



Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education

ISSN: 0305-7925 (Print) 1469-3623 (Online) Journal homepage: www.tandfonline.com/journals/ccom20

Teaching controversial issues in politically challenging times

Helen Hanna, Jason Cong Lin, Evgenia Efimova, Anton Abdul Fatah, Zafer Kuş & Chawin Pongpajon

To cite this article: Helen Hanna, Jason Cong Lin, Evgenia Efimova, Anton Abdul Fatah, Zafer Kuş & Chawin Pongpajon (20 Apr 2026): Teaching controversial issues in politically challenging times, Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education, DOI: [10.1080/03057925.2026.2650181](https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2026.2650181)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2026.2650181>



© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.



Published online: 20 Apr 2026.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 937



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

FORUM



OPEN ACCESS



Check for updates

Teaching controversial issues in politically challenging times

Helen Hanna^a, Jason Cong Lin^{ib}, Evgenia Efimova^c, Anton Abdul Fatah^d, Zafer Kuş^e and Chawin Pongpajon^f

^aManchester Institute of Education, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK; ^bEducation University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China; ^cDepartment of Education, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden; ^dCenter for Research on Peace and Development (CRPD), Faculty of Social Sciences, KU Leuven, Leuven, Belgium; ^eFaculty of Education, Ahi Evran University, Kırşehir, Turkey; ^fDepartment of Curriculum and Instruction, Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok, Thailand

ABSTRACT

This Forum explores how educators in schools and universities approach controversial issues in societies facing democratic decline, conflict, or political restriction. While open discussion is often seen as central to democratic education, teachers' capacity and willingness to address divisive topics depend greatly on their political and cultural contexts. Drawing on examples from Hong Kong, Russia, Turkey, Indonesia, Thailand, and other settings, the Forum brings together researchers working in or on illiberal environments to highlight the moral and professional dilemmas educators face. The contributions shed light on how teachers navigate questions of neutrality, safety, and risk, and how these choices reflect wider struggles over democracy. Through academic research as well as personal, reflective accounts, the Forum aims to deepen understanding of what it means to teach critically in politically challenging times, why such teaching matters for open dialogue, and what scholars of comparative and international education can do to support it.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 16 February 2026
Accepted 16 March 2026

KEYWORDS

Controversial; political; illiberal; citizenship; history; teachers

Introduction (Helen Hanna)

We are in a period of global democratic decline. Freedom House reported that 2025 marked the 19th year of this bleak regression away from democratic principles and commitment to a liberal society (Freedom House 2025) and V-Dem's academic freedom index has reflected a similar and related decline (V-Dem 2025). Alongside this, there remains a staunch belief in many societies that quality education in a multicultural society must incorporate some exposure to a variety of views on different topics, as well as an opportunity to deliberate over these topics in a constructive and democratic way; indeed it is seen as a lynchpin of democracy more broadly (Gutmann 1999; Torney-Purta 2002). The long-standing definition of a controversial issue is one on which society is 'clearly divided and significant groups within society advocate conflicting explanations

CONTACT Helen Hanna  helen.hanna@manchester.ac.uk  Manchester Institute of Education, University of Manchester, Ellen Wilkinson Building, Oxford Road, Manchester, UK

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way. The terms on which this article has been published allow the posting of the Accepted Manuscript in a repository by the author(s) or with their consent.

or solutions based on alternative values' (Stradling 1984, 9). While the obvious place for such discussions to happen is inside the History, Citizenship Education, Social Studies or Social Sciences classroom, controversial issues can come up in any place in a school or university, including in the 'home room' classroom or in third spaces in corridors and staff rooms. But despite this seemingly widespread agreement that teaching such topics is a 'good thing', the ability and willingness to include and debate such diverse views in the curriculum vary, particularly in societies experiencing conflict, social unrest or lack of civil and political freedom, where the role education *should* play in addressing societal problems and challenging the powerful is *not* agreed upon.

In research circles globally, the teaching of controversial issues has long been shown to be a concern (Cowan and Maitles 2012), but much of that research emanates from North America or focuses on developed democracies (e.g. Hess 2009; Ho et al. 2017). While there is a spotlight in some quarters placed on countries that are recognisably conflict-affected, there remains a clear lack of published research in illiberal or hybrid countries; this should not surprise us, given the heavy penalties that can be paid for speaking out in some contexts. This Forum piece brings to light some of these contexts and the immense challenges faced by teachers and those who research them.

Despite this research gap, we come to this Forum with an acknowledgement of key concepts in this field, and try to build on and contextualise them. For example, the willingness and ability of a teacher to deal with differences of opinion over controversial or contentious social and political issues can be understood as a spectrum in terms of 'risk-taking' (Fatah, Kuppens, and Langer 2023; Kitson and McCully 2005), influenced by teacher standpoint on whether or not to teach these issues, whether to share their own views, and whether to remain 'neutral' (Kelly 1986; Kuş and Öztürk 2019). The purposes of education, the curriculum and teachers themselves, expressed in policy or curriculum documents, and their diversity or lack of clarity further complicates these pedagogical decisions, as does the political climate in which the education system is located. In the conflict-affected societies of Northern Ireland and Israel, Hanna (2017, 2019) found that views on the citizenship education classroom ranged from viewing it as a 'safe space' for the discussion of issues that are at the centre of the historical conflict in both countries, to the stance that the classroom should offer a 'safe space' *sheltered from* consideration of issues that may cause disagreement or upset among students. In Cyprus, another 'divided' society, Zembylas and Kambani (2012) found that Greek-Cypriot teachers struggled to deal with controversial issues, and ultimately Zembylas (2015) has problematised the use of a 'pedagogy of discomfort' in such contexts. In Hong Kong, Chong et al. (2022) highlighted that, while some teachers feel that it is impossible to avoid controversial issues and that using them is educationally necessary, the space in schools for discussion of political contention has shrunk since the quashing of protests in 2019–20, and Hanna (2022) (as well as Lin 2025a) argues that this has worsened since the introduction of the 2020 National Security Law that imposes heavy penalties on those who are deemed to be 'unpatriotic' or who speak out against the government. Beyond structured classroom time, sometimes teachers have to react on the spur of the moment, and deal with controversial issues they would not normally do in their subject areas, such as was the case in Efimova's (2024, also a contributor to this Forum) hugely timely research with teachers in Russia just as Russia began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In brief, the task for teachers is conceptually complex.

In practice in the classroom, it comes down to something quite fundamental, which is about making often on-the-spot decisions about what to say and what not to say, or how to handle something unexpected. Teach controversial issues, or avoid them? Stay neutral, or take a strong partial stance? Follow the textbook narrative, or present an alternative perspective? Focus on the ‘global’, or focus on the national and local? Treat the classroom as a ‘safe space’ away from difficult topics, or as a ‘safe space’ for speaking openly? Develop a certain type of citizen, or leave space for multiple identities? Teachers make numerous decisions about their work every day. In these challenging political times in illiberal and conflict-affected societies, these decisions carry more weight than ever.

My own interest in this topic – which has grown from a mere intellectual curiosity to a deep and inescapable concern – springs from three things. Firstly, growing up in Northern Ireland, and realising when I came to my PhD studies in my late 20s that I didn’t know very much about the conflict in my home country, one which I grew up with. On reflection, I realised my education offered me very little by way of teaching about the conflict; indeed, it was seemingly a ‘controversial issue’, too sensitive to touch, perhaps not least because I am part of the group seen as the dominant, oppressing majority that has benefited from the societal divisions. Secondly, spending a formative time in Hong Kong following widespread pro-democracy protests after the National Security Law was introduced in 2020, and watching young protestors be imprisoned and student and staff trade unions disband. And thirdly, teaching students from illiberal countries at University of Manchester, where I wrestle constantly with questions over whether to teach issues that are controversial in their home contexts, when to push on a topic, when to drop it, how to respond to students’ critical questions, and how to manage discussions when you don’t know what students know about their country’s human rights record.. So, as a higher education practitioner, I have come to believe that in whichever context we teach and at whatever stage of education, we should take more time to think through these decisions outside of the classroom, to help prepare and guide us for what we will do in the classroom. But we should also know the risks that this may pose for us and others, and make our peace with the fact that our “on the spot” decisions may have consequences for our careers.

In this Compare Forum, we have come together as a group of people concerned about teaching controversial issues in challenging political times. While we all have an academic background, we have other, diverse professional identities: some of us are former teachers, others of us are or were government officials or NGO employees, and most of us now teach and research in universities. The collaboration came about when I was struggling in my search for articles on teaching controversial issues in illiberal contexts, and I found these authors. I contacted each of the authors to ask them to be part of a British Education Research Association conference symposium. Funding, visa and other issues meant that only a few of us could join the symposium, but nevertheless, the group was initiated. This Forum publication is the next stage in solidifying and sharing our concerns. Each contribution focuses on a different country context, in turn: Hong Kong, Russia, Indonesia, Turkey and Thailand. It highlights the gap in comprehensive literature focusing on societies that have been affected by political control, conflict and unrest. While each contribution is distinct and aims to highlight the nuances in their case, nevertheless, we agreed that each author would address the following questions: What issues are considered to be controversial in my context?; Are they

being taught?; What approaches are teachers taking to teaching them?; What determines whether a teacher teaches them? And what are the particular challenges in teaching controversial issues in politically challenging contexts and times? We also all take positionality seriously and so we have provided some insight into our own backgrounds, standpoints and motivations to contextualise our work.

We want this Forum to be helpful for those working in comparative and international education who are trying to make sense of what it means to continue under increasing constraints, as well as for those of us with relative privilege in terms of civil and political freedoms. Thus, I highlight here three summary points and recommendations which may be of use for further discussion with our colleagues and students in universities and even in schools. Firstly, the Forum contributions show that, fundamentally, children and young people are curious and want to talk and explore, regardless of whether such exploration is state-sanctioned through the education system. Denying them that right does not make those issues go away; rather it pushes them elsewhere in search of answers. So teachers are faced with very difficult situations in trying to meet students' needs while at the same time avoid reprimand – or worse – from their managers. Therefore, we argue that classrooms should maintain that prized position as a safe space where difficult issues can be discussed in an environment managed by a trained educator. Secondly, we must take care as CIE scholars not to mimic the authoritarian rulebook when we call for localisation in education research. While the contextualisation of education has long been a concern for CIE scholars and has, in my view, been an overwhelmingly positive movement, the idea of hyper-localisation has sometimes been harnessed by illiberal governments to argue against human rights as a 'Western' construct that does not apply in their contexts, thereby denying citizens their freedoms. Care should be taken over the language we use. My third and final point is perhaps the most challenging of all, and comes from what the Forum contributors have shared about their own positionalities and motivations. As Chawin Pongpajon asked in his contribution, how can an individual, in all good conscience, recommend that others speak out in risky environments, when they are not willing to do the same themselves in a relatively risk-free higher education climate? Like in relatively democratic countries, teachers in illiberal contexts are diverse, with various motivations and varying levels of training and capacity. Thus, in any context, some teachers will choose to avoid sensitive issues, and that is their prerogative. In focusing this Forum on illiberal settings, I do not wish to discount the current difficulties faced by those even in longstanding democracies like the UK (where this journal is published) who wish to support Palestine in the face of aggression by the Israeli military, on the one hand, and squeamishness of some UK universities towards student and staff demonstrations, on the other; nor the difficulties faced by US academics in continuing to push for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion against the backdrop of the overt anti-diversity drive championed by the current Administration. I only mean to highlight how easily even longstanding democracies can lose their way, and how autocracy can arrive by stealth if we do not keep careful watch (Applebaum 2024). Fundamentally, the comparison between contexts shows us what is valuable as it shows us what it looks like to lose it. Thus, as comparative and international education scholars and practitioners, especially those of us in relatively liberal contexts, I believe we should reach out and support educators who want to continue to teach controversial issues, offering whatever safety can be provided by our position. It is not enough to know our civil and political rights; we need to *claim* them, and help others to claim theirs too.

'Too Western' to teach controversy? Reassessing the debate in Hong Kong

Jason Cong Lin

Since the 1997 handover, national education in Hong Kong has been a site of recurring contestation. The 2012 proposal to introduce a compulsory *Moral and National Education* curriculum triggered large-scale public mobilisation by students, parents, and educators concerned about politicisation and a narrowing of viewpoints; the plan was subsequently shelved. Following the 2019 protests and the enactment of the National Security Law in 2020, the Education Bureau reconfigured civic education: national security education was infused across subjects; *Liberal Studies* was replaced by *Citizenship and Social Development* in 2021, with required Mainland study tours; and textbooks and school materials became subject to enhanced review. Recent policies and curriculum documents emphasise cultivating national identity, respect for law, and a 'correct' understanding of sensitive historical and political topics. In practice, these shifts signal a preference for presenting settled narratives and discouraging classroom treatment of politically sensitive content as open controversies (Lin 2025a, 2025b).

I write as a university assistant professor based in Hong Kong, who grew up and was educated in Mainland China. This vantage point has made me attentive to differences in how controversial civic topics are framed across contexts, and to the ongoing local appetite in Hong Kong for academically structured spaces to examine competing interpretations. Local demands for such space have been expressed through parent–student mobilisation during the 2012 curriculum controversy, teacher and school leader submissions during public consultations, university and community forums, and the widespread pre-2020 classroom practice of discussion-based inquiry in *Liberal Studies*. Research has documented students' and educators' interest in exploring contested historical events with balance and evidence, without turning classrooms into sites of political advocacy (Chong 2017). It is within this locally grounded context that I reassess the claim that treating national education topics as controversial is 'too Western'.

In Hong Kong, one central critique – mainly originating from government authorities – of teaching national education-related issues (e.g. patriotism, the colonial history of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong–Mainland China relationship) as controversial is that this approach relies heavily on Western liberal traditions of pursuing democracy, seeking political legitimacy, and cultivating students who are rational and independent (Yiu and Wu 2021). In these so-called Western approaches, individuals are treated as atomic and rational beings, fully capable of making independent judgements. Critics therefore argue that these Western approaches (1) do not reflect Chinese traditions and philosophies, which emphasise relational persons who always exist within communities at various levels, and (2) have the ulterior motive of using concepts such as 'developing critical thinking', 'upholding academic freedom and autonomy', and 'showing diverse perspectives' as a disguise to incite Hong Kong people's resistance to Chinese identity, China, and its authorities, thus endangering national security and Hong Kong's future (Lau 2023). Following this logic, as Hong Kong becomes more integrated into national development, the national (i.e. Mainland Chinese) approach to teaching controversial political issues – treating them as non-controversial and having clear and simple correct answers – should, it is argued, naturally be applied to Hong Kong, as it provides an approach that better aligns with Chinese tradition, fits the Hong Kong context, and

allows for fuller and smoother integration into national development (Lu 2025; Tsoi and Wai 2022).

However, is this really the case? Is discussing national education-related topics as controversial truly ‘too Western’? Must Hong Kong choose between the binary Western and national approaches? What are the views of local people on this matter? In this short piece, I argue that the above critique may have gone too far. My answers to these questions are straightforward: discussing national education-related topics does not necessarily mean being ‘too Western’; and Hong Kong does not need to choose between the binary Western and national approaches because discussing national education-related topics as controversial is a local demand and requirement. The voices of local people should be acknowledged and respected in the implementation of national education.

De-Westernisation in a previously colonised society like Hong Kong is understandable and laudable. Yet, this decolonisation effort, though well-intentioned, should not be used as a disguise for blind nationalism that neglects citizens’ basic rights to learn about the diversity of perspectives present in political reality and to express reasonable dissent. It may be reasonable to judge teaching controversial issues with the intention of political incitement – such as encouraging students to oppose Chinese authority, question its legitimacy, or advocate for Hong Kong independence – as inappropriate, since teachers are not political activists. However, when controversial issues are taught for academic discussion, with the aim of accurately and comprehensively understanding historical events and their causes so that past mistakes are less likely to be repeated, there is no good reason to label this as ‘Western’ (in government discourse, equivalent to ‘ill-intentioned’) and reject it. Some examples of national education-related issues suitable for academic discussion include: the pros and cons of different forms of patriotism in Mainland China and Hong Kong; the boundary between patriotism and nationalism, negative events in Chinese history (e.g. the Opium Wars, the Cultural Revolution, and the 1989 Tiananmen Square incident) and their rationales; the complex relationship between Mainland China and Hong Kong; the colonial history of Hong Kong; and the impact of the British colonial legacy. These issues are not directly linked to any single political view and can accommodate diverse interpretations. Teaching them as controversial is not intended to propagandise or engage in political demagoguery, but rather to use historical and social realities – replete with disagreement – as examples to acknowledge that mistakes have occurred, empowering students to learn from history, better understand the present (e.g. how and why did we get to where we are), and to build a more inclusive and just future.

In fact, teaching national/citizenship education-related issues as controversial has been a common practice in many Asian societies (e.g. Taiwan, South Korea, and Japan). For example, the history subject in Japan encourages students to analyse constitutional debates and war memory from multiple perspectives (Nozaki 2008). More importantly, it was implemented in Hong Kong prior to 2020 and represents a local demand and request. When criticising this approach as being ‘too Western’, we should always ask what local people think about it. If this approach were being demanded in Hong Kong simply because some Westerners had come and criticised Hong Kong for lacking the climate for teaching controversial issues, and required Hong Kong to change, then one could argue this approach is ‘too Western’. However, when local people collectively demand this limited space to teach controversial issues, it is difficult to justify

dismissing this as ‘too Western’. Of course, critics can always claim that local people are influenced or even brainwashed by some nefarious Western forces and have adopted Western political ideologies without realising it (Lau 2023). Yet, even if this is the case, the best way for the public to realise that they are ‘brainwashed’ by Western forces is to provide them with competing views and demonstrate why one perspective is preferable to others, rather than only presenting a single perspective and stating, ‘this is the only perspective you should believe’. After all, is not the latter method of combating Western ‘brainwashing’ simply another form of brainwashing? Or, as critics might argue, is Chinese nationalist ‘brainwashing’ itself justifiable and not subject to critical evaluation (which, again, might be classified as a Western element, as it involves ‘critical’ reasoning)?

Having grown up in China, I have witnessed how the space for teaching controversial issues has progressively narrowed, and how some people have suffered as a result while others have become accustomed to or supportive of this approach. Seeing similar critiques emerge in Hong Kong’s discourse has been alarming. As my grandmother used to say, we all have our mission in this world: if something unfair or unjust troubles you, face it until you find your mission. Defending a responsible space for teaching controversial national education-related issues in Hong Kong is, for me, that mission.

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine as a classroom controversy in Russia

Evgenia Efimova

What makes a political issue controversial? To follow Hess and McAvoy (2014), three criteria can be used to answer this question: behavioural (students in the class actually disagree), epistemic (several reasonable answers exist), and politically authentic (debated in the realm of public politics in a given context), with the latter criterion being somewhat favoured in the field of civic education. This political authenticity, however, presupposes the existence of free and competitive public politics, where political issues are articulated and discussed from multiple perspectives. This liberal representation of public politics is probably misleading even for flourishing Western democracies, as it ignores built-in inequalities and hegemonic order (e.g. Knowles and Clark 2018). I believe it may be totally inadequate when applied to places less fortunate. What is a politically authentic controversy when there is no public politics, i.e. when political competition is either non-existing or orchestrated by an authoritarian power?

The full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 as a domestic political issue in Russia illustrates this problem well. On the one hand, from the very beginning, school teachers were treated as instrumental in pro-war propaganda efforts, which, along with criminalisation of ‘discrediting the Russian army’ and other repressive laws, suggested that the invasion is not an issue up for public debate. On the other hand, the invasion was met with very diverse responses in the general population. Teachers found themselves in a difficult situation. My colleague and I, then employed by a university in Moscow, decided to investigate it and did 26 interviews with teachers and school leadership in the first month of the invasion.

Although I have always been interested in democratic civic education, first as a student activist and then as a school teacher, my academic work back then focused on totally

different topics. Those interviews started as a genuine and personal attempt to understand the people around me and their actions. Leaving Russia allowed me to pursue my interest in civic education in an academic setting, starting with these interviews (Efimova 2024). That safety offered critical distance but also the risk of an ivory-tower arrogance towards practitioners making hard everyday decisions inside Russia. I therefore aimed to keep my tone descriptive rather than moralising and to place individual choices in their structural context.

As always happens, different teachers did different things. While some approaches we observed have been described in many other studies – which I refer to as avoidance, democratic civics, and political proselytism (see, e.g. Flensner 2020; Hess 2009; Kello 2016) – the other two approaches (emotion- and relation-focused) are not discussed as much, although they highlight something crucial about school realities in the context of autocracy.

The emotion-focused approach was mostly found in the earlier interviews, when the fact of the invasion was not yet fully processed and rationalised and emotions were indeed heightened. Teachers who implemented this approach took students' feelings seriously and did their best to support their well-being and preserve the social fabric of the community by creating an open classroom climate. While student-centred and genuinely humanistic, these teachers also depoliticised the issue, treating it like a natural disaster that requires stoicism and empathy, but not political engagement, and tried to bring attention to a superficial (though still important) common ground (see also Pollak et al. 2018). To use a distinction made in the introduction of the article, they created a space that is 'safe from' politics – a deliberate strategy also called 'an island of stability' in professional discussions in Russia at the time. They managed to talk about the issue without actually talking about it, but also without explicit avoidance. I do not want to say that this approach is always problematic, I believe it might have been appropriate in those early days. The problem is that this 'emotional band aid' was never followed by something more substantial that would transform students' personal feelings into political passions (Ruitenberg 2009). Instead, it served to reinforce depoliticisation as a key component of Russian authoritarianism.

In contrast, the relation-focused approach could address the politics of the issue directly, but with a distinct purpose – building teacher–student relationships through political disclosure in informal conversations. Being 'not afraid to talk' was a desirable feature of teacher identity for those who used this approach, but at the same time these teachers tended to have very 'safe' political views. They supported an open climate in the 'grey areas' of school and managed to maintain trusting relationships with their liberally inclined students, at least in those early days. However, by keeping the discussion private, this approach also aligned with the logic of authoritarianism that allows some debate as long as it is not public and does not lead anywhere.

To return to my original question, this case demonstrates how, within an authoritarian context, a controversial issue can simultaneously be framed as both open and settled. Students are allowed to have different feelings and thoughts about a political decision and they may even exchange them, as long as they do it privately and accept that decision as a fact. Treating the issue as open and public required turning the classroom into an alternative, idealised public space that is not actually authentic to the broader political context.

Despite risks and challenges that come with it, some teachers I talked to tried to create such a space in their classroom. I believe high professional status and strong school community can be key factors that allowed those teachers to follow their political commitment. Another aspect was availability of subject content that helps to process the ongoing events. All the teachers who reported having deep and honest discussions used their role as subject teachers as an ‘identity cover’ (Beck 2019) and relied on subject content, be it a pacifistic pamphlet by Tolstoy in a literature class or checks and balances in social studies. The ability to understand the potential of their subject and to find external legitimacy in the curriculum allowed them to address the issue within the frame of the lesson, going beyond the private realm.

In this research, I tried to capture a unique moment for teacher agency – a crack in the pre-invasion normalcy, marked by uncertainty about the rules of the game on the one hand and intense emotional pressure on the other, be it confusion, despair, or excitement. Four years on, as the shock of the invasion has faded both institutionally and emotionally, I believe more teachers would gravitate towards avoidance as a sustainable strategy, with only occasional private conversations in line with the relation-focused approach

Teaching on the edge: risk-taking and avoidance in peace education practices in Ambon, Indonesia

Anton Abdul Fatah

In divided societies, peace education carries both urgency and complexity. It offers a way to address the legacies of violence, rebuild social trust, and foster critical understanding among new generations. In post-conflict contexts such as Ambon, Indonesia, the classroom becomes more than a site of learning; it becomes a fragile space where collective memories, moral responsibilities, and hopes for reconciliation intersect. The challenge lies in how teachers interpret these demands – when to speak, when to remain silent, and how to teach peace in communities still marked by division.

Indonesia’s pluralism – with more than 300 ethnic groups and around 700 languages – creates both richness and tension. Ambon exemplifies this duality. Once celebrated as *Ambon Manise* (‘Sweet Ambon’) for its harmony between Christian and Muslim residents, the city suffered devastating intercommunal violence between 1999 and 2002 (Al Qurtuby 2016). The conflict destroyed not only physical infrastructure but also long-standing interreligious relationships. Two decades later, the local government’s slogan, *Laboratorium Perdamaian Dunia* (‘Global Peace Laboratory’), symbolises an ongoing process of rebuilding and learning from the past.

My research focused on Ambonese teachers, many of whom experienced the conflict as young adults and are now responsible for educating a post-conflict generation. There is no official curriculum addressing Ambon’s violent past, yet the traces of conflict permeate school life. Teachers, as public servants and moral figures, must decide how to handle those memories in their classrooms. Their decisions reveal much about the possibilities and limits of peace education.

Interviews with teachers, local leaders, and policymakers revealed that educators play a central role in shaping collective memory. Schools remain largely segregated along

religious lines, and teachers often work within communities that expect discretion and restraint. Some teachers openly discuss past violence, emphasising forgiveness and coexistence. Others avoid the topic entirely, fearing misunderstanding or renewed tension. Both approaches reflect the constant ethical and emotional labour inherent in peace education.

Those who take risks in addressing sensitive histories resemble what Kitson and McCully (2005) term ‘risk-taking teachers’ – educators who engage with controversy as part of democratic learning. They use discussion, storytelling, and local history projects to encourage empathy among students. One teacher remarked, ‘If we do not speak, students will learn silence’. This statement encapsulates what Zembylas and Loukaidis (2021) describe as *pedagogies of risk* – teaching practices that confront discomfort and uncertainty as essential to reconciliation. Such teachers embody the transformative potential of education: they treat peace not as a topic to be taught but as a relational practice enacted daily in their classrooms.

However, avoidance does not necessarily indicate resistance to peacebuilding. For many teachers, silence represents a form of care and self-protection. Discussing the conflict can provoke emotional distress, especially among students whose families remain divided across religious lines. In these cases, silence may preserve classroom harmony and prevent further trauma. Epstein and Peck (2017) argue that educators working with ‘difficult histories’ operate within constrained spaces, where ethical judgement and emotional safety must coexist.

I come from West Java, where teaching has long been part of my family tradition. That background has shaped my belief in education’s capacity to nurture both intellect and empathy. Conducting research in Ambon allowed me to examine how Indonesian teachers confront moral and emotional dilemmas in the pursuit of peace within diverse and fractured communities. My position as an Indonesian scholar from outside Ambon shaped how I understood these dynamics. My training in peace and conflict studies had encouraged me to see education as a transformative force (Davies 2017). In practice, however, transformation often emerged in my research not through dramatic interventions but through quiet, persistent acts: a teacher pairing students of different faiths, or refusing to perpetuate stereotypes. These small gestures revealed that peace education thrives in ordinary moments rather than in grand theoretical formulations.

Local teachers in my research repeatedly expressed a need for institutional and emotional support. Many requested training to help them facilitate dialogue, manage trauma-related responses, and address sensitive histories without fear of reprisal. These concerns align with findings from Horner et al. (2015) and Sayed et al. (2018), who emphasise that teachers in post-conflict societies require professional development that combines pedagogical, psychosocial, and intercultural competencies. Effective peace education, therefore, must not only focus on content but also on teacher well-being and reflective capacity. Partnerships among schools, universities, and civil society can strengthen these dimensions, creating collaborative frameworks for peacebuilding through education.

Ambon’s experience offers valuable insight into the broader Indonesian context. Teachers’ practices, whether risk-taking or cautious, illustrate the fine balance between confronting the past and sustaining social stability. Their work highlights that peace education is not confined to policy frameworks or formal curricula but is enacted

through daily acts of teaching and caring. It is within these small, context-specific efforts that reconciliation gains substance.

Reflecting on this research, I am convinced that the sustainability of peace in Indonesia depends on teachers' capacity to foster critical empathy and moral reflection. Education must move beyond avoidance or idealism towards an honest engagement with history's difficult lessons. The task of teaching on the edge – between risk and avoidance – is not easy, but it is precisely where peace education finds its strength. Teachers in Ambon show that peace is not a static achievement but a continuous process of learning, questioning, and rebuilding relationships across divides.

From public heat to classroom hush: controversial issues in Turkish classrooms

Zafer Kuş

As a social studies educator and researcher, I have spent more than two decades examining how teachers approach democracy, politics, citizenship, and identity in the classroom. My professional journey from teaching to academia has placed me squarely between policymakers' ambitions for the curriculum and teachers' everyday dilemmas at the chalkface. I therefore recognise – much as in many parts of the world – that adopting a critical stance within Türkiye's academic milieu can at times entail professional or personal risks. Even so, I believe these experiences must be made visible. In a period marked by anti-democratic practices, regional conflicts, mass migration, and global challenges, the importance of educating democratic citizens is more vital than ever. In this spirit, and drawing on the Turkish case, I contend that documenting and opening up to discussion the distinctive difficulties teachers encounter in classrooms is essential. This idea, which first sprouted from Dr Hanna's conference invitation (for which I extend my thanks), has now become a valuable opportunity to present the Turkish context and to discuss it comparatively across many countries.

Türkiye offers a rich, multilayered setting for studying the teaching of controversial issues. This richness is nourished both by historical ruptures and contemporary socio-political developments. With the proclamation of the Republic in 1923 after the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, secularism and national identity were placed at the centre of the education system. Since the Republic's founding, efforts to build a democratic, secular society have continued – with interruptions and fluctuations. While the early 2000s saw a strengthened orientation towards the European Union, subsequent years witnessed a more centralised, supervisory political climate foregrounding references to the Turkish-Islamic heritage. Today, the secular republican legacy and religious-conservative sensitivities are simultaneously palpable. This dual tension directly shapes which topics are discussed in classrooms, how they are discussed, and to what depth. Moreover, Türkiye's geography situates it at the heart of migration flows, rendering multiculturalism, identity formation, and social cohesion highly contested themes. The mass arrival of Syrian refugees, gender inequality, religion–state relations and ethnic identities, recent coups and debates about authoritarianism – these all figure, directly or indirectly, among the most salient controversial issues that surface in educational settings.

Türkiye's historical, cultural, and socio-political layering provides a fertile 'laboratory' for research on citizenship education. Across numerous studies I have conducted on controversial issues, I have focused from an educational perspective on three core questions: (1) Which publicly debated issues cross the classroom threshold, and to what depth are they discussed? (2) To what extent are these discussions used to cultivate students' democratic citizenship competencies? (3) What are teachers' competencies and the challenges they face in this area? We have carried out many studies, at different times, with different methods, on the stakeholders of this issue. Each generated distinct findings. Yet as I revisited this body of work while preparing this forum piece, I realised some common and coherent conclusions about the whole.

Our classroom observations show that certain agenda items often enter lessons at unplanned moments. The issues most frequently discussed cluster around democracy; environmental pollution and natural disasters; human rights; historical events; the education system; the internet and digital culture; violence; foreign policy; and justice. What they share is an ease of connection to the curriculum and a perception of lower pedagogical risk. By contrast, high-tension themes such as the judiciary, corruption, ethnic identity/the Kurdish question, the 'deep state,' party closures, elections, religious communities, and evolution/creationism either do not enter the classroom at all or are addressed only very briefly (Kuş and Öztürk 2019). Teachers tend to open such topics only when they can build a solid curricular bridge and feel confident about the classroom's safe climate. In short, items that 'spontaneously' enter the classroom pass through a selective filter. Many subjects considered 'highly sensitive' in Türkiye – treated as taboos – either never cross the classroom threshold or appear fleetingly and then vanish.

My experience highlights two primary reasons for this pattern in the Turkish context. The first is (1) the political and social climate: fluctuations in Türkiye's political environment directly influence teachers' decisions about which topics they can address in class and which they will pass over in silence. In particular, rising political polarisation over the past decade, debates about authoritarianism, and the state's ideological orientations appear to have made the handling of controversial issues riskier than ever from teachers' perspective. In this climate, teachers often adopt silence as a pedagogical strategy and display an inclination to avoid controversial topics. This atmosphere strengthens a conservative understanding of citizenship among teachers while diminishing the visibility of liberal and especially critical orientations (Kuş and Doğu 2025).

On the other hand, the challenges generated by the political climate are not limited to state-level pressures. Parental and community expectations, students' political sensitivities, and the strong influence of media also produce additional constraints on what teachers feel able to bring into the classroom. In a recent study conducted with parents, we found a strong consensus around the view that the primary function of schooling is the transmission of 'values education'. These values are largely articulated around national values (such as patriotism, social cohesion, and respect for authority) and moral values (including faith-based ethical sensitivities and traditional norms). A shared expectation underpinning these views is that children should be raised as individuals who are 'beneficial to their country and society'. Notably, there is substantial societal support for the teaching of national and religious values in schools. By contrast, when it comes to controversial political issues, parents tend to oppose their inclusion in classroom

discussions, expressing concerns about the potential imposition of teachers' personal views and the risk of conflict within the classroom (Kuş and Ozan 2025). In another study with 595 social studies teachers, we found that attitudes and self-efficacy alone do not explain teachers' intentions to address controversial issues; the strongest predictors are subjective norms such as parental and administrative expectations, the local climate, and the broader political atmosphere (Kuş, Elvan, and Demirkol, [in review](#)).

It is not possible to explain the Turkish case through ideological reasons alone. The second influential factor shaping answers to our three questions concerns teachers' pedagogical competence for teaching controversial issues. The effects of this factor parallel findings in the international literature. Even when teachers have forged a direct connection to the curriculum and are confident about a safe classroom climate, they often end discussions without fully exploring the topic or deliberately linking it to the development of democratic values and skills. We observed over 8 weeks in three classes that lessons were predominantly teacher-centred, with factual recall eclipsing analysis or counter-argument, brief improvised dialogues, and rapid closure driven by exam pressures and design gaps (Kuş and Yakar 2021).

The fluctuating place of controversial issues in Türkiye's curriculum helps complete the picture. The 2005 reform, inspired by constructivist ideas, appeared to open space for such topics. The 2018 update retained the label 'controversial issues,' yet left some uncertainty about which topics would qualify. The 2024 curriculum reform, framed as 'skills-based,' places greater emphasis on national and moral values, national identity, and respect for authority, without explicitly allocating space for controversial issues. This shift aligns with parental framings in our recent study, where schooling was primarily seen as responsible for transmitting national and religious/moral values, rather than addressing controversial political issues. In this context, stepping beyond the prescribed programme may feel risky for teachers, which can narrow pedagogical creativity and, at times, contribute to pedagogical self-censorship.

Returning to the three guiding questions for the Turkish case yields, albeit tentatively, a set of insights: (1) Of the topics heatedly debated in the public sphere, only those that are easily linked to the curriculum and perceived as low-risk tend to enter the classroom. High-tension issues either never enter or are treated briefly and superficially. (2) Discussions that do surface in class often close quickly along an axis of information transmission and risk management; as a result, their capacity to nurture democratic citizenship skills – critical thinking, plural perspectives, and deliberation – remains limited. (3) Teachers' competencies and the challenges they face are shaped by intersecting pressures: a shrinking curricular/policy space that leaves limited room for controversial issues, alongside subjective norms (e.g. parental/community expectations) and micro-pedagogical shortcomings. For progress in the Turkish context, the keys are to safeguard academic freedom, systematically support pedagogical competencies, and strengthen the institutional/public frameworks that protect teachers. In this way, the classroom can cease to be a space that avoids sensitive issues and become, instead, an evidence-based, pluralistic, and genuinely democratic learning environment.

Teaching controversial issues in conflict affected southern Thailand: the thinkable, but unteachable pedagogy and the researcher's ethical dilemma

Chawin Pongpajon

While Thailand has been globally known as the 'land of smiles', very few know that in southern Thailand (ST), there has been a conflict between the Malay-Muslim minority and the Thai-Buddhist state for centuries. The Anglo-Thai Treaty in 1909 brought about the annexation of the Patani kingdom (McCargo 2008). The Thai state's lack of cultural sensitivity over the differences between ethno-religions has led to the oppression of Malay-Muslims in terms of language, religion, politics, history and education, driving violent clashes between them (Jitpiromsri, Waitoolkiat, and Chambers 2019; McCargo 2008). Despite state attempts to remedy the situation through providing socio-economic developmental programmes for Malay-Muslims as part of its counterinsurgency strategy, the situation has waxed and waned, and the insurgent movements have continued. For the last 21 years, the military and insurgent operations as well as independent incidents have left 7755 dead and 14,731 injured (Deep South Watch 2025).

It is within this very challenging context that education has evolved. Secular and Islamic religious educational establishments have been targeted and attacked by the state and the insurgents both violently and structurally (Pherali 2023; Pongpajon 2018). Teaching history has been particularly controversial and a battlefield between both sides to disseminate historical narratives of glorification and victimisation, thus promoting their own political ideology across supporters. In such a situation, I believe that teaching controversial issues is needed as the critical space for raising and learning about the issues (Ho et al. 2017), and that this supports peacebuilding education through developing critical thinking, empowering marginalised voices, (re-)building relationships and truth seeking and recovery (Bush and Saltarelli 2000; UNICEF 2019).

However, despite this promising idea, this section, based on my experiences in the field as an early-career researcher working with schools and teachers amidst the conflict, reflects my thoughts on teaching controversial issues in ST as *the thinkable but unteachable*. I will discuss this point through the lens of ethical dilemmas in the practice of researching teaching controversial issues in ST.

Despite an increase in promoting discussion of the contested history and root causes of conflict through local activities, social media and scholarships, teaching controversial issues in ST is still problematic and faces a stalemate. Based on my own contextual analysis, key to this problem is that the meaning and objective of teaching controversial issues held by the state on the one hand, and the insurgents on the other, are divergent: aiming at legitimising their reasons for using violence, promoting national security or mobilising independence rather than promoting truth-seeking/recovery discussions and peaceful-coexistence. Consequently, neither of these two key conflicting actors seem accept the 'evidence' or arguments of the other.

Within such a context, teachers, regardless of ethno-religion, mentioned many kinds of fears in relation to teaching controversial issues. There is fear of the state, where the military and its national security agendas often violently and unlawfully attack the insurgents or even those suspected of being insurgents, even though they are often later found not guilty. If the schools are held in suspicion, then they can lose funding. And there is also fear of the insurgent due to indiscriminate deadly

attacks or deliberate targeting. Schools that do not co-operate with the insurgents can be attacked. They could be targeted if their actions discourage the narratives used to mobilise nationalist independence. This means that teaching controversial issues that encompass both sides and, indeed, multiple perspectives, is perceived as highly risky. It is a common understanding in ST that people should not talk about Patani history or conflict in public. If they do so, they may find that a plastic bag filled with rice and eggs gets hung on their front door as a warning to shut up; otherwise, they might be killed. Or they could find their house forcibly entered by the military. These events really happened, and have reinforced fear and distrust amongst people. With this personal understanding, a challenging question for me in terms of teaching controversial issues in ST is, thus, not about to teach or not to teach, but about people's safety in terms of themselves, schools, students and their parents.

By closed looking at the case, one of my critical questions as a researcher – being a Thai-Buddhist outsider working at a university whose founder played a significant role in incorporating Patani, but now finding myself in the paradoxical position of urging its people to promote peace for the state, ethnicity and language they perceive as not fully theirs – is: Is it ethical to promote teaching controversial issues as an obligatory practice that schools and teachers must implement for the sake of peace, if I am not the one who bears the risk? As some teachers have challenged me: 'Why don't you walk the talk instead of talking about the walk when you speak about courage, but we are the ones who must face the risks and consequences alone?'

This question exposes a profound ethical tension in promoting peacebuilding education in reality. While I recognise that teaching controversial issues is critical for nurturing critical thinking, empathy and reconciliation, I argue that such pedagogy must be embedded within a safety and support system. This includes carefully designed frameworks for how to approach sensitive topics, how to talk about them safely and constructively, and how to start from less sensitive or more distant contested issues as preparation for teachers and students to think beyond fear and binaries.

In contexts where death, threat or surveillance are part of lived reality, suggesting (or implicitly forcing) that teachers should implement such risky pedagogies may be perceived as asking them to sacrifice their own safety or rights for the sake of achieving academic ideals. Therefore, I believe that working or researching in this field is not only about addressing the conflict and exploring pathways to peace but also about caring for the people whose lives are deeply entangled in that conflict. I insist that their lives are far more valuable than our theoretical imaginations or research ambitions. So I conclude: for teaching controversial issues in conflict-affected areas to be successful and sustainable, it must be grounded in contextual empathy, mutual protection and gradual empowerment to ensure that it does not become another form of imposition or symbolic violence, but a shared human practice with minimal loss.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Jason Cong Lin  <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-6971-0375>

References

- Al Qurtuby, S. 2016. "Religious Violence and Conciliation in Indonesia: Christians and Muslims in the Moluccas." *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 39 (1): 135–155. <https://doi.org/10.1355/cs39-1k>.
- Applebaum, A. 2024. *Autocracy, Inc.* London: Allen Lane.
- Beck, T. A. 2019. "Managing an Unpopular Opinion in a Controversial Political Issue Discussion." *Theory and Research in Social Education* 47 (2): 205–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2018.1551165>.
- Bush, K. D., and D. Saltarelli. 2000. *The Two Faces of Education in Ethnic Conflict: Towards a Peacebuilding Education for Children*. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre.
- Chong, E. K.-M. 2017. *From Citizenship Education to National Education: Perceptions of National Identity and National Education of Hong Kong's Secondary School Teachers*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Chong, E.K.-M., J. Hu, H.H.-H. Tang, E. C.-K. Cheng, I. Davies, Y.-W. Leung, and S. C.-F. Hung. 2022. "Hong Kong Secondary School Teachers' Pedagogical Approaches to Controversial Issues at a Time of Social and Political Turmoil." *Teacher Development* 26 (1): 34–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2021.1981427>.
- Cowan, P., and H. Maitles. 2012. *Teaching Controversial Issues in the Classroom: Key Issues and Debates*. London: Continuum.
- Davies, L. 2017. "Justice-Sensitive Education: The Implications of Transitional Justice Mechanisms for Teaching and Learning." *Comparative Education* 53 (3): 333–350. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2017.1317999>.
- Deep South Watch. 2025. "DSW – CID Conflict Incident Database," August 31. Accessed October 5. <https://deepsouthwatch.org/th>.
- Efimova, E. 2024. "Russian Teachers Dealing With the Full-Scale Invasion of Ukraine as a Classroom Issue." *Journal of Social Science Education* 23 (2). <https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-6852>.
- Epstein, T., and C. L. Peck, eds. 2017. *Teaching and Learning Difficult Histories in International Contexts*. 1st ed. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Fatah, A. A., L. Kuppens, and A. Langer. 2023. "Discerning Risk-Takers from Avoiders: Which Teachers Are More Likely to Support Teaching About the Violent Past in Ambon, Indonesia?" *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice* 19 (3): 510–531. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17461979231179142>.
- Flensner, K. K. 2020. "Dealing With and Teaching Controversial Issues—Teachers' Pedagogical Approaches to Controversial Issues in Religious Education and Social Studies." *Acta Didactica Norden* 14 (4): 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.5617/adno.8347>.
- Freedom House. 2025. *Freedom in the World 2025: The Uphill Battle to Safeguard Rights*. Washington, DC: Freedom House. <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/2025/uphill-battle-to-safeguard-rights>.
- Gutmann, A. 1999. *Democratic Education*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Hanna, H. 2017. "Dealing with Difference in the Divided Educational Context: The Cases of Northern Ireland and Israel." *Compare: A Journal of International and Comparative Education* 47 (1): 17–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2015.1119649>.
- Hanna, H. 2019. *Young People's Rights in the Citizenship Education Classroom*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hanna, H. 2022. "Global Citizenship Education: The Search for Global Cohesion." In *Soft Skills and Hard Values: Meeting 21st Century Challenges*, edited by K. J. Kennedy, M. Pavlova, and J. C. K. Lee, 71–92. Abingdon: Routledge.

- Hess, D. E. 2009. *Controversy in the Classroom: The Democratic Power of Discussion*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Hess, D. E., and P. McAvoy. 2014. *The Political Classroom: Evidence and Ethics in Democratic Education*. London: Routledge.
- Ho, L.-C., P. McAvoy, D. Hess, and B. Gibbs. 2017. "Teaching and Learning About Controversial Issues and Topics in the Social Studies: A Review of the Research." In *The Wiley Handbook of Social Studies Research*, edited by M. M. Manfra and C. B. Bolick, 321–335. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley.
- Horner, L., L. Kadiwal, Y. Sayed, A. Barrett, N. Durrani, and M. Novelli. 2015. *Literature Review: Youth Agency, Peacebuilding, and Education*. Brighton: University of Sussex, Centre for International Education. <https://educationanddevelopment.wordpress.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/11/youth-literature-review.pdf>.
- Jitpiromsri, S., N. Waitoolkiat, and P. Chambers. 2019. "Special Issue: Quagmire of Violence in Thailand's Southern Borderlands-Chapter 1: Introduction." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 45 (2): 43–55. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00927678.2018.1555924>.
- Kello, K. 2016. "Sensitive and Controversial Issues in the Classroom: Teaching History in a Divided Society." *Teachers & Teaching* 22 (1): 35–53. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2015.1023027>.
- Kelly, T. E. 1986. "Discussing Controversial Issues: Four Perspectives on the Teacher's Role." *Theory and Research in Social Studies* 19 (2): 113–138. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.1986.10505516>.
- Kitson, A., and A. McCully. 2005. "'You Hear About it for Real in School': Avoiding, Containing, and Risk-Taking in the History Classroom." *Teaching History* 120 (120): 32–37. <http://uir.ulster.ac.uk/14812/1/TH4.pdf>.
- Knowles, R. T., and C. H. Clark. 2018. "How Common is the Common Good? Moving Beyond Idealistic Notions of Deliberative Democracy in Education." *Teaching & Teacher Education* 71:12–23. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2017.12.002>.
- Kuş, Z., and B. Doğu. 2025. "Sensemaking of Citizenship Norms by Teachers in Turkey: Conservative, Liberal, or Critical?" *Citizenship Teaching and Learning* 20 (3): 301–318. <https://doi.org/10.1177/17461979241240451>.
- Kuş, Z., Ö. Elvan, and S. Demirkol. *in review*. *Controversial Issues in the Classroom: Exploring Social Studies Teachers' Intentions and Behaviors Using the Theory of Planned Behavior*.
- Kuş, Z., and H. Ozan. 2025. "Should School Be a Political Site? Concerns of Turkish Parents." *Journal of International Social Studies* 15 (2): 24–48. <https://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/2025-11/JISS-Nov25-24.pdf>.
- Kuş, Z., and D. Öztürk. 2019. "Social Studies Teachers' Opinions and Practices Regarding Teaching Controversial Issues." *Australian Journal of Teacher Education* 44 (8): 18–31. <https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2019v44n8.2>.
- Kuş, Z., and H. Yakar. 2021. "Sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerinin demokrasiye yönelik inançları ve sınıf içi uygulamaları." *Ahi Evran Üniversitesi Kırşehir Eğitim Fakültesi Dergisi* 22 (1): 332–371. <https://doi.org/10.29299/kefad.929595>.
- Lau, S.-K. 2023. "Patriotic Education and Hong Kong." *Ta Kung Pao*, July 31. <https://www.cahkms.org/HKMAC/indexMac/goWzxxDetail?id=630B8484DD3F42BAA39BAC2984B3278E&dm=04>.
- Lin, J. C. 2025a. *National Education in Hong Kong in the New Era*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lin, J. C. 2025b. "Navigating Red Lines: Political Risk Management and National Education in Hong Kong's Universities." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*: 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2025.2587641>.
- Lu, J. T. K. 2025. "Hong Kong Teachers Allegedly Told to Avoid US Independence Day Events." *The Guardian*, June 20. Accessed July 28. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/20/hong-kong-teachers-allegedly-told-to-avoid-us-independence-day-events>.
- McCargo, D. 2008. *Tearing Apart the Land: Islam and Legitimacy in Southern Thailand*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Nozaki, Y. 2008. *War Memory, Nationalism, and Education in Postwar Japan*. Abingdon: Routledge.

- Pherali, T. 2023. "Social Justice, Education and Peacebuilding: Conflict Transformation in Southern Thailand." *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education* 53 (4): 710–727. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2021.1951666>.
- Pollak, I., A. Segal, A. Lefstein, and A. Meshulam. 2018. "Teaching Controversial Issues in a Fragile Democracy: Defusing Deliberation in Israeli Primary Classrooms." *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 50 (3): 387–409. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2017.1397757>.
- Pongpajon, C. 2018. "The States and Problems of Peacebuilding Education Development of Government Schools in 3 Southernmost Provinces of Thailand" [สภาพปัญหาในการพัฒนาการศึกษาเพื่อสร้างสันติสุขของโรงเรียนรัฐบาลในพื้นที่สามจังหวัดชายแดนภาคใต้]. *Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities* 44 (2): 116–157.
- Ruitenbergh, C. W. 2009. "Educating Political Adversaries: Chantal Mouffe and Radical Democratic Citizenship Education." *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 28 (3): 269–281. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11217-008-9122-2>.
- Sayed, Y., N. Carrim, A. Badroodien, Z. McDonald, and M. Singh, eds. 2018. *Learning to Teach in Post-Apartheid South Africa: "Student Teachers" Encounters with Initial Teacher Education*. Stellenbosch: African Sun Media. <https://doi.org/10.18820/9781928357971>.
- Stradling, R. 1984. "The Teaching of Controversial Issues: An Evaluation." *Educational Review* 36 (2): 121–129. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013191840360202>.
- Torney-Purta, J. 2002. "The School's Role in Developing Civic Engagement: A Study of Adolescents in Twenty-Eight Countries." *Applied Developmental Science* 6 (4): 203–212. https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532480XADS0604_7.
- Tsoi, G., and L. C. Wai. 2022. "Hong Kong National Security Law: What is it and is it Worrying?" *BBC*, June 28. Accessed. February 14. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-52765838>.
- UNICEF. 2019. "Lessons Learned for Peace: How Conflict Analyses Informed UNICEF's Peacebuilding and Education Programming." https://s3.amazonaws.com/inee-assets/resources/Lessons_Learned_for_Peace_2019_ENG.pdf.
- V-DEM. 2025. "Academic Freedom Index 2025." <https://academic-freedom-index.net/>.
- Yiu, P., and S. Wu. 2021. "Hong Kong to Teach Children as Young as Six About Subversion, Foreign Interference." *Reuters*, February 5. Accessed August 1.. <https://www.reuters.com/article/world/hong-kong-to-teach-children-as-young-as-six-about-subversion-foreign-interference/idUSKBN2A50AZ/>.
- Zembylas, M. 2015. "'Pedagogy of Discomfort' and its Ethical Implications: The Tensions of Ethical Violence in Social Justice Education." *Ethics & Education* 10 (2): 163–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17449642.2015.1039274>.
- Zembylas, M., and F. Kambani. 2012. "The Teaching of Controversial Issues During Elementary-Level History Instruction: Greek-Cypriot Teachers' Perceptions and Emotions." *Theory and Research in Social Education* 40 (2): 107–133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2012.670591>.
- Zembylas, M., and L. Loukaidis. 2021. "Affective Practices, Difficult Histories, and Peace Education: An Analysis of Teachers' Affective Dilemmas in Ethnically Divided Cyprus." *Teaching & Teacher Education* 97:103225. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2020.103225>.