

Understanding barriers to teaching political and controversial issues holistically: The hegemonic barrier model from a Gramscian perspective

Yusuf Erhan Bencamin Onganer^{1*} 

¹ Department of Social Studies Education, Necatibey Faculty of Education, Balıkesir University, Balıkesir, Türkiye

Received: 09 September 2026 | **Revised:** 29 September 2026 | **Accepted:** 29 September 2026

ABSTRACT

Teaching political and controversial issues promotes students' critical thinking, democratic deliberation, and civic engagement. Nonetheless, educators encounter a range of legal, curricular, institutional, cultural, and professional constraints. This conceptual article introduces the Hegemonic Barrier Model to elucidate the conditions under which these challenges become hegemonic and influence classroom decision-making. Employing a theory-driven synthesis, the study reorganizes patterns identified in the literature through the lens of Gramsci's concepts of hegemony, coercion and consent, the integral state, common sense, good sense, and the pedagogical role of intellectuals. It delineates three interrelated domains of hegemonic operation: structural-regulatory, institutional-societal, and cultural-ideological. Furthermore, it conceptualizes intellectual-pedagogical mediation as a bidirectional process through which teachers may reproduce, negotiate, resist, or transform these influences. The article proposes six analytical manifestations: legal constraints, curriculum, school and societal pressures, historical narratives, teacher identity and professional subjectivity, and assumptions regarding students' political agency. Rather than treating these constraints as discrete barrier categories, the analysis examines how power relations, legitimacy boundaries, institutional expectations, and teachers' professional judgments interact to shape pedagogical choices within specific contexts. Consequently, the model functions as a relational analytical framework rather than a causal or prescriptive instructional model. The study concludes that a difficulty attains a hegemonic character when it is embedded within asymmetrical power relations, engenders the selective legitimization of particular forms of knowledge, narratives, or subjectivities, is sustained through varying combinations of coercive and consensual mechanisms, and is translated via intellectual-pedagogical mediation into a constriction of opportunities for knowledge acquisition, discussion, or participation. The article advocates for enhancing legal clarity, curricular flexibility, institutional protection, professional autonomy, and teacher education. Future research should empirically test the model's applicability across diverse contexts and incorporate negative and contrasting cases.

KEYWORDS: Political and controversial issues; Hegemony; Hegemonic barrier; Pedagogical mediation; Teacher subjectivity

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.29329/pedper.2026.214> | Vol. 5, No. 2 (2026) | pp. 535-559

1. Introduction

Political and controversial issues involve ongoing disputes over rights, values, identities, public policies, or historical interpretations, with parties holding different defensible views (Dearden, 1981; Stradling, 1984). Their controversial nature varies with historical, political, and social contexts (Baildon & Afandi, 2014). Here, "political and controversial issues" refer to public matters and power relations that provoke disagreement among social groups. This definition does not legitimize hate speech or views that violate fundamental rights merely because they are contested.

Teaching political and controversial issues creates a crucial space for democratic citizenship education that goes beyond knowledge transmission (Hess, 2009). In pluralistic, structured settings (Avery et al., 2013), students reason about public matters (Hess & McAvoy, 2015), encounter diverse perspectives (Avery et al., 2013), develop evidence-based arguments (Hess, 2009), and engage in democratic deliberation (Avery et al., 2013; Lo, 2023). These issues thus serve not only as curriculum content but also as a learning domain that promotes critical thinking, mutual respect, and democratic participation.

The realization of this pedagogical potential depends on teachers having enough professional freedom to address political and controversial issues safely, pluralistically, and manageably. This freedom is shaped by legal and administrative rules, curricular priorities, school and societal expectations, historical narratives, teachers' professional perspectives, and assumptions about students' political agency. In some contexts, these factors restrict topic selection, discussion scope, and student participation.

Key challenges include legal-political constraints, curricular demands, and institutional-societal expectations. Beyond explicit prohibitions, uncertainty about freedom of expression and professional responsibility leads teachers to anticipate complaints and sanctions (Hess, 2004; Ho et al., 2014; Stitzlein, 2024). Curricular density, limited instructional time, centralized exams, and favored narratives shape which issues are taught (Foster, 2014; Misco & Tseng, 2018; Yavaş et al., 2024). Additionally, expectations from administrators, colleagues, parents, and media influence teachers' risk assessments (Dunn et al., 2019; Karousiou et al., 2025; Pollock et al., 2022).

Challenges also stem from cultural assumptions and pedagogical factors. Official historical narratives, collective memory, and identity relations often legitimize certain interpretations while marginalizing others (Barton & McCully, 2007, 2012). Teachers' preparation, self-efficacy, emotions, identities, beliefs, and role perceptions influence how these factors affect classroom decisions (Gindi et al., 2021; Philpott et al., 2011). Moreover, the belief that younger students cannot understand political issues may restrict their engagement opportunities (Brophy & Alleman, 2009; Han et al., 2026; Kelly & Brooks, 2009). Therefore, these challenges cannot be attributed solely to external regulations or individual traits.

Teaching challenges differ by country, education system, school level, and subject (Baki Pala, 2020; Hanna et al., 2026; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). The same regulations may be interpreted differently across school cultures. Factors like administrative support, collegial solidarity, and families valuing democratic discussion can enhance teachers' autonomy (Baki Pala, 2020; Karousiou et al., 2025). In contrast, social polarization, unclear complaint procedures, and inadequate professional training can limit it (Hanna et al., 2026; Kuş & Öztürk, 2019; Öntaş et al., 2021). These relational influences can either reinforce or undermine each other depending on the context.

Existing research often classifies difficulties as legal, curricular, institutional, cultural, or individual. While these categories identify visible sources, they do not explain how difficulties interrelate,

become dominant, and influence teachers' decisions. For example, legal uncertainty may be legitimized within a school culture, causing teachers to self-restrain through risk assessment, whereas in supportive institutions, the same uncertainty may have little effect. Therefore, a framework is needed to explain the interaction among coercive regulations, institutional expectations, social consent, ingrained assumptions, and pedagogical mediation, rather than merely listing difficulties.

This article applies Antonio Gramsci's theory of hegemony to examine instructional challenges as manifestations of power relations in education. Key concepts—hegemony, coercion and consent, political and civil society, common sense, good sense, and the intellectuals' pedagogical role (Gramsci, 1971; Mayo, 2011; Thomas, 2009)—are used to analyze how knowledge, narratives, identity, and behavior are legitimized and naturalized in classrooms through teachers' judgments. It also recognizes that teachers are active agents who can negotiate, resist, question, or reproduce hegemonic assumptions.

The article proposes the Hegemonic Barrier Model by integrating Gramscian concepts with patterns observed in teaching political and controversial issues across various national and educational contexts. The model identifies three domains—structural-regulatory, institutional-societal, and cultural-ideological—where power relations arise, mediated intellectually and pedagogically to influence classroom decisions. It views legal constraints, curriculum, school and societal pressures, historical narratives, teacher identity and professional subjectivity, and assumptions about students' political agency as six interconnected analytical categories for examining these relations.

The model does not consider all legal, institutional, cultural, or pedagogical constraints inherently hegemonic. A difficulty becomes a hegemonic barrier when, within unequal power relations, it presents certain knowledge, opinions, or narratives as natural and legitimate while dismissing evidence-based alternatives as inappropriate or risky. This legitimacy boundary influences teachers' professional judgment, limiting pluralistic discussion. Rather than creating new barrier categories, the model explains how difficulties gain hegemonic status, become legitimized, and affect pedagogical decisions.

This article examines when teachers' challenges in addressing political and controversial issues become hegemonic barriers, based on Gramsci's theory of hegemony. It also explores how these barriers emerge and affect pedagogical decisions through the interaction of structural, institutional, cultural dynamics, and teachers' intellectual mediation.

The next section presents the study's conceptual background. The Argumentation section develops the Hegemonic Barrier Model, explains its criteria, outlines the research design and analytical procedure, and examines its six analytical manifestations. The Discussion evaluates the model's theoretical contributions, limitations, and implications for research and practice. The Conclusion summarizes the model's central argument.

2. Conceptual Background¹

2.1. Hegemony, Coercion, and Consent: The Relational Operation of Domination

Gramsci (1971) argues that modern power depends less on repression and more on securing social consent (Femia, 1981; Thomas, 2009). Hegemony is the intellectual and moral leadership by which a

¹ To construct a coherent framework of Antonio Gramsci's theory on hegemony and education—based on his fragmented prison notes (1971)—contemporary secondary literature was also used. Key analyses include Thomas (2009), who offers a philological reconstruction of Gramsci's hegemony and integral state; Mayo (2011, 2015), who examines the hegemony-education link; Entwistle

group's worldview is accepted as the common interest. This domination extends beyond economics and politics, serving as a multilayered mechanism that legitimizes and shapes accepted knowledge.

Gramscian hegemony involves two elements: coercion and consent. Coercion includes legal regulation and state sanctions, while consent refers to the acceptance of the existing order as inevitable (Gramsci, 1971). Consent is historically shaped through institutions and daily practices, not spontaneous. The balance between coercion and consent varies; sanctions dominate during legitimacy crises, whereas cultural means maintain order without overt repression (Thomas, 2009). Hegemony is never complete and must be continually re-established, making it open to contestation and change.

Education exemplifies the interplay of coercion and consent. Schools do not merely transmit knowledge; they shape accepted truths and values. Entwistle (2009) cites Gramsci's view of hegemonic relations as pedagogical processes. However, schools are not closed systems imposing dominant ideas unilaterally. As Mayo (2011) observes, educational spaces are contested sites where assumptions can be reinforced or challenged. Thus, schools both sustain hegemonic values and allow alternative discourses to emerge.

The dialectical relationship between coercion and consent explains teachers' struggles with controversial issues. Challenges go beyond legal restrictions to include institutional assumptions about safe or risky topics, which often lead to self-censorship. Conversely, institutional support, professional protections, and critical pedagogical judgment can counteract these effects. These mechanisms interact differently across contexts, sometimes reinforcing, transforming, or neutralizing one another.

In the Hegemonic Barrier Model, coercion and consent are fluid, appearing in varying forms and intensities across all three domains. Legal constraints may be normalized by social legitimacy, institutional expectations enforced through administrative sanctions, and cultural assumptions can prompt self-restraint via anticipated reactions. Thus, hegemonic barriers are relational processes shaped by shifting blends of coercion and consent, influencing pedagogical decisions and remaining open to negotiation and scrutiny. This framework supports the model's other Gramscian concepts.

2.2. The Integral State: Political Society, Civil Society, and Education

Gramsci's concept of the state goes beyond government, bureaucracy, law, and security forces. He views the modern state as a complex network of relations, including political and administrative institutions that enforce sanctions, alongside cultural, moral, and educational relations that foster social consent (Gramsci, 1971). Thomas (2009, p. xxii) notes that political society and civil society form an organic unity within Gramsci's "integral state." Although analytically distinct, these spheres are not sharply separated or independent in reality (Gramsci, 1971; Thomas, 2009).

Political society encompasses the state's visible legal, administrative, and coercive powers, including laws, courts, security forces, bureaucracies, and public authorities. Civil society consists of institutions and relationships shaping daily life and social norms, such as schools, families, religious groups, media, trade unions, professional bodies, and cultural associations. However, equating political society solely with coercion and civil society solely with consent misrepresents Gramsci's concept of the relational state. Political and legal systems require social legitimacy, while civil society institutions may exercise administrative control, exclusion, and sanctions. Gramsci's formula "state = political society + civil society" and his description of the state as "hegemony

(2009), who addresses the tension between Gramsci's radical politics and traditional schooling; and Crehan (2002, 2016), who provides conceptual mappings.

protected by the armour of coercion" (Gramsci, 1971, p. 263) demonstrate that coercion and consent are intertwined and mutually reinforcing within the integral state.

The integral-state perspective shows that Gramsci's concept of the educative state extends beyond formal institutions. The state functions as a moral-pedagogical force shaping behavior, values, and social understanding (Gramsci, 1971; Thomas, 2009). Schools are key sites where these dynamics intersect, connected to regulatory power through laws, policies, curricula, and oversight, while also fostering social consent via school culture, teacher-student interactions, textbooks, family expectations, and notions of legitimate knowledge (Entwistle, 2009; Gramsci, 1971; Mayo, 2015). Therefore, schools should be viewed not only as parts of political or civil society but as educational spaces where these relations are concretized.

The integral-state perspective explains that challenges faced by teachers of political and controversial issues arise from interactions between social and educational spheres. Legal regulations and administrative practices can restrict teachers' pedagogical scope, while school culture, parental expectations, media discourses, and social assumptions may support, challenge, or reinforce these limits. The curriculum is not merely a technical document by political authorities but a site where state regulatory power intersects with social understandings of knowledge, values, and citizenship.

The Hegemonic Barrier Model's domains do not directly align with political and civil society. The structural-regulatory domain includes law, policy, curricula, oversight, and coercive power; the institutional-societal domain involves expectations, legitimacy, support, and pressure from schools, families, media, and other actors; the cultural-ideological domain examines naturalization processes that transcend these distinctions. These domains serve as analytical tools to study intersecting forms of coercion and consent in education. Their influence on classroom decisions is analyzed separately through intellectual-pedagogical mediation.

2.3. Common Sense and Good Sense: Producing and Questioning Hegemonic Meanings

A central element of Gramsci's hegemony theory is common sense—the thoughts, values, and explanations people use to interpret daily life. Common sense is a fragmented worldview combining ideological, cultural, religious, and political elements from different historical periods with everyday experience (Crehan, 2002, 2016; Gramsci, 1971). It often includes contradictory ideas and should be understood not as fixed truths but as a historically accumulated, heterogeneous set of meanings used in daily life.

The fragmented nature of common sense makes it a key site of hegemonic struggle. Hegemonic groups do not impose a fixed worldview but shape social consent by selecting and linking existing values, fears, expectations, and explanations to support a specific social order. Historically constructed social relations, political preferences, and authority forms thus appear "ordinary," "natural," or "inevitable" (Crehan, 2002, pp. 99-100; Crehan, 2016, pp. 51-52; Gramsci, 1971, p. 12). Common sense is neither a uniform consciousness passively reflecting dominant ideology nor a collection of false ideas. It contains the experiences, memories, and contradictions of various social groups, both supporting the existing order and harboring critical elements that reveal its limits (Crehan, 2002, 2016; Gramsci, 1971). Hence, hegemonic struggle focuses not on eradicating common sense but on interpreting its elements.

Gramsci identifies "good sense" within common sense as elements arising from everyday experience that enable questioning of established assumptions (Gramsci, 1971). Rather than a fully formed worldview, good sense represents the critical potential of common sense. Crehan (2016, p. 47) terms

this the "healthy nucleus," which helps individuals connect daily problems to broader social and structural issues. However, good sense does not naturally develop into systematic critical consciousness; its fragmented elements require cultivation through conceptual tools, collective experiences, and pedagogical relations (Crehan, 2002; Gramsci, 1971). Thus, good sense entails critically examining the historical and social roots of everyday assumptions instead of adopting a ready-made worldview.

Education is a key social sphere where common sense is both reproduced and challenged. It shapes judgments about valid knowledge, legitimate values, and reasonable social explanations. Schools sustain the cultural continuity of dominant common sense, but when students connect academic knowledge to everyday experience, critically examine assumptions, and develop alternative explanations, education enhances the rational elements within common sense. Since hegemony requires constant renewal and defense, education is not solely a reproductive process (Entwistle, 2009).

This article uses common sense to explain how cultural-ideological factors complicate teaching political and controversial issues. Treating certain historical narratives, political values, and social assumptions as unquestionable truths creates invisible boundaries that determine which issues are seen as legitimate, appropriate, or risky. Similarly, excluding childhood from political life or assuming younger students cannot engage meaningfully with political topics naturalizes specific views of childhood and citizenship.

Such assumptions become hegemonic not merely due to their prevalence or tradition but because, within unequal power relations, they naturalize and legitimize specific knowledge and subjectivities while dismissing alternatives as inappropriate or unthinkable, thereby restricting pedagogical discussion. The model's cultural-ideological domain explores these processes of naturalization and legitimation. Good sense is not a fully developed counter-hegemonic structure but a critical potential arising from contradictions within common sense. Its emergence in the classroom relies on teachers' intellectual mediation, students' experiences, and evidence-based critical dialogue.

2.4. Intellectuals, Pedagogical Mediation, and the Transformative Potential of Education

A key aspect of Gramsci's theory of hegemony is his broad definition of intellectuals. He does not restrict intellectuals to academics or writers; rather, everyone engages in intellectual activity, though not all are intellectuals. İnan (2025) contends that academic titles alone do not define intellectuals. Instead, they are distinguished by producing ideas, communicating and teaching them, and addressing social problems. Intellectuals are identified by their roles in organizing, legitimizing, and directing social relations. They interpret and shape social worldviews and mediate the production of social consent (Gramsci, 1971; İnan, 2025; Mayo, 2011).

Within this framework, Gramsci distinguishes traditional intellectuals, who view themselves as independent of social classes and historical struggles, from organic intellectuals, who emerge from a social group's lived experience and unify its fragmented ideas and experiences (Gramsci, 1971).

The concept of the organic intellectual does not inherently imply a progressive or counter-hegemonic stance. Dominant social groups also produce organic intellectuals who promote their worldviews. What matters is the social experiences emphasized, the worldview articulated, and the hegemonic interests served (Gramsci, 1971; Thomas, 2009).

Gramsci links intellectuals, hegemony, and pedagogy, arguing that hegemony is sustained not only by political and legal institutions but also through pedagogical relations where people learn to interpret the world and accept legitimate knowledge and values. This process is reciprocal: educators

learn from learners, who actively influence the relationship with their experiences. Mayo (2011) extends Gramsci's concept of counter-hegemonic struggle by incorporating Freire's praxis, which rejects passive "banking education" and seeks to empower individuals as active agents who question and reshape their social realities.

This article builds on the Gramscian framework by applying Benner's (2023) non-affirmative education theory and Mäkiharju and Smeds-Nylund's (2025) concept of pedagogical mediation to teachers. It shows how teachers interpret policies, curricula, and social contexts, transforming them into classroom decisions. Teachers are neither passive transmitters nor fully autonomous but navigate legal, institutional, and cultural constraints. Pedagogical mediation is a relational process where external demands are reshaped through professional judgment rather than directly reflected in teaching.

Teachers' institutional roles do not inherently make them organic or transformative intellectuals. They may either reinforce dominant knowledge hierarchies or, depending on context, challenge these boundaries through evidence and diverse experiences. Giroux (1988, p. 121) defines a "transformative intellectual" as a teacher who critically evaluates the values and social impacts of pedagogy rather than merely delivering curricula. Unlike Gramsci's organic intellectual, Giroux (1988) emphasizes teachers' roles in fostering critical thinking, democratic participation, and public dialogue by creating spaces for students to critically assess diverse perspectives.

The transformative potential of education is not a sudden change driven by a single teacher's will. In Gramsci's "war of position," transformation occurs through prolonged struggles within civil society, cultural practices, and everyday meaning-making (Gramsci, 1971, pp. 238-239). Teachers' pedagogical mediation is thus a limited but meaningful intervention constrained by structural and institutional factors, fostering critical thinking, dialogue, and alternative meanings. Expecting teachers to overcome legal insecurity, institutional pressure, or physical threats through individual courage alone oversimplifies and unfairly burdens them with responsibility for hegemonic relations.

Within this framework, intellectual-pedagogical mediation is a cross-cutting process that translates influences from the other three domains into classroom decisions through teachers' judgment. This process both reproduces established boundaries and enables negotiation, resistance, and transformation. Its detailed role is explained in the model-development subsection below.

3. Argumentation and Model Development

The Hegemonic Barrier Model is an original analytical framework developed in this article, based on Gramsci's concepts of hegemony, coercion and consent, the integral state, common sense, good sense, and the pedagogical role of intellectuals. It explains the relational challenges in teaching political and controversial issues.

The model identifies three elements: domains of hegemonic operation, intellectual-pedagogical mediation, and analytical manifestations of barriers. Domains are social and educational spheres where power relations around teaching political issues are formed and legitimized. Intellectual-pedagogical mediation is how teachers interpret and apply these influences in classroom decisions. Analytical manifestations are the tangible forms these processes take in practice. The model focuses on the pedagogical decision to address or limit political or controversial issues and the network shaping that decision, rather than on individual teachers, students, institutions, or regulations.

The model analyzes hegemonic operations in three domains: structural-regulatory (laws, policies, oversight shaping teachers' actions), institutional-societal (social actors influencing views on

political issues), and cultural-ideological (accepted knowledge, narratives, and identity assumptions).

These three domains are analytical distinctions, not fixed social layers, highlighting different modes of operation. Coercion and consent function through overlapping relations between political and civil society. Legal, institutional, and cultural elements may legitimize power asymmetries, producing hegemonic barriers that are sustained and mediated pedagogically. Domain interactions can intensify this process, though not all domains are always involved.

Intellectual-pedagogical mediation is a cross-cutting process that shapes how teachers interpret structural, institutional, and cultural influences in their classroom practices. Filtering regulations, curricula, and social norms through their knowledge, identity, and emotions, teachers may avoid or superficially address controversial topics or, alternatively, promote diverse perspectives and critical engagement. This mediation involves resistance, transformation, and reproduction of hegemonic norms.

This bidirectional process prevents pedagogical decisions from being viewed as direct, mechanical responses to external conditions. The same legal regulation, curriculum, or institutional expectation can produce different outcomes depending on teachers and school contexts. Factors like teachers' professional stance, issue knowledge, institutional support, student characteristics, and perceived risk intensity influence how structural, institutional, and cultural elements shape classroom practice. Teachers' diverse strategies across political contexts—such as avoidance, risk-taking, private discussions, emotional engagement, or critical dialogue—underscore the contextual nature of mediation (Hanna et al., 2026).

The model's six analytical manifestations are not mutually exclusive barrier categories of equal ontological status but serve as entry points for analyzing hegemonic relations. Each manifestation is mainly linked to one domain but can also appear across multiple domains. Therefore, primary associations indicate the initial analytical focus, not a fixed barrier assignment.

Within this framework, intellectual-pedagogical mediation differs from the analytical focus on teacher identity and professional subjectivity. Teacher identity and subjectivity are analytical entry points when factors like professional preparation, self-efficacy, beliefs, emotions, or role perceptions are central to the study. While teacher subjectivity may be the primary focus in some cases, pedagogical mediation is a constant process in all cases within the model.

3.1. Distinguishing Criteria and Analytical Boundaries of a Hegemonic Barrier

This article defines a barrier as a difficulty that restricts the introduction of political and controversial issues in the classroom, their pluralistic treatment, or student participation. A hegemonic barrier is a relational process that legitimizes certain knowledge, opinions, narratives, or subjectivities within asymmetrical power relations, rendering alternatives invisible, inappropriate, or risky, and influencing pedagogical decisions. While every hegemonic barrier is an instructional barrier, not all instructional barriers are hegemonic. To classify a difficulty as hegemonic, all four criteria must be met, though they may arise at different times, levels, or through various actors.

The first criterion links difficulty to power imbalances where parties lack equal influence over decisions and boundaries. Personal factors like a teacher's reluctance or limited knowledge do not indicate hegemony. Instead, power arises from legal authority, institutional roles, dominant narratives, or accepted social definitions that shape outcomes. Power extends beyond authority to agenda-setting and normalizing views while burdening alternatives. As Entwistle (2009) explains, dominant groups control schools by legitimizing their cultural assumptions and defining valid

knowledge through the curriculum, resulting in classroom asymmetry and unilateral control over educational value.

The second criterion involves selective legitimation and delegitimation. A difficulty becomes hegemonic when it frames certain knowledge, narratives, identities, or subjectivities as natural, neutral, safe, or educationally appropriate, while portraying evidence-based alternatives as controversial or inappropriate. This can occur through explicit topic bans, presenting specific historical interpretations as the only valid narrative, erasing certain social groups' experiences, assuming children cannot engage with political issues, or labeling teachers' facilitation of pluralistic discussions as biased. A dominant narrative alone is not hegemonic; it becomes a barrier when it systematically excludes alternative evidence and diverse experiences. As Entwistle (2009) notes, hegemony gains power by making dominant boundaries seem like natural social common sense. When successful, dominant narratives appear neutral, while alternative views are dismissed as lacking legitimacy.

The third criterion examines coercive and consent-based mechanisms that define legitimacy boundaries, including sanctions, institutional expectations, social consent, and teachers' perceived risks. Not all mechanisms apply in every case; some rely on explicit sanctions, others on social norms. According to Entwistle (2009) and Gramsci (1971), these mechanisms combine to normalize certain pedagogical choices while marginalizing others. This criterion highlights the power and risk dynamics influencing teachers' decisions rather than the decisions themselves.

The fourth criterion is that these mechanisms cause pedagogical narrowing through teachers' intellectual mediation. Teachers interpret sanctions, institutional expectations, social reactions, and assumptions using their professional knowledge, experience, identity, emotions, and risk assessment. This interpretation can lead to self-restraint, resulting in issues being omitted, superficially addressed, framed within dominant narratives, stripped of alternative evidence, quickly closed, or discussed in ways that limit some students' participation. However, the same structural, institutional, or cultural conditions do not produce identical outcomes for every teacher. Teachers may reproduce, negotiate, mitigate, or critically examine these influences. Thus, self-restraint is not the hegemonic mechanism itself but a pedagogical choice arising from teachers' interpretation; pedagogical narrowing is the observable effect on knowledge, discussion, and participation. Entwistle (2009) similarly argues that teachers actively interpret external influences through professional judgment rather than passively implement them. Therefore, hegemonic barriers in the classroom result from a dynamic process shaped by teachers' professional judgment and mediation.

The four criteria can be illustrated through a hypothetical scenario. A teacher's choice to avoid a recent historical issue does not alone indicate a hegemonic barrier. However, the official narrative's dominant role in shaping discussion boundaries reveals power asymmetry. Portraying alternative evidence as inappropriate or risky reflects selective legitimation. Anticipating reactions from administrators or parents, or the threat of investigation, maintains this boundary. The teacher's risk assessment and self-restraint represent the pedagogical decision, while excluding alternative sources and limiting discussion to the dominant narrative constitute pedagogical narrowing. The hegemonic barrier emerges from the interaction of these elements.

The systematic nature of pedagogical narrowing does not mean the same boundary yields identical outcomes for every teacher, school, or issue. Instead, systematicity indicates that constraints stem from broader structures of power and legitimacy, not isolated personal preferences. When certain issues are consistently deemed risky across time and settings—prompting teachers to anticipate similar reactions or sanctions and repeatedly excluding alternative views—this pattern may reflect

such a relationship. However, repetition alone does not prove hegemony; the pattern must meet all four criteria outlined above.

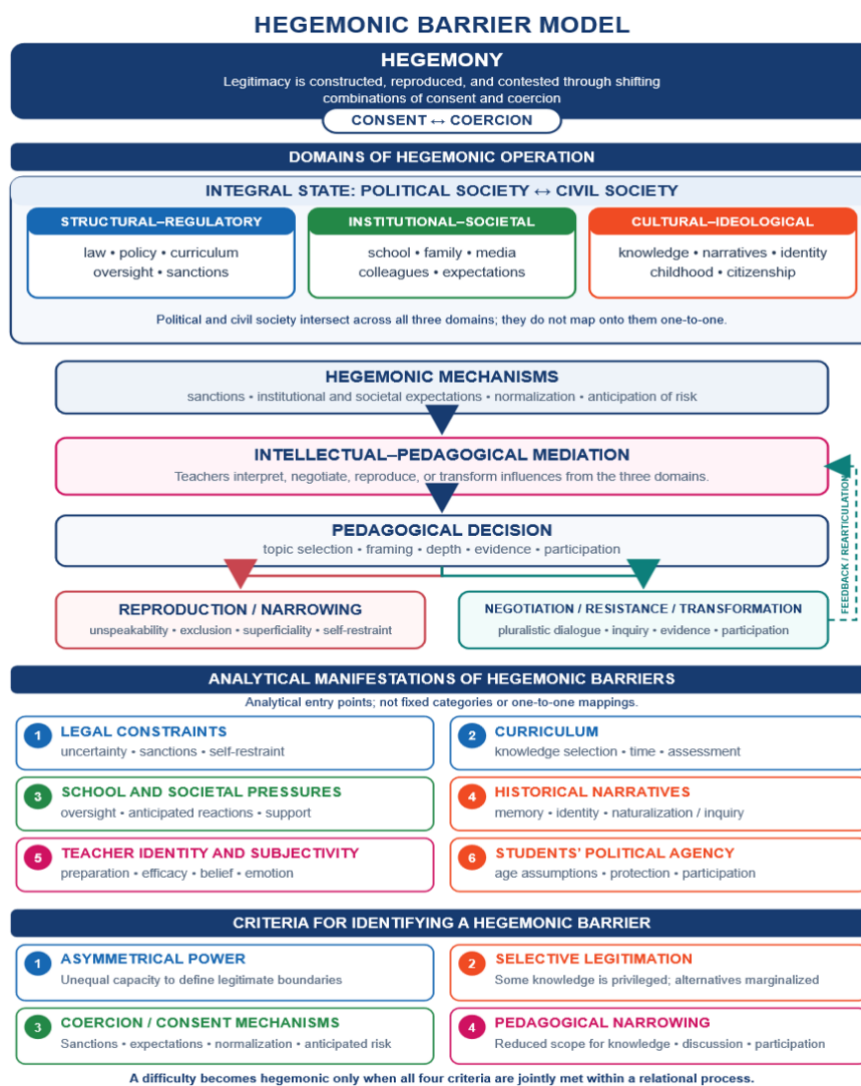
The model does not see all pedagogical boundaries as negative or hegemonic. Boundaries that shield students from hate speech, discrimination, misinformation, political indoctrination, or developmentally inappropriate trauma are not hegemonic simply because they limit discussion. Similarly, a teacher's rejection of unsupported claims, refusal to assign equal epistemic value to all views, or adjustment of language and scope to protect students aligns with pluralism. Pluralistic teaching involves evaluating different views based on evidence, reasoning, human rights, and mutual respect—not accepting all claims as equally valid (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). A protective or ethical boundary becomes hegemonic only when selectively used to silence legitimate political views and enforce an unquestioned dominant narrative.

Avoidance and silence should not be viewed as hegemonic reproduction without context. Teachers may avoid issues due to internalized dominant assumptions or to protect students, themselves, and the class from trauma or real threats. Examples from Indonesia and southern Thailand show that silence can signify care, self-protection, and physical safety (Hanna et al., 2026). The barrier arises not from avoidance itself but from violence, sanctions, institutional insecurity, and enforced silence that make avoidance necessary. This distinction prevents blaming teachers for broader power dynamics.

A teacher's lack of pedagogical knowledge or self-efficacy alone does not create hegemonic barriers. While inadequate professional preparation is a common challenge across subjects, it can reinforce hegemonic practices when combined with dismissing political issues, uncritically transmitting dominant narratives, or restricting certain student perspectives. Therefore, teacher competence should be understood not as fixed personal shortcomings but in relation to structural support, institutional safeguards, cultural assumptions, and professional experience.

In future empirical research using this model, findings should not be attributed to a single domain based solely on their apparent source. Analysis must first identify the constrained issue, knowledge, perspective, or subjectivity, then examine the structural, institutional, and cultural conditions that establish the boundary, the legitimizing mechanisms, the teacher's interpretation, and the resulting pedagogical outcome. Rather than asking, "To which domain does this finding belong?" analysis should ask, "Through which relations and mechanisms does this difficulty become a hegemonic barrier?" Associating a finding with multiple domains reflects the model's relational nature, not categorical ambiguity.

A hegemonic barrier is a relational process that creates selective legitimation within unequal power dynamics, maintained through coercion and consent, and limits discussion via pedagogical mediation. This process is open-ended; active engagement from teachers and students can foster negotiation and change. Figure 1 depicts the model's relational structure, connecting the three domains of hegemonic operation, intellectual-pedagogical mediation, and six analytical manifestations.

Figure 1 *The hegemonic barrier model*

3.2. Conceptual Approach

3.2.1. Conceptual Research Design and Analytical Procedure

This article presents the Hegemonic Barrier Model, a theoretical framework based on Gramsci's hegemony theory, to explain the challenges teachers face when addressing political and controversial issues. The model is an analytical tool—not an instructional or empirically tested causal model—used to examine power relations and mechanisms that give these challenges a hegemonic nature. Instead of generating new data, the article synthesizes existing literature to clarify these dynamics. It is a theory-driven conceptual synthesis, not a systematic review or meta-synthesis, aiming to establish new explanatory links (Jaakkola, 2020).

3.2.2. Source Base and Initial Classification

The model builds on existing classifications of teaching difficulties from the literature (Baki Pala, 2020; Günal, 2016; Onganer, 2025; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). These studies initially categorized challenges in teaching political and controversial issues into six areas: lack of legal safeguards; curriculum; school and society; emotionally charged history; teachers' education, identities, and beliefs; and students' political subjectivity. This classification served as a preliminary framework for reconceptualization rather than the model's final structure.

3.2.3. Analytical Procedure

These areas were not seen as fixed, independent obstacles. Following Lukka and Vinnari's (2014) distinction and Jaakkola's (2020) conceptual design, the empirical literature served as domain theory, while the Gramscian framework provided method theory to transform this knowledge. Initial areas were reconsidered to link fragmented difficulties in the literature with conceptual clarity. Analytical constructs representing relational operations replaced rigid categories, shifting from descriptive classification of visible challenges to a model explaining how these challenges become hegemonic barriers affecting pedagogical decisions.

Legal safeguards were reframed as constraints, including prohibitions, uncertainty, sanctions, and self-restraint. The curriculum served as a selective framework shaping legitimate, teachable issues amid content and time pressures. Challenges arose from administrators, colleagues, parents, media, and the environment, acting as sources of pressure or support. Emotionally charged history was structured by narratives shaped by collective memory and identity.

Difficulties in teacher education, identity, and beliefs were reframed as teacher identity and professional subjectivity, emphasizing the interaction among professional preparation, self-efficacy, emotion, social identity, belief, and institutional role. Age-related challenges were viewed not as cognitive limitations but as issues of students' political agency, challenging the notion that childhood is apolitical and excluded from public life. This reframing led to six analytical manifestations.

3.2.4. Theoretical Selection

Gramsci was chosen because the issues extend beyond individual traits or isolated legal, curricular, and institutional problems. Teaching boundaries operate through regulation, oversight, sanctions, institutional expectations, social assumptions, historical narratives, and professional self-monitoring. Therefore, the research needs a framework linking coercion and consent, the state and civil society, institutional regulation and everyday assumptions, as well as reproduction and potential pedagogical transformation.

Gramsci was selected not as the sole theorist with explanatory value but for his ability to analyze the state-civil society relationship, coercion and consent, the naturalization of dominant assumptions in common sense, and teachers' intellectual-pedagogical mediation within a unified relational framework. While other approaches—such as discourse and subjectivation, discipline, symbolic reproduction, ideological apparatuses, and critical pedagogy—also shed light on aspects of the problem, the choice is based on explanatory fit with the research question rather than theoretical superiority.

The selected Gramscian concepts do not aim to exhaustively represent Gramsci's intellectual legacy but were chosen for their relevance to the research problem. The resulting Hegemonic Barrier Model was presented in the previous section.

3.2.5. Research Ethics

This study complied with all rules stipulated in the Directive on Scientific Research and Publication Ethics of Higher Education Institutions. None of the actions listed under “Actions Contrary to Scientific Research and Publication Ethics,” the second section of the directive, were carried out. Because the study is a theory-directed conceptual synthesis based exclusively on published sources and does not involve human participants, personal data, or primary data collection, ethics committee approval was not required.

3.3. Analytical Manifestations of the Model

3.3.1. Analytical Manifestations

The analytical manifestations are not fixed, mutually exclusive categories at the same ontological level but serve as entry points for examining relational operations. The following subsections analyze each manifestation across three domains: hegemonic mechanisms, intellectual-pedagogical mediation, and pedagogical outcomes. Assigning a manifestation to a primary domain does not exclude others; it merely indicates the initial analytical focus.

3.3.2. Legal Constraints: Uncertainty, Risk of Sanction, and Self-Restraint

Legal challenges in teaching political and controversial topics arise not only from explicit bans but also from uncertainty about freedom of expression, teachers' professional duties, inconsistent enforcement, and unclear guidance. These issues lead to direct content restrictions, ambiguous rules, and teachers' fear of discipline despite no explicit prohibitions. Distinguishing these challenges prevents conflating legal regulations with their interpretations and expectations.

Research across countries shows that teachers' decisions to address political issues are shaped by education policy, law, and institutional support. In Turkey, Singapore, and China, teachers often avoid politically sensitive topics due to uncertainty about their acceptability (Ersoy, 2010; Ho, 2010; Misco, 2011). In the United States, regulations restrict discussions on race, gender, and sexual identity by limiting certain concepts, books, and content (Han et al., 2026; Stitzlein, 2024). Studies in Israel, Poland, and Cyprus reveal that fears of disciplinary action, dismissal, complaints, or being labeled biased—exacerbated by unclear guidelines and lack of institutional protection—are major deterrents (Karousiou et al., 2025; Ketko-Ayali et al., 2025; Skura et al., 2026). Thus, perceived risk of sanctions can influence professional judgment as much as actual penalties.

Legal constraints mainly operate within the structural-regulatory domain, where written rules, disciplinary procedures, administrative oversight, and sanctioning powers define teachers' professional scope. However, their pedagogical impact also depends on how school administrations interpret these rules, the effectiveness of complaint procedures, the level of institutional protection for teachers, and societal responses—engaging the institutional-societal domain. Over time, avoiding certain topics may become normalized as "safe," "neutral," or "professionally appropriate," giving legal boundaries cultural-ideological legitimacy.

These influences shape classroom decisions via intellectual-pedagogical mediation. Teachers weigh the regulation's scope, past complaints, institutional support, and perceived risk, which may lead them to avoid topics, soften language, hold superficial discussions, or seek limited professional autonomy. Thus, self-restraint is not an automatic effect of legal regulation but a potential outcome when structural boundaries are interpreted through institutional, cultural, and professional risk assessments. The varied responses among teachers and schools underscore the contextual nature of this mediation.

Not all legal constraints are hegemonic barriers. Clear, predictable, and proportionate regulations on discrimination, hate speech, political indoctrination, and teacher authority abuses protect democratic education. A legal boundary becomes hegemonic when uncertainty, selective enforcement, or disproportionate sanctions suppress evidence-based views and restrict pluralistic discussion.

3.3.3. The Curriculum: Selection of Knowledge and Scope for Pedagogical Action

In teaching political and controversial issues, the curriculum is more than a technical document organizing content. Its scope, priorities, assessment methods, and allowance for teacher

interpretation determine which political topics are taught, their coverage, and perspectives presented. The included issues and their framing shape students' political socialization, while a curriculum promoting justice, pluralism, and deliberation supports democratic reasoning development (Barton & Ho, 2022; Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Thus, the curriculum acts as a framework that selects specific knowledge and narratives and authorizes their classroom use.

Time, content, and assessment constraints limit curricular scope. Curricular density, mandatory outcomes, and pressure to cover required material reduce time for controversial issues (Hahn, 1998; Karousiou et al., 2025; Skura et al., 2026). Centralized exams and measurable outcomes often favor brief expository teaching over student-centered discussions (Alviar-Martin et al., 2008; Hanna et al., 2026; Misco, 2011). The shift toward exam-focused courses and practice tests also hinders in-depth exploration of political topics (Hess, 2009; Pace, 2011; Wills, 2007). Yet, time pressure alone does not explain avoidance; institutional views of academic achievement and teachers' curricular interpretations are also crucial.

The second dimension explores whether the curriculum's relationship with political issues creates a legitimizing or restrictive threshold. The same curriculum can be interpreted differently: some teachers link current issues to curricular goals, while others adopt a narrow view (Journell, 2017). Connecting issues to curricular objectives or professional duties legitimizes their inclusion as educational decisions rather than personal preferences (Cassar et al., 2026). In Poland, a broad curriculum interpretation enabled connections to current affairs, while the absence of explicit core requirements justified exclusion (Skura et al., 2026). In Turkey, lower-risk curriculum-related issues are addressed more frequently, while highly contentious topics are often excluded or superficially treated (Hanna et al., 2026). Thus, the curriculum's impact depends less on the text itself and more on the interaction of curricular relevance, risk perception, and institutional context.

The curriculum's structural-regulatory framework governs content, hours, outcomes, assessments, and exams, limiting political and controversial topics. It also shapes cultural-ideological priorities by selecting which knowledge and values are taught. School administrations' interpretation and enforcement further influence its institutional and societal effects.

Teachers mediate the curriculum by connecting content to current issues and diverse social experiences, highlighting marginalized perspectives, and critically examining official narratives. However, they may also view curricular boundaries as fixed, excluding certain topics or views. This mediation depends on factors such as curriculum flexibility, legal protections, school leadership, exam pressures, professional training, and teachers' confidence in facilitating discussion. Consequently, the same curriculum can result in avoidance, superficial coverage, a single narrative, or critical dialogue depending on the context.

The absence of a topic in the curriculum does not always signify hegemonic exclusion, nor does its inclusion ensure pluralistic teaching. Factors like instructional time, disciplinary scope, and developmental needs legitimately shape content selection. The curriculum becomes hegemonic when it normalizes selective knowledge boundaries, systematically hides evidence-based alternatives, and perpetuates this bias through institutional practices and teacher decisions.

3.3.4. School and Societal Pressures: Institutional Oversight, Anticipated Reactions, and Support

Teachers' decisions to address political and controversial issues are shaped by legal regulations, curriculum, personal pedagogy, administrators' views, collegial support, student and parent expectations, media, and political contexts. Democratic discussion depends on schools fostering respectful, trusting spaces for diverse views (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Teachers feel freer pedagogically

when supported by administrators, colleagues, and clear conflict management; in risk-averse settings, avoiding controversy often seems safer (Barton & McCully, 2012; Levy et al., 2023).

Institutional and societal influences shape teachers' behavior through direct interventions or anticipated responses. Warnings from administrators, complaints from parents or students, and criticism from colleagues can restrict discussion (Gindi et al., 2021; Karousiou et al., 2025; Oulton et al., 2004; Swalwell & Schweber, 2016; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). Even without explicit intervention, teachers uncertain of administrative support or fearing bias accusations may avoid sensitive topics, soften language, or address content superficially (Dunn et al., 2019; Hess, 2004; Zembylas & Kambani, 2012). Teachers learn which issues are risky not only from official statements but also from past incidents, colleagues' experiences, and implicit school culture messages. Thus, anticipated reactions prompt risk assessment and self-censorship without formal sanctions.

Media-driven social polarization extends beyond schools, leading teachers to limit topics, discussion depth, and sources to avoid misinterpretation or politicization on social media. Political campaigns amplified by media influence school climates through parent groups and boards, creating a chilling effect even without legal restrictions (Pollock et al., 2022). The impact varies with polarization levels, institutional support, and the issues addressed.

The primary focus of the school-and-societal-pressure manifestation is the institutional-societal domain. School administrators, colleagues, students, parents, and the media exert external pressure on teachers and influence which political issues are considered educationally acceptable, safe, or objectionable. Labels like "too sensitive," "inappropriate for students," or "likely to cause difficulties for the school" circulate and normalize cultural-ideological legitimization. Formal complaints, investigations, and sanctions further reinforce structural-regulatory mechanisms.

Intellectual-pedagogical mediation describes how teachers interpret expectations and apply them in classroom decisions. Anticipating parental reactions, media scrutiny, or administrative intervention, teachers may assess professional risks that lead to avoidance, softened language, superficial treatment, or self-restraint. Schools and their social environments vary; within the same institution, some view controversial issues as risks, while others see them as vital to democratic education. Thus, the institutional environment can both restrict teachers' actions and legitimize discussion, protect against backlash, and encourage pedagogical risk-taking.

Not all administrative actions or social expectations protecting students' safety, privacy, or freedom from discrimination constitute hegemonic pressure. Unlike legal constraints, hegemonic pressure relies less on formal coercion and more on legitimizing boundaries through everyday interactions in schools and society. An intervention becomes a hegemonic barrier when it delegitimizes a legitimate political issue within asymmetrical power relations, promoting a specific worldview and causing teachers to avoid or limit discussion.

3.3.5. Historical Narratives: Hegemonic Common Sense and Critical Inquiry

Teaching historically and politically charged events with deep emotional significance presents unique challenges. Conflicts, military interventions, human rights violations, forced migrations, and collective traumas are not merely past events; they continue to influence identities, affiliations, and intergroup relations today. It is essential to distinguish the historical event from the narratives that select, connect, and represent it. Since the same event can be interpreted from multiple perspectives—varying in origins, causes, perpetrators, and victims—classroom inquiry must explore not only what happened but also who interprets the past, using which sources and within what context.

Examining contested histories through diverse narratives encourages comparison, multidimensional evaluation, and democratic deliberation (Hess, 2002; Hess & An, 2006; Hess & Gatti, 2010). However, when recent history intersects with family experience, identity, and belonging, it can provoke emotional tension (Barton & McCully, 2012; Gindi et al., 2021; Holden, 2004; Kuş, 2015; Magendzo & Toledo, 2009; McCaffery & Hansson, 2011). In divided classrooms, some students remain silent to avoid exclusion, blame, or being seen as group representatives (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Reitano et al., 2008). In Northern Ireland, presenting the other group's perspective sparked conflict between multiperspectivity and loyalty to family and community (Pace, 2024). Similarly, in the Greek-Cypriot context, where alternative narratives may be viewed as disloyalty, anticipated student and parent reactions led some teachers to avoid controversial history (Karousiou et al., 2025).

The historical-narratives approach primarily analyzes the cultural-ideological domain. By emphasizing certain events and downplaying others, it frames specific interpretations as national or social realities, embedding these meanings into common sense. When adopted as "official memory" in curricula, these narratives often reflect dominant political ideologies. Politically endorsed narratives, collective memories, and local power dynamics restrict alternative historical perspectives (Chimbunde & Brown, 2026; Hung et al., 2026; Skura et al., 2026). This influence extends beyond textbooks to family stories, commemorations, school culture, media, and political discourse, shaping which historical interpretations are accepted as legitimate.

Historical narratives intersect with various domains. The official curriculum reflects structural-regulatory roles, while legitimacy from school culture, families, and media shows institutional-societal influence. Intellectual-pedagogical mediation involves teachers' evaluation of their historical stance, interpretation of students' emotions, source selection, and promotion of diverse perspectives. In conflict zones, these dynamics can threaten teachers' professional and physical safety. For instance, in southern Thailand, state and separatist groups use narratives of glorification and victimhood to justify political positions, making multiperspectival teaching potentially life-threatening (Hanna et al., 2026). Here, teachers' avoidance may be a self-protection strategy rather than hegemonic consent.

Hegemonic common sense is neither consistent nor fixed. In the same classroom, dominant views often coexist with differing or challenging perspectives. By comparing diverse sources—including marginalized experiences—and analyzing historical claims against evidence, context, and causation, teachers can encourage critical evaluation of established narratives. Good sense involves helping students develop a coherent, evidence-based, and critical understanding of history, rather than merely substituting one official narrative for another.

Recognizing multiple historical narratives does not imply all interpretations are equally valid academically or ethically. Factual accuracy should be assessed through evidence, source criticism, and historical methods. The model's role is to expose power dynamics that render certain interpretations unquestionable. A narrative becomes hegemonic not by popularity or official status, but by systematically restricting alternative evidence and experiences.

3.3.6. Teacher Identity and Professional Subjectivity: Professional Preparation, Self-Positioning, and Risk Judgment

Teachers' decisions to address political and controversial topics depend not only on subject knowledge and pedagogy but also on their professional training, self-efficacy, cultural background, social identities, personal beliefs, and institutional roles. Therefore, teacher identity and professional subjectivity are dynamic processes shaped by educational, institutional, and social contexts, reflected in their pedagogical choices.

Inadequate teacher education in theory, practice, and discussion facilitation is a major issue (Çopur, 2015; Karlberg & Bezzina, 2022; Kuş & Öztürk, 2019; Philpott et al., 2011; Waterson, 2009). This problem includes limited professional learning, lack of practical experience, collegial interaction, authentic classroom exposure, and feedback (Karousiou et al., 2025). Insufficient preparation can cause teachers to avoid accommodating diverse views, addressing discriminatory discourse, and managing emotional tension (Alarcón & Bellow, 2018; Gindi et al., 2021; Hess, 2002; Oulton et al., 2004; Waage et al., 2016). During crises, a lack of confidence in pedagogical tools for engaging political emotions (Ketko-Ayali et al., 2025) or conflict-management skills may disrupt discussions despite student willingness to participate (Kaka et al., 2021; Kindlinger & Hahn-Laudenberg, 2023; Kuş & Öztürk, 2019; Logtenberg et al., 2024). Conversely, high-quality teacher education and professional support improve teachers' self-efficacy and readiness to address these challenges (Erlich & Gindi, 2019; Wong et al., 2019).

Self-efficacy alone does not guarantee a democratic instructional process. Confidence without subject knowledge, ethical judgment, and critical self-reflection risks teachers imposing their views. Teachers' cultural backgrounds, social identities, and worldviews may bias them toward certain narratives or make controversial topics feel threatening (Bekerman, 2009; Fickel, 2000; Gindi et al., 2021; Ho et al., 2017; Hung, 2020; James, 2014; Oulton et al., 2004; van Hover & Yeager, 2003). Research on preservice early-childhood teachers shows that personal values and emotional unpreparedness can lead to avoidance or superficial treatment of issues (Han et al., 2026), underscoring the challenge of neutrality in teaching (Cohen, 2016; Michaeli, 2014; Williams, 1994). In Poland, expectations for teachers to remain apolitical (Skura et al., 2026) and fears of bias (Schulte, 2026) illustrate this struggle. Neutrality does not mean value-neutrality but requires awareness of one's standpoint, avoiding manipulation, and facilitating discussions grounded in evidence, human rights, and universal principles.

Teacher identity and professional subjectivity are analytical constructs that shape how teachers interpret challenges but are not separate domains or the mediation process itself. Intellectual-pedagogical mediation integrates influences from all domains into teaching decisions, with identity and subjectivity visible but distinct from this process.

Treating neutrality as avoiding current issues or excluding political topics from teaching can become ingrained norms. However, neutrality, identity, and risk perception are not fixed traits guiding pedagogy. Cassar et al. (2026) show that teachers' choices to engage in unplanned discussions depend more on their interpretation of the situation and perceived stakes than the topic itself. Teachers may act to prevent harm, set moral boundaries, challenge prejudice, promote democratic-critical development, or fulfill professional duties. Thus, pedagogical decisions reflect a complex interplay of professional knowledge, identity, emotions, institutional roles, and contextual risk assessments, not just personal views.

Subjectivity mediates hegemonic operations when personal or professional roles merge with institutional authority, becoming unquestioned truths that delegitimize evidence-based alternatives and limit student participation. A lack of pedagogical knowledge or self-efficacy contributes to this barrier only when combined with uncritical acceptance of dominant narratives and restricted student engagement.

Teacher education should encompass critical self-evaluation, discussion facilitation, ethical decision-making, and democratic use of institutional authority, alongside subject knowledge and self-efficacy. However, overcoming hegemonic barriers cannot rely solely on individual effort.

Sustaining critical pedagogical mediation demands legal protections, institutional support, curricular flexibility, and professional autonomy in addition to personal capacity.

3.3.7. Assumptions about Students' Political Agency: Age, Childhood, and Participation

Students' age influences teachers' decisions to introduce political topics in class (Houser, 1996; Kelly & Brooks, 2009; Parker, 2006). At the primary level, these issues are often excluded, assuming students lack the cognitive and linguistic skills to engage with complex matters. In the U.S., some teachers considered students "too young" to form political opinions (Dunn et al., 2019), while Canadian preservice teachers believed young children were uninterested in current affairs and unable to analyze politics (Kelly & Brooks, 2009). In Poland, perceptions of students' immaturity led to political topics being briefly mentioned or omitted (Skura et al., 2026). While such concerns may reflect developmental responsibility, it is important to distinguish developmental differences from assuming children cannot understand political issues.

Research shows that with appropriate teaching methods, young students can grasp concepts like racism, discrimination, justice, equality, and human rights (Levstik & Barton, 2011; Shuttleworth & Lomax, 2018). Although they may not use adult political language, children develop political meanings through everyday experiences of fairness, rules, exclusion, representation, rights, and collective decision-making. Restricting politics to parties, elections, and government overlooks children's experiences of power, justice, participation, and coexistence. Assessing their political understanding solely by adult standards risks missing their unique perspectives.

Teachers' concerns about age stem not only from students' cognitive development but also from social views of childhood as a protected, dependent phase outside public life (Engelbert, 1994; Makrinioti, 1994; Qvortrup, 1994). Preservice teachers aiming to preserve childhood innocence often avoid topics they consider severe or frightening. Likewise, narrow, protectionist views of developmental appropriateness can exclude real social issues from the classroom (Han et al., 2026; Kelly & Brooks, 2009). This perspective sees children less as active interpreters of social life and more as future citizens to be prepared for public participation.

This analysis focuses on the cultural-ideological domain. Common beliefs such as "children do not understand politics" or "political issues are inappropriate for children" create invisible boundaries that exclude childhood from political life, determining which age groups may discuss certain topics without explicit prohibition. These beliefs intersect with other domains: limited political content in curricula for younger students reinforces structural-regulatory mechanisms, while parental expectations and school administrators' avoidance of controversy uphold institutional-societal dynamics. Teachers' perceptions of childhood, professional training, and self-efficacy further influence how these factors shape pedagogical decisions.

Recognizing students' political agency does not mean they possess the same knowledge, experience, or decision-making power as adults. It refers to their capacity to interpret relationships affecting their lives, form views on rights and justice, engage with diverse perspectives, and express concerns. However, student voice alone does not ensure critical consciousness, as classroom power dynamics, source selection, and teacher guidance can reinforce biases (Gilbert, 2018; Kelly & Brooks, 2009; Kuş & Öztürk, 2019; MacCoy, 2018). Thus, structured learning environments are crucial for students to test their views against evidence, encounter differing perspectives, and reassess assumptions.

Not all pedagogical concerns about age and development create hegemonic barriers. Students should be shielded from traumatic content, discriminatory speech, and political indoctrination, with

language and topics tailored to their developmental stage. The key distinction is between using age to guide support and using it to exclude children from political engagement. Age becomes a hegemonic barrier when it treats children as a uniform, apolitical group and restricts their participation. Early political literacy involves discussing justice, rights, responsibility, and participation in safe, age-appropriate settings—not merely transmitting adult content.

4. Discussion

The Hegemonic Barrier Model explains how influences from structural-regulatory, institutional-societal, and cultural-ideological domains persist through coercive and consensual mechanisms and are reflected in classroom decisions via intellectual-pedagogical mediation. The model's six analytical manifestations are not fixed or mutually exclusive barriers but serve as entry points to examine how instructional challenges become hegemonic. Its theoretical contribution lies in explaining the conditions that cause teaching difficulties in political and controversial issues to become hegemonic, leading to pedagogical narrowing.

By integrating coercion and consent with the integral state, the model offers a framework to examine sanctions, institutional expectations, legitimacy, and normalization as interconnected elements of hegemonic operation. The concepts of common sense, good sense, and intellectual-pedagogical mediation enable consideration of reproduction, negotiation, resistance, and transformation. Teachers are positioned neither as passive recipients of structural pressures nor as fully autonomous actors; rather, they interpret these influences through professional judgment, making pedagogical decisions that may reproduce, negotiate, resist, or transform existing legitimacy boundaries.

The model differentiates protective pedagogical boundaries from hegemonic narrowing. Avoidance, silence, or restriction should not be seen as hegemonic reproduction without considering the context. These practices may stem from legitimate concerns about student protection, professional responsibility, or institutional risks. Thus, analysis should focus not on avoidance or restriction alone, but on the power relations behind them, the legitimacy they uphold, and their impact on knowledge, discussion, and classroom participation.

The model was developed by synthesizing research from various national and educational contexts, but its components have not been empirically tested together. Therefore, no universal conclusions can be drawn about the prevalence, direction, or causality of the proposed relationships. Contextual and methodological differences among the studies also limit direct generalization. Thus, the model should be viewed not as a fixed causal framework but as a flexible tool for analyzing hegemonic relations in education.

4.1. Implications for Research and Practice

Democratic classroom discussion cannot rely solely on teachers' willingness to take professional risks. At policy and institutional levels, legal boundaries on teaching political and controversial issues must be clear, predictable, and proportionate. Curricula should allow sufficient time and flexibility for pluralistic, evidence-based discussions, while school administrations must provide institutional protection and transparent complaint procedures. Teacher education and ongoing professional development should support subject knowledge, discussion facilitation, ethical decision-making, critical self-assessment, evidence evaluation, and managing emotional and intergroup tensions. Developmental considerations should guide appropriate pedagogical support, not justify excluding students from political topics. These efforts require legal safeguards, curricular flexibility, institutional backing, and professional autonomy.

The empirical application of the model begins by identifying the restricted topic, knowledge, viewpoint, narrative, or subjectivity. Researchers then analyze relevant power relations, operational domains, processes of selective legitimation, sustaining mechanisms, teachers' interpretations, and resulting pedagogical outcomes. Since the model is relational, a single finding may relate to multiple hegemonic domains. Combining interviews with classroom observations, policy and curriculum documents, instructional materials, reflective records, and quantitative data allows comparison of reported accounts with observed practices and examination of recurring patterns. Cases that do not meet hegemonic barrier criteria, as well as contrasting cases with similar conditions but different outcomes, should also be included. Such comparative analyses help test the model's explanatory scope and analytical boundaries across diverse educational and national contexts.

5. Conclusion

The key finding is that not all difficulties in teaching political and controversial issues are hegemonic barriers. A difficulty becomes hegemonic when it legitimizes certain knowledge, narratives, or subjectivities within unequal power relations while delegitimizing evidence-based alternatives. This legitimacy boundary is maintained through coercive and consensual means, such as sanctions, institutional and societal expectations, normalization, and risk anticipation. Teachers interpret these mechanisms through professional judgment, leading to pedagogical choices that limit pluralistic discussion. Thus, the critical factor is not the difficulty's source but what it legitimizes and how it impacts knowledge, discussion, and participation opportunities in the classroom.

6. Declarations

6.1. Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

6.2. Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

6.3. Author contributions (CRediT)

Yusuf Erhan Bencamin Onganer: Conceptualization; Methodology; Formal analysis; Writing—original draft; Writing—review & editing

6.4. Data availability statement

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

6.5. Ethics approval

Because the study is a theory-directed conceptual synthesis based exclusively on published sources and does not involve human participants, personal data, or primary data collection, ethics committee approval was not required.

6.6. Use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools

Wordvice AI and ChatGPT (OpenAI) were used for language editing, grammar checking, and stylistic refinement of the manuscript. The author reviewed and edited the content and takes full responsibility for the publication.

6.7. Acknowledgements

Not applicable.

References

- Alarcón, J. D., & Bellow, E. (2018). Class meeting as critical pedagogy. In S. B. Shear, C. Tschida, E. Bellow, L. B. Buchanan, & E. Saylor (Eds.), *(Re)Imagining elementary social studies: A controversial issues reader* (pp. 3–24). Information Age Publishing.
- Alviar-Martin, T., Randall, J. D., Usher, E. L., & Engelhard, G. (2008). Teaching civic topics in four societies. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 101(3), 177–187. <https://doi.org/10.3200/JOER.101.3.177-188>

- Avery, P. G., Levy, S. A., & Simmons, A. M. M. (2013). Deliberating controversial public issues as part of civic education. *The Social Studies*, 104(3), 105–114. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00377996.2012.691571>
- Baildon, M., & Afandi, S. (2014). A disciplinary approach to teaching historical controversy in Singapore's schools: The case of the Internal Security Act. In M. Baildon, L. K. Seng, I. M. Lim, G. İnanç, & J. Jaffar (Eds.), *Controversial history education in Asian contexts* (pp. 196–215). Routledge.
- Baki Pala, Ç. (2020). *Tartışmalı ve hassas konuların sosyal bilgiler öğretimi bağlamında incelenmesi: Bir eylem araştırması* [An examination of controversial and sensitive issues in the context of social studies teaching: An action research study] [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. Marmara University.
- Barton, K. C., & Ho, L.-C. (2022). *Curriculum for justice and harmony: Deliberation, knowledge, and action in social and civic education*. Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003010104>
- Barton, K. C., & McCully, A. (2007). Teaching controversial issues... where controversial issues really matter. *Teaching History*, 127, 13–19.
- Barton, K. C., & McCully, A. W. (2012). Trying to “see things differently”: Northern Ireland students’ struggle to understand alternative historical perspectives. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 40(4), 371–408. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2012.710928>
- Bekerman, Z. (2009). Identity versus peace: Identity wins. *Harvard Educational Review*, 79(1), 74–83. <https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.79.1.m30672027u72x633>
- Benner, D. (2023). On affirmativity and non-affirmativity in the context of theories of education and Bildung. In *Non-affirmative theory of education and Bildung* (pp. 21–59). Springer International Publishing.
- Brophy, J., & Alleman, J. (2009). Meaningful social studies for elementary students. *Teachers and Teaching*, 15(3), 357–376. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540600903056700>
- Cassar, C., Oosterheert, I., & Meijer, P. C. (2026). Deciding to engage: Understanding teachers’ justifications for addressing unplanned controversial issues. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 181, Article 105702. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2026.105702>
- Chimbunde, P., & Brown, B. (2026). Teaching school history in postcolonial states: An analysis of the research literature. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14681366.2026.2636252>
- Cohen, A. (2016). Navigating competing conceptions of civic education: Lessons from three Israeli civics classrooms. *Oxford Review of Education*, 42(4), 391–407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2016.1194262>
- Crehan, K. A. F. (2002). *Gramsci, culture, and anthropology*. University of California Press.
- Crehan, K. A. F. (2016). *Gramsci’s common sense: Inequality and its narratives*. Duke University Press.
- Çopur, A. (2015). *Sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerinin tartışmalı konuların öğretimine ilişkin düşüncelerinin incelenmesi* [An examination of social studies teachers' views on teaching controversial issues] [Unpublished master's thesis]. Bursa Uludağ University.
- Dearden, R. F. (1981). Controversial issues and the curriculum. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 13(1), 37–44. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0022027810130105>
- Dunn, A. H., Sondel, B., & Baggett, H. C. (2019). “I don’t want to come off as pushing an agenda”: How contexts shaped teachers’ pedagogy in the days after the 2016 U.S. presidential election. *American Educational Research Journal*, 56(2), 444–476. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0002831218794892>
- Engelbert, A. (1994). Worlds of childhood: Differentiated but different. Implications for social policy. In J. Qvortrup, M. Bardy, G. Sgritta, & H. Wintersberger (Eds.), *Childhood matters: Social theory, practice and politics* (pp. 285–298). Avebury.
- Entwistle, H. (2009). *Antonio Gramsci (Routledge Revivals): Conservative schooling for radical politics*. Routledge.
- Erlich, R., & Gindi, S. (2019). Are civics teachers different from teachers of other disciplines in their handling of controversial issues? *Education, Citizenship and Social Justice*, 14(2), 118–130. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1746197918767082>
- Ersoy, A. F. (2010). Social studies teacher candidates’ views on the controversial issues incorporated into their courses in Turkey. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(2), 323–334. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2009.09.015>
- Femia, J. V. (1981). *Gramsci’s political thought: Hegemony, consciousness, and the revolutionary process*. Clarendon Press.
- Fickel, L. H. (2000). Democracy is messy: Exploring the personal theories of a high school social studies teacher. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 28(3), 359–389. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2000.10505913>
- Foster, S. (2014). Teaching controversial issues in the classroom: The exciting potential of disciplinary history. In M. Baildon, L. K. Seng, I. M. Lim, G. İnanç, & J. Jaffar (Eds.), *Controversial history education in Asian contexts* (pp. 19–37). Routledge.
- Gilbert, L. (2018). Putting Mrs. Rosa Parks front and center of an elementary methods course. In S. B. Shear, C. Tschida, E. Bellow, L. B. Buchanan, & E. Saylor (Eds.), *(Re)Imagining elementary social studies: A controversial issues reader* (pp. 199–218). Information Age Publishing.

- Gindi, S., Sagee, R., & Gilat, R. (2021). Who wants a political classroom? Attitudes toward teaching controversial political issues in school. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 20(2), 130–150. <https://doi.org/10.11576/jsse-3943>
- Giroux, H. A. (1988). *Teachers as intellectuals: Toward a critical pedagogy of learning*. Bergin & Garvey.
- Gramsci, A. (1971). *Selections from the prison notebooks of Antonio Gramsci* (Q. Hoare & G. Nowell-Smith, Eds.). Lawrence & Wishart Limited.
- Günel, H. (2016). *Tarih öğretmenlerinin tartışmalı ve hassas konulara yaklaşımları (Erzurum Örneği)* [History teachers' approaches to controversial and sensitive issues (The Erzurum case)] [Doctoral dissertation, Ataturk University].
- Hahn, C. L. (1998). *Becoming political: Comparative perspectives on citizenship education*. State University of New York Press.
- Han, S., Blank, J., & Smirnova, D. (2026). Early childhood preservice teachers' engagement with social issues. *Journal of Early Childhood Teacher Education*, 47(3), 900–916. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10901027.2025.2508961>
- Hanna, H., Lin, J. C., Efimova, E., Fatah, A. A., Kuş, Z., & Pongpajon, C. (2026). Teaching controversial issues in politically challenging times. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057925.2026.2650181>
- Hess, D. E. (2002). Discussing controversial public issues in secondary social studies classrooms: Learning from skilled teachers. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 30(1), 10–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2002.10473177>
- Hess, D. E. (2004). Controversies about controversial issues in democratic education. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 37(2), 257–261. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096504004196>
- Hess, D. E. (2009). *Controversy in the classroom: The democratic power of discussion*. Routledge.
- Hess, D. E., & An, S. (2006). Keeping the beast at bay: Unraveling the role of media in social studies education. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 34(4), 569–573. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2006.10473322>
- Hess, D. E., & Gatti, L. (2010). Putting politics where it belongs: In the classroom. *New Directions for Higher Education*, 2010(152), 19–26. <https://doi.org/10.1002/he.408>
- Hess, D. E., & McAvoy, P. (2015). *The political classroom: Evidence and ethics in democratic education*. Routledge.
- Ho, L. C. (2010). Don't worry, I'm not going to report you: Education for citizenship in Singapore. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 38(2), 217–247. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2010.10473423>
- Ho, L.-C., Alviar-Martin, T., & Leviste, E. N. P. (2014). "There is space, and there are limits": The challenge of teaching controversial topics in an illiberal democracy. *Teachers College Record*, 116(5), 1–25.
- Ho, L., McAvoy, P., Hess, D., & Gibbs, B. (2017). Teaching and learning about controversial issues and topics in the social studies. In M. M. Manfra & C. M. Bolick (Eds.), *The Wiley handbook of social studies research* (pp. 319–335). John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118768747.ch14>
- Holden, C. (2004). 'Heaven help the teachers!' Parents' perspectives on the introduction of education for citizenship. *Educational Review*, 56(3), 247–258. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0013191042000201163>
- Houser, N. (1996). Negotiating dissonance and safety for the common good: Social education in the elementary classroom. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 24(3), 294–312. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.1996.10505780>
- Hung, Y.-H. (2020). Exploration of teachers' personal practical knowledge for teaching controversial public issues in elementary school classrooms. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 44(3), 281–289. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2020.04.001>
- Hung, Y.-H., Kawaguchi, H., & Kim, J. (2026). Exploration of how teacher education programs prepare pre-service teachers to teach difficult knowledge in Japan, Korea, and Taiwan. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 181, Article 105741. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2026.105741>
- İnan, S. (2025). *Ne gerek var sosyal bilimlere? İnsan ve toplum bilimleri üzerine sorgulamalar* [Why do we need the social sciences? Reflections on the humanities and social sciences]. Paradigma Yayınları.
- Jaakkola, E. (2020). Designing conceptual articles: Four approaches. *AMS Review*, 10(1–2), 18–26. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13162-020-00161-0>
- James, J. H. (2014). Religious belief and the framing of teachers' approaches to controversy in the classroom in the United States. In T. Misco & J. de Groof (Eds.), *Cross-cultural case studies of teaching controversial issues* (pp. 221–236). Wolf Legal Publishers.
- Journell, W. (2017). *Teaching politics in secondary education: Engaging with contentious issues*. State University of New York Press.
- Kaka, S. J., Littenberg-Tobias, J., Kessner, T., Francis, A. T., Kennett, K., Marvez, G., & Reich, J. (2021). Digital simulations as approximations of practice: Preparing preservice teachers to facilitate whole-class discussions of controversial issues. *Journal of Technology and Teacher Education*, 29(1), 67–90. <https://doi.org/10.35542/osf.io/95gyd>

- Karlberg, M., & Bezzina, C. (2022). The professional development needs of beginning and experienced teachers in four municipalities in Sweden. *Professional Development in Education*, 48(4), 624–641. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2020.1712451>
- Karousiou, C., Vrikki, M., & Evagorou, M. (2025). Teachers' perceptions on introducing sensitive and controversial issues in the classroom. *Frontiers in Education*, 10, Article 1481173. <https://doi.org/10.3389/feduc.2025.1481173>
- Kelly, D., & Brooks, M. (2009). How young is too young? Exploring beginning teachers' assumptions about young children and teaching for social justice. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 42(2), 202–216. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10665680902739683>
- Ketko-Ayali, K., Cohen, A., & Michaeli, N. (2025). From SEL to SPEL: Teachers integrating political emotions in lessons during times of crisis. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 160, Article 105015. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2025.105015>
- Kindlinger, M., & Hahn-Laudenberg, K. (2023). German preservice teachers' stances on criteria for discussing controversial issues in the classroom. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 47(3–4), 197–209. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23522798231206194>
- Kuş, Z. (2015). Science and social studies teachers' beliefs and practices about teaching controversial issues: Certain comparisons. *Journal of Social Science Education*, 14(3), 84–97. <https://doi.org/10.4119/jsse-753>
- Kuş, Z., & Öztürk, D. (2019). Social studies teachers' opinions and practices regarding teaching controversial issues. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(8), 1–19. <http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2019v44n8.2>
- Levstik, L. S., & Barton, K. C. (2011). *Doing history: Investigating with children in elementary and middle schools* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Levy, B. L. M., Busey, C. L., Cuenca, A., Evans, R. W., Halvorsen, A.-L., Ho, L.-C., Kahne, J., Kissling, M. T., Lo, J. C., McAvoy, P., & McGrew, S. (2023). Social studies education research for sustainable democratic societies: Addressing persistent civic challenges. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 51(1), 1–46. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2022.2158149>
- Lo, J. (2023). Debate and deliberation in democratic education. In *The Cambridge handbook of democratic education* (pp. 298–310). Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781009071536.022>
- Logtenberg, A., Savenije, G. M., Bruijn, P. d., Epping, T., & Goijens, G. (2024). Teaching sensitive topics: Training history teachers in collaboration with the museum. *Historical Encounters: A Journal of Historical Consciousness, Historical Cultures, and History Education*, 11(1), 43–59. <https://doi.org/10.52289/hej11.104>
- Lukka, K., & Vinnari, E. (2014). Domain theory and method theory in management accounting research. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal*, 27(8), 1308–1338. <https://doi.org/10.1108/AAAJ-03-2013-1265>
- MacCoy, M. L. (2018). Preparing preservice educators to teach American Indian Boarding School Histories. In S. B. Shear, C. Tschida, E. Bellow, L. B. Buchanan, & E. Saylor (Eds.), *(Re)Imagining elementary social studies: A controversial issues reader* (pp. 255–281). Information Age Publishing.
- Magendzo, A., & Toledo, M. I. (2009). Moral dilemmas in teaching recent history related to the violation of human rights in Chile. *Journal of Moral Education*, 38(4), 445–465. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03057240903321923>
- Mäkiharju, A., & Smeds-Nylund, A.-S. (2025). Educational leadership as pedagogical mediation – a non-affirmative approach. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 39(6), 1517–1530. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJEM-10-2024-0668>
- Makrinioti, D. (1994). Conceptualization of childhood in a welfare state: A critical reappraisal. In J. Qvortrup, M. Bardy, G. Sgritta, & H. Wintersberger (Eds.), *Childhood matters: Social theory, practice and politics* (pp. 267–284). Avebury.
- Mayo, P. (2011). *Gramsci, Freire ve yetişkin eğitimi: Dönüştürücü eylem fırsatları* [Gramsci, Freire, and adult education: Possibilities for transformative action] (A. Duman, Trans.). Ütopya Yayınevi.
- Mayo, P. (2015). *Hegemony and education under neoliberalism: Insights from Gramsci* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203069219>
- McCaffery, N., & Hansson, U. (2011). *The troubles aren't history yet: Young people's understanding of the past*. Community Relations Council.
- Michaeli, N. (2014). Introduction: Education and politics in the Israeli education. In N. Michaeli (Ed.), *Political education: An anthology* (pp. 9–29). Hakibbutz Hameuchad.
- Misco, T. (2011). Deontological reconceptualization: A study of moral education in Beijing. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 39(4), 464–493. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2011.10473464>
- Misco, T., & Tseng, J.-H. (2018). “I will not mention controversial issues unless they are in the textbook”: An exploration of curriculum instructional gatekeeping in Taiwan. *Journal of Social Studies Research*, 42(1), 1–10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jssr.2017.01.005>
- Onganer, Y. E. B. (2025). *Sosyal bilgiler öğretmenlerinin politik okuryazarlık eğitimi öz yeterliklerinin incelenmesi* [An examination of social studies teachers' self-efficacy for political literacy education] [Doctoral dissertation, Kastamonu University].

- Oulton, C., Day, V., & Dillon, J. (2004). Controversial issues – teachers’ attitudes and practices in the context of citizenship education. *Oxford Review of Education*, 30(4), 489–507. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0305498042000303973>
- Öntaş, T., Yıldırım, E., Egüz, Ş., & Kaya, B. (2021). Reflections of teaching of controversial topics to the field of classroom education. *Eğitim ve Bilim*, 46(205), 161–189. <https://doi.org/10.15390/EB.2020.9104>
- Pace, J. L. (2011). The complex and unequal impact of high stakes accountability on untested social studies. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 39(1), 32–60. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2011.10473441>
- Pace, J. L. (2024). Tensions in teaching balanced controversial history: Competing voices within a student teacher in Northern Ireland. *British Educational Research Journal*, 50(4), 1983–2000. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.4008>
- Parker, W. C. (2006). Public discourses in schools: Purposes, problems, possibilities. *Educational Researcher*, 35(8), 11–18. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X035008011>
- Philpott, S., Clabough, J., McConkey, L., & Turner, T. N. (2011). Controversial issues: To teach or not to teach? That is the question! *The Georgia Social Studies Journal*, 1(1), 32–44.
- Pollock, M., Rogers, J., Kwako, A., Matschiner, A., Kendall, R., Bingener, C., Reece, E., Kennedy, B., & Howard, J. R. (2022). The conflict campaign: Exploring local experiences of the campaign to ban “critical race theory” in public K–12 education in the U.S., 2020–2021. UCLA Institute for Democracy, Education, and Access.
- Qvortrup, J. (1994). Childhood matters: An introduction. In J. Qvortrup, M. Bardy, G. Sgritta, & H. Wintersberger (Eds.), *Childhood matters: Social theory, practice and politics* (pp. 1–23). Avebury.
- Reitano, P., Kivunja, C., & Porter, K. (2008). *Teaching controversial issues in schools to prepare children for a sustainable global village* [Conference paper]. Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) Conference, Brisbane, Australia.
- Rucker, T. (2023). Knowledge, values and subject-ness: Educative teaching as a regulative idea of school development in the twenty-first century. In *Non-affirmative theory of education and Bildung* (pp. 63–81). Springer International Publishing.
- Schulte, J. (2026). Teaching and learning controversial issues in environmental and sustainability education: A systematic literature review and proposed heuristic. *Environmental Education Research*, 1–22. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2026.2693941>
- Shuttleworth, J., & Lomax, A. (2018). Teaching about enslavement through a critical analysis of three early childhood historical fiction texts. In S. B. Shear, C. Tschida, E. Bellow, L. B. Buchanan, & E. Saylor (Eds.), *(Re)Imagining elementary social studies: A controversial issues reader* (pp. 341–354). Information Age Publishing.
- Skura, M., Klatt, G., & Dobkowska, J. (2026). Pedagogy as a political action - discussing controversial issues in Polish schools. *Teachers and Teaching: Theory and Practice*, 32(2), 349–372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13540602.2024.2447794>
- Stitzlein, S. (2024). Teaching controversial issues in a populist and post-truth context. *Philosophical Inquiry in Education*, 31(2), 111–125. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1115457ar>
- Stradling, R. (1984). Controversial issues in the classrooms. In S. Hill & C. C. Reid (Eds.), *Teaching controversial issues* (pp. 1–12). Edward Arnold.
- Swalwell, K., & Schweber, S. (2016). Teaching through turmoil: Social studies teachers and local controversial current events. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 44(3), 283–315. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2016.1201447>
- Thomas, P. D. (2009). *The Gramscian moment: Philosophy, hegemony and Marxism*. Brill.
- van Hover, S. D., & Yeager, E. A. (2003). Secondary history teachers and inclusion of students with disabilities: An exploratory study. *The Journal of Social Studies Research*, 27(1), 36–45.
- Waage, I. Ó., Kristjánsson, K., & Björnsdóttir, A. (2016). What are Icelandic teachers’ attitudes toward democracy in education? In P. R. Carr, P. L. Thomas, B. Porfilio, & J. Gorlewski (Eds.), *Democracy and decency: What does education have to do with it?* (pp. 99–118). Information Age Publishing.
- Waterson, R. A. (2009). The examination of pedagogical approaches to teaching controversial public issues: Explicitly teaching the Holocaust and comparative genocide. *Social Studies Research and Practice*, 4(2), 1–24.
- Wills, J. (2007). Putting the squeeze on social studies: Managing teaching dilemmas in subject areas excluded from state testing. *Teachers College Record*, 109(8), 1980–2046. <https://doi.org/10.1177/016146810710900804>
- Williams, J. A. (1994). *Classroom in conflict: Teaching controversial subjects in a diverse society*. State University of New York Press.
- Wong, K. L., Lee, C. K. J., Chan, K. S. J., & Kennedy, K. J. (2019). Teacher self-efficacy in cultivating students to become “good citizens”: A Hong Kong case. *Teacher Development*, 23(2), 155–173. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2018.1550435>
- Yavaş, M., Karadağ, Y., & Kaymakçı, S. (2024). Teaching political issues in social studies course: Teachers’ views. *Anadolu Journal of Educational Sciences International*, 14(1), 114–146. <https://doi.org/10.18039/ajesi.1337186>

Zembylas, M., & Kambani, F. (2012). The teaching of controversial issues during elementary-level history instruction: Greek-Cypriot teachers' perceptions and emotions. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 40(2), 107–133. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2012.670591>