

Taboos and Issues

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The authors

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Disclaimer

None of the material in this book is deliberately controversial. The publishers and the authors would like to make it clear that any views expressed are solely in personal classroom discussion and do not reflect their own personal views or attitudes. Teachers are encouraged to refer to the Introduction and use the rest of the book for guidance on handling the material.

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Introduction

Introduction

Teachers often complain that teaching materials are bland and devoid of the type topics we discuss in our daily lives. The title of this book suggests that the material covers controversial and difficult issues which students may be reluctant to discuss. Many of the issues are indeed controversial but the material is in no way intended to shock. In fact, the content closely resembles those we find in our newspapers every day.

There are good reasons why general classroom materials avoid topics which may lead to controversy or division in the classroom. However, many more experienced teachers recognise the educational value of materials which touch closely on the real world.

This book presents just such stimulating and relevant topics. These broad categories are:

1. culture such as swearing, talking about death and prostitution;
2. science issues such as nuclear and genetic engineering;
3. personal matters such as appearance, hygiene and smoking.

The material is not intended to form the basis of a course but a resource from which teachers can, with their students, select topics which interest them. The issues may only be used with classes you know well and where the students are mature enough to respect and treat both you and their fellow students. Even then, you must use the material sensibly. Individual students or members of their family or their friends may be immature, personal, even hostile, experience of some of the topics. In some cases, you may want to check it with an individual teacher before using a particular topic in class. It is essential that teachers remain alert for difficulties. If a particular issue becomes too sensitive, the teacher must be willing to abandon the topic and be prepared to move on to something completely different.

How it is organised

Most units follow this pattern:

left hand page: introductory discussion and use of cartoons
right hand page: language work and further discussion

Methodology

It is expected that this material will be used by experienced teachers. The teachers' notes, therefore, have been kept to a minimum and comprise only about notes, the answers, and occasional extra ideas.

Seeing to avoid the sensitive nature of many of the topics, we suggest it will usually be best to start by asking students to think silently about some of the questions before they are asked to say anything at all. They then work in pairs and small groups before the topic is opened up to the whole class.

In a similar way, with the reading texts, students often work in pairs, with each reading a different short text, which they then report to their partner, before the material is dealt with in the whole class. During individual or pair work, teachers often do 'language' tasks which help you judge whether and how the explicit can be opened up to a wider class discussion.

It goes without saying that, as the teacher, you should remain neutral throughout any discussion, seeking only to encourage students to express their views.

Teachers will often have strongly-held views and possibly avoid personal experiences which they are willing to share with the class. Instead, trying to engage students in this way is perhaps the prime purpose of the materials. While encouraging and helping them to express their views and experiences, you must, however, never lose sight of the fact that it is a language lesson and they must be in the best possible position to discuss or describe things about themselves with which they are in any way unhappy. A student who wishes to remain silent must have their right to do so respected.

Using the Internet

Because the topics are controversial and regularly in the news, it will almost always be easy to find related material by a quick search of the internet. Carefully testing news or other busy websites into a search engine will be sufficient to give you contemporary examples relevant to the topic.

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