

Sensitive Issues

Supporting Students with Skills for Dialogue

Creating safe and courageous spaces to have difficult discussions

The
Faith
& Belief
Forum



School Resources



Autumn 2024

Tailored for Teachers

Supporting Students with Skills for Dialogue – Sensitive Issues and Current Events

Guidance for Teachers, School Leaders, and those working with Children & Young People

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1. The Faith & Belief Forum's Anti-Prejudice Approach

We believe in an educational approach that equips learners with the skills & tools that they need to handle & influence relations between different faiths & beliefs: learning the social & emotional skills to thrive in modern, multicultural Britain. Our approach to Anti-prejudice education incorporates an Interfaith, Anti-racist, Peacebuilding, and Trauma informed approach. Schools are central to students developing skills to be able to navigate the world around them and more than this, to move to creating positive change within their communities. For students to develop these skills, they should feel confident communicating and collaborating with anybody, regardless of their faith, belief, culture, or background.

How can we encourage an Anti-prejudice approach in schools?

We suggest the following...

Safe, Brave, & Equitable Spaces - Develop strategies for creating an inclusive, safe and managed environment for sensitive issues to be explored

A Holistic Approach - Encourage students' critical thinking, resilience, empathy and appreciation for different viewpoints

Developing Mindsets - Build confidence in dealing with difficult moments and turning them into opportunities for learning

Where we have seen an anti-prejudice education approach make a difference, there has been a conscious effort to incorporate skills development through regular opportunities to explore and practice across the school.

The guidance on the following pages can be used in conjunction with The Faith & Belief Forum Skills for Dialogue lesson plans for primary and secondary schools. **These can be downloaded here** <https://faithbeliefforum.org/resources/>

2. Facilitating Dialogue

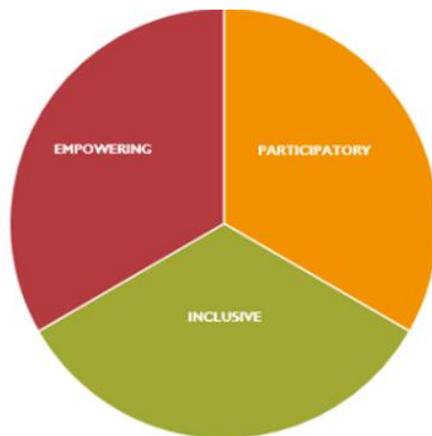
As facilitators of dialogue, we need to think about our own thoughts, feelings and actions. The following may help with considering your own Anti-prejudice approach and practice.

Ensure that your Actions & Language are **considered, accessible & open**.
PIE can be a useful way to check-in:

Participatory

Inclusive

Empowering



A Holistic approach to developing teacher / facilitator practice

An important first step in facilitating dialogue is recognising our own humanity, feelings, emotions, challenges & behaviours.

The 3 step strategy below could help to navigate dialogue

Step One: Register Emotions & reactions

- How does it feel listening to this?
- What are your instincts telling you?
- What bias / strong views might you hold?
- What can you do to help yourself to sustain confidence in this situation?

Step Two: Generate Strategies

- What can you do immediately? During lesson? Afterwards?
- Do you think the event will have an effect on the group?
- What action might need to be taken?
- Do you need to speak to individual(s) / whole class?

Step Three: Debrief and Discuss

- What might you try next time?
- Where can you “debrief” or find (appropriate) support?
- What have you learned from this experience?

3. Safe, Brave, & Equitable Spaces

Develop strategies for creating an inclusive, safe and managed environment for sensitive issues to be explored

In order to dialogue about sensitive topics – whether that be planning for them in your curriculum or responding to them as they arise – **safe, brave, trusting, equitable** and **respectful** environments are key. These need to be developed & practised over time. By using these strategies regularly, students will be skilled when hot topics arise.

Respect

Active listening

Dialogue not debate

IStatements

Oops! & Ouch!

Co-create a **‘Framework for Encounter’** with your students.

Include what actions & behaviours are expected & what they might look like.

To begin, you can ask Students what principles help to ensure that they...

- Feel comfortable & safe
- Feel brave / able to share
- Can learn from each other & deepen understanding
- Look after themselves & each other



Being respectful



Understanding each other



I speak for myself



Listening with your whole body



Discussing not arguing

Example of **Oops** behaviours & actions:

(when a mistake is made or words / a phrase hurt someone else)

- Be aware of the impact of your words
- Treat people how you want to be treated
- Try to rectify the situation without having to be told to

Example of **Ouch** behaviours & actions:

(when what someone says feels hurtful or negative)

- Remember that it's ok to feel hurt sometimes
- Express that you'd like someone to reframe what they said
- Say 'Ouch' if you are struggling to find the words to express yourself

RADIO (secondary schools) & **BUILD** (primary schools) can be used as tools to begin conversations about creating Safe, Brave & Equitable spaces. They can be used with groups to begin co-creating a framework for encounter. Or as an individual task / reflective tool.

USING RADIO AS AN ACTIONABLE TOOL

- I WILL SHOW RESPECT BY...
- I WILL SHOW ACTIVE LISTENING BY...
- I WILL COMMIT TO DIALOGUE NOT DEBATE BY...
- I WILL USE 'I' STATEMENTS SUCH AS...
- I WILL RESPOND TO 'OOPS' AND 'OUCH' MOMENTS BY ...

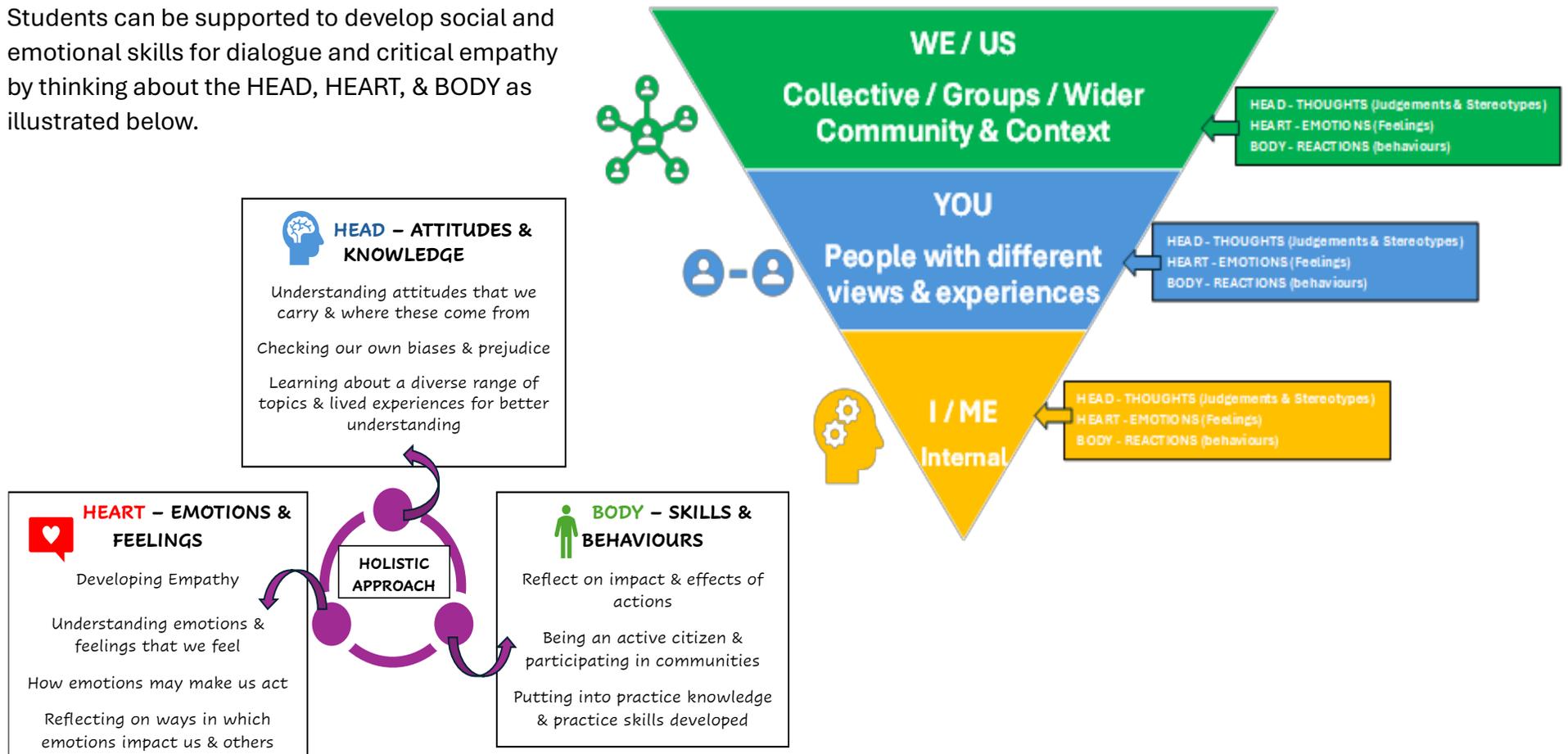
Some things to remember when creating spaces for dialogue about sensitive issues & current events

- Spaces cannot be truly safe but can be '**managed**'
- Co-create a '**Framework for Encounter**' (RADIO & BUILD can be helpful to start)
- Create regular, intentional spaces for **exploring, understanding and appreciating diverse perspectives, sensitivities, feelings and lived experiences**
- Encourage **recognition of topics and themes that might be difficult or sensitive**
- These encounters are about developing **skills to navigate and address** issues in the classroom and beyond, practice these throughout the school year
- A framework for encounter is different to school rules
- These spaces are about creating opportunities to understand that we all have **different ideas, personalities, experiences, & backgrounds** and to know & understand each other better.

4. A Holistic approach - encouraging students' critical thinking, resilience, empathy & appreciation for different viewpoints

Exploring sensitive topics provides a unique space in which multiple, complex and often conflicting viewpoints can be aired. With effective management, these conversations can be an excellent space for students to really experience and practice dealing with difference and diversity.

Students can be supported to develop social and emotional skills for dialogue and critical empathy by thinking about the HEAD, HEART, & BODY as illustrated below.



Exploration of the questions below can be done individually and then used as a reflective start for group / class dialogue (once safe, brave, and equitable spaces have been created):

**Ask the following when thinking of
I/ME**

HEAD: What do I think about the riots?
What has influenced my views? (past experiences / the people around me / social media / friends)
What do I know to be true about what I have seen and heard?
How do I know this to be true or factual?

HEART: How do I feel about the riots?
Why might I feel this way?

BODY: How have these feelings and thoughts made me act / behave?

**Ask the following when thinking of
YOU**

HEAD: What might other people think about the riots? How do I know this?
How could I find out more / hear from other people about their thoughts & experiences?
What might have influenced their views?
What alternative sources may others be using? How do we know that other sources are factual / true?

HEART: How might other people feel about the riots? How do I know this?
Why might they feel this way?

BODY: How have these feelings and thoughts made other people act / behave? What have I seen / heard to know this?

**Ask the following when thinking of
WE/US**

HEAD: What events / context might have led to the differing attitudes in communities / society?
What influences may have impacted on the events / context and experiences?
How do we know that other sources are factual / true?

HEART: How might communities / groups be feeling about the riots? How do we know this? Why might they feel this way?

BODY: What behaviours have we seen? (positive and negative) How have the riots affected communities / groups?
How have communities / groups come together for positive actions? What more could be done to help?

5. Developing Mindsets - Build confidence in dealing with difficult moments and turning them into opportunities for learning

A barrier to tackling sensitive topics can be not knowing how to respond. Changing how these moments are thought about can help to understand how to tackle them rather than avoid them. Difficult and charged moments can provide opportunities for learning something new, transforming the challenging into the meaningful.

HEAD & HEART - DEVELOPING MINDSETS

FROM	TO
Polarised over issues Lacking nuance Not wanting to lose identity	Understanding influences Critique own side Open mind about complexity
Fundamental differences which pose as stumbling blocks	No need to 'win' or agree Resolving to learn something
Overwhelmed due to conflicting stance Fear of engagement due to being unsure	Critical thinking Self-confidence
Difficult / strong emotions	Emotional Literacy & Empathy

HEAD & HEART - SKILLS DEVELOPED

The **skills** that can be learned through contentious conversations if we FACE challenges:

- F**lexibility & Resilience
- A**cceptance
- C**ritical Thinking & Confidence
- E**mpathy & Emotional Intelligence

BODY - ACTIONS

By opening up dialogue about controversial issues, we want to support students to **QUERY...**

- Q**uestion & challenge with sensitivity and empathy
- U**nderstand others and themselves
- E**nable & encourage a heightened awareness of the impact of context
- R**espect & value diversity and difference
- Y**es to dialogue!

Present the acronym QUERY to students before dialogue to explore what these may look like during dialogue & create a list of example behaviours, words & phrases. Connect this with the co-created safe, brave, & equitable principles agreed upon to further develop these into prompts or reminders displayed during dialogue.

The **I/ME – YOU – WE/US** pathway can be helpful here in developing mindsets. Using the questions below can help. They can be used for individual reflections; shared with teachers as an assessment of mindsets in class; used as a starting point to allow space for thoughts, feelings & behaviours before group dialogue; or questions during dialogue to encourage further thought, empathy and critical thinking.

**Ask the following when thinking of
I/ME**

HEAD: What are my core beliefs about this topic? Where might these come from / be influenced by? How do I know that this is true or factual? Why might it not be true or factual? What do I know to be true about what I have seen and heard? What are reliable sources to check facts and experiences?

HEART: How do I feel about the topic? Why might I feel this way? What might be the underlying emotions beneath these feelings? Do any aspects of my identity feel threatened or challenged?

BODY: How have these feelings and thoughts made me act / behave? Are there people that I have not spoken to or interacted with because of my beliefs? Are there ways in which I could speak to people with different beliefs? How does my body respond when feeling uncomfortable, or feeling strong negative emotions?

**Ask the following when thinking of
YOU**

HEAD: What might other people's core beliefs be about this topic? How do I know this? How could I find out more / hear from other people about their thoughts & experiences? What might have influenced their core beliefs? What alternative sources may others be using? How do we know that other sources are factual or not?

HEART: How might other people feel if this topic threatens their identity or core beliefs? How do I know this? Why might they feel this way? Can I relate to these feelings? Are there similar situations where I have felt this way?

BODY: How have these feelings and thoughts made other people act / behave? What have I seen / heard to know this? What might the impact of these behaviours be on this person? What has the impact been on me, if any? What actions might help to encourage more positive behaviour or support more positive experiences?

**Ask the following when thinking of
WE/US**

HEAD: What events / context might have led to the differing attitudes in communities / society? What might be the core beliefs of the groups and communities directly involved? What might influence these core beliefs / values? How do I know this? What sources do I use to make these judgements? What sources might these groups / communities use to make these judgements? How do we know that sources are factual / true?

HEART: How might communities / groups be feeling about this? How do we know this? Why might they feel this way? Are there groups / situations that I have been in that I have felt a similar way?

BODY: What behaviours have we seen? How have events affected communities / groups? How have communities / groups come together for positive actions? What more could be done to help? How can I share my own reflections and experiences and those of others that I have explored to help create a shared understanding of diverse lived experiences and beliefs?