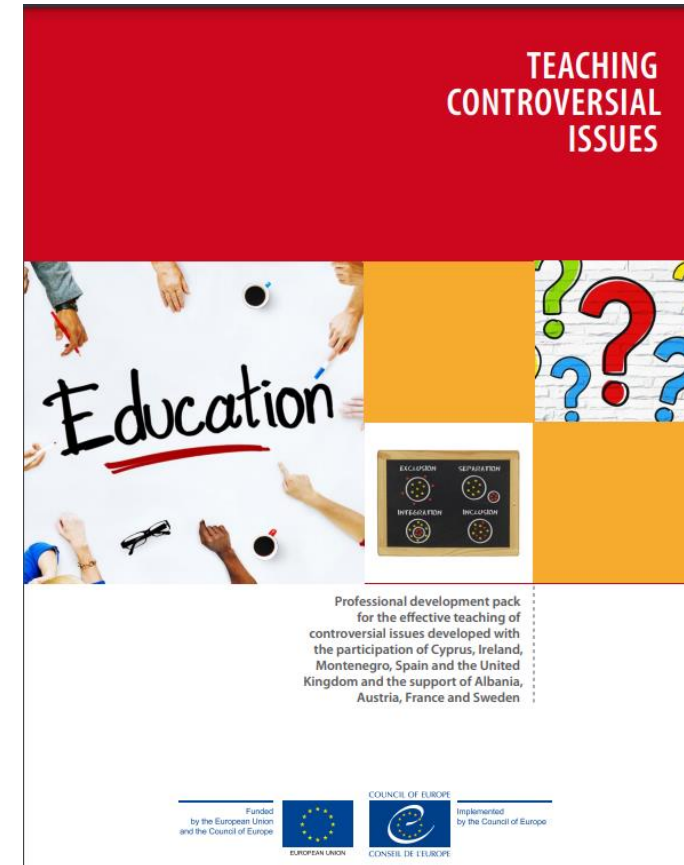
THE EUROPEAN
WERGELAND
CENTRE



Controversial issues

“Issues which arouse strong feelings and divide opinion in communities and society”

- Kerr D. og Huddelston T. m.fl, 2016



The context

1. Lack of trust in democratic institutions



THE CONTEXT

2. Polarization, hate speech, xenophobia



Berøringsangst og taushet truer demokratiopplæringen i skolen

Helle Christin Nyhuus
Leder, Norsk Lektorlag



Vi kan ikke akseptere at demokrati og ytringsfrihet får dårligere kår. Her har skolen et viktig oppdrag, skriver Helle Christin Nyhuus, leder i Norsk Lektorlag. Illustrasjonsfoto: Gorm Kallestad, NTB

Frykten for å bli misforstått gjør både lærere og elever mer forsiktige.

Publisert: 04.11.2024 22:00

Nyhetsbrev: Se. Lese. Høre. Gjøre.

Ukentlig | Gratis

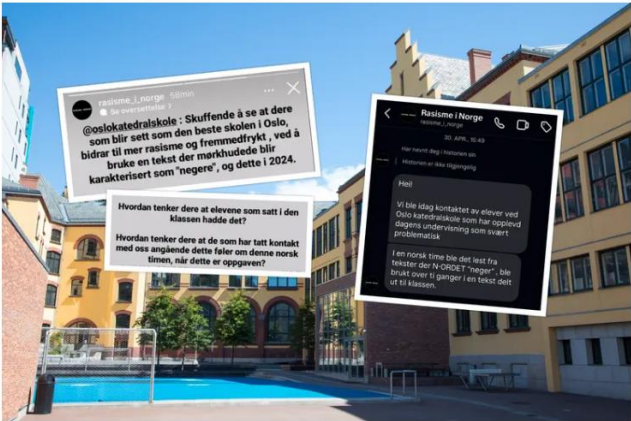
Debattredaktør Erik Tønnes sender deg de mest interessante anmeldelsene og debattene.

+ Meld deg på

Lærernes oppgave er å legge til rette for godt ytringsklima og trene elevene i å delta i den demokratiske samtalen. For sommeren fortalte lærerne ved Oslo katedralskole at de ble anklaget for rasisme for å vise deler av historien. Kronikken høstet debatt og motbør,

Lærere ved Oslo katedralskole: Vi blir anklaget for rasisme for å vise viktige deler av historien

Lærere ved Oslo katedralskole



Skjermdump av historier Rasisme i Norge publiserte på sin Instagram-konto. Meldingen til høyre ble sendt direkte til Oslo katedralskoles Instagram-konto. Foto: Audun Braastad, NTB/Skjermdump Instagram. Collage: Ingerborg Semset

Flere er engstelige for å bli filmet når vi underviser om kontroversielle temaer. Vi føler at vi beveger oss på tynn is.

Publisert: 14.05.2024 20:00 | Oppdatert: 06.03.2025 10:11

Nyhetsbrev: Se. Lese. Høre. Gjøre.

Ukentlig | Gratis

Debattredaktør Erik Tønnes sender deg de mest interessante anmeldelsene og debattene.



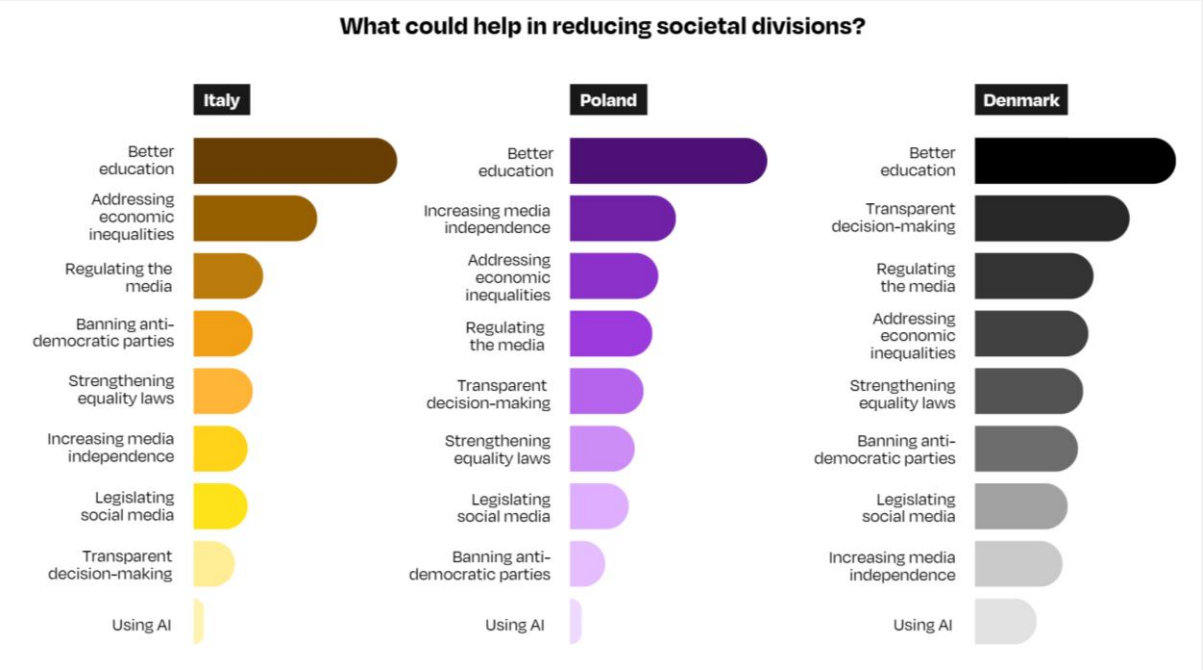
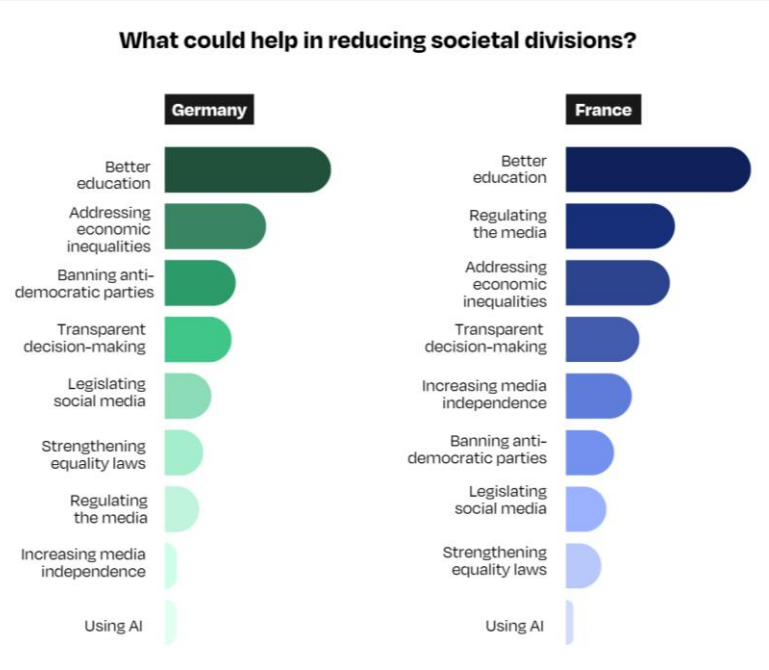
Skolrapport: Lärare undviker känsliga ämnen

Elvira Yeo, Zainab Dhanad, Björn Parphim och Edriss Abdelmasid är elever på Bredingskolan. Foto: Tim Aro

Frågor som abort, klimat och sexuell läggning har blivit allt mer kontroversiella bland högstadiel elever. Skillnaden är "oroande" stor mellan pojkar och flickor. Enligt Skolinspektionen undviker lärare känsliga frågor i klassrummet.

Possible solutions: education tops the list

Asked how best to counter societal divisions, participants overwhelmingly choose improving education as their first line of defence.



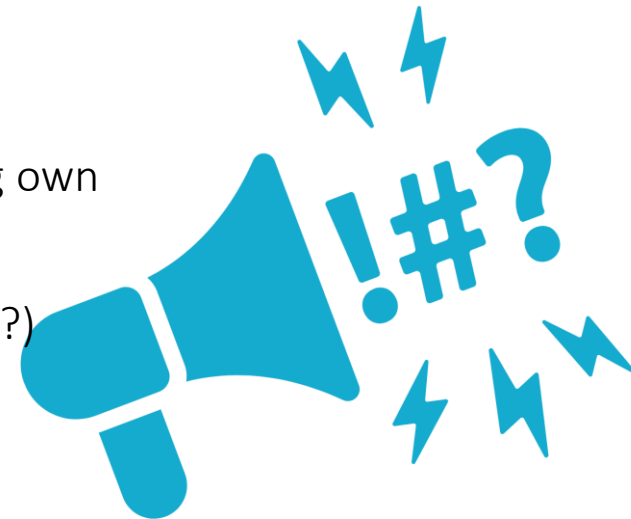
Potential challenges - statement from teachers

- Heated discussions with a lot of emotions
- Lack of overview or sufficient knowledge about the topic
- Uncertainty about one's own role
- Insensitive comments or jokes
- Not enough time to “close” the discussion or topic
- Concerned about parents' reactions

Why **still** teach controversial issues?

To strengthen education in democracy and citizenship, and to boost children's and young people's political self-efficacy.

- Practicetice democratic dialogue: listeining, reconsidering own views, learning about others, learning about oneself
- Training the muscle that can address important (difficult?) topics
- Think critically and analytically
- Often engaging topics



Teaching controversial issues → Goal: Open, respectful classroom climate

Preparation

Know multiple perspectives
Gather reliable info

Self-Reflection

Check your biases
Try to stay objective

Dialogue

Make clear rules with the group
Start safe, maybe with related topics
Encourage multiple viewpoints

Case Studies, Simulations & Role-Play

To understand complex societal issues
Build empathy and deeper understanding

Practice & Manage

Lead discussions confidently
Pause if heated
Debrief afterwards

Break it down

What is this really about?
Which perspectives exist?
What arguments support each side?
Encourage critical thinking by exploring
strengths and weaknesses in different
viewpoints.

School Support

Leadership backing
Make controversial topics part of learning

Learning about, through,
and for democracy





An example from Norway: 22. of july and democratic citizenship

- Building democracy where democracy has been tested
- Three day workshop with learning about the events and...
 - Talking about controversial issues
 - Learning to respond to hate speech
 - Strengthen political self-efficacy
- Democracy workshop for
 - teachers and student
 - youth councils and youth organisations
 - courses for teachers and teacher students

Example on activity from democracy workshop: How to respond to hate speech



Through this activity, we had the opportunity to develop empathy, understand the perspectives of those who experience hate speech, and experiment with different strategies to cope with such situations.

This helps to create a more inclusive and respectful society by building us up with the tools we need to face hate speech everyday.

- Johan, 15 years

Dialogue sheet: How to respond to hate speech

- Collaborative learning
- Practice perspective-taking
- Training on how to react in different situations



Four ways to respond to hate speech

- Ignore
- Report
- Tell friends
- Answer





Thank you!