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Title of your paper: **Controversiality as an element of teaching quality**

### **Abstract**

The relevance of teaching controversial issues is broadly shared in social science education. This is related to the controversial character of pluralistic democracies, and linked to the goal to enhance political learning, and to develop democratic competencies as perspective taking, reflective judgment and critical thinking. However, there is no consensus among educators on which controversial issues should be taught, and how, and this discussion has not been systematically connected to teaching quality frameworks. Likewise, frameworks that operationalize generic aspects of teaching quality often fail to consider the aspect of controversiality. We will present and discuss a framework to operationalize and analyze controversiality as an aspect of quality in teaching social science subjects. This framework will be applied to videotaped teaching sequences from the Nordic LISA-video material and videos from the German LArS-Project. The framework conceptualizes three interrelated dimensions related to the topic, the teacher and the learner. The operationalization of controversiality as a teaching quality faces specific challenges, as the shaping of controversy in the classroom is characterized more than other dimensions of teaching quality by sometimes conflicting subject didactic requirements. The framework of controversiality as teaching quality has the potential to advance the concept of teaching quality as a whole and the theory development in social science didactics, to provide a basis for comparative empirical analyses of instructional videos, and to be introduced in teacher education to promote professional vision.

## Extended summary

### Introduction

Controversy and disagreement are key characteristics of pluralistic democracies. Social science education in pluralistic democracies therefore needs to reflect the controversial nature of political contents. Social Science didactic and Civic Education theory agree on the normative importance of controversy in the classroom (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Larsson & Lindström, 2020; Christensen & Grammes, 2020; Kerr & Huddleston, 2015) and the goal to develop democratic competencies as perspective taking, reflective judgment and critical thinking. However, the discourse is fragmented and there is a lack of didactic theories concerning the influencing quality factors, characteristics and effects of learning-promoting designs of controversy in the classroom. In Social Science didactics, the discourse on "good teaching" is largely detached from generic educational research; empirical data on process characteristics or outcomes are regrettably rare (Gronostay, 2016).

### Theoretical Background

Previous frameworks of teaching quality do acknowledge the existence of subject-specific features, but often this relates to aspects of content or emphasis of specific (sub)-dimensions. E.g., the PLATO framework has been developed for language arts education. It is rooted in ideas of generic qualities of teaching, which is reflected in the categories used (Instructional Scaffolding, Disciplinary Demand, Representing and Use of Content, and Classroom Environment) (Grossman, Loeb, Cohen, & Wyckoff, 2013; Klette, Blikstad-Balas, & Roe, 2017). With a similar perspective Praetorius, Herrmann et al. (2020) provides a synthesis framework of teaching quality which further differentiates the Three Basic Dimension Modell (Cognitive Activation, Classroom Management & Student Support) (Praetorius, Klieme et al., 2020). Particularly the dimension of student support is further divided into support of practicing, formative assessment, support of all students' learning and socio-emotional support to enhance a subject-specific adaptability of the framework. The framework was developed in the context of mathematics didactics and generic educational research, but has recently been applied to natural science subjects, sport and history, so that it represents a suitable starting point for relating the discourses.

These generic quality dimensions are without doubt relevant for social science education, but they do not capture controversiality as a quality in teaching political or social science contents. For example, controversy can provoke cognitive activation through cognitive conflicts, but the question of controversiality in teaching cannot be reduced to a function of cognitive activation.

### Aims

In this contribution, we develop and introduce the cornerstones of a framework for the analysis of controversiality as an element of quality in social science teaching. The viability of the framework will be tested with material from two video studies.

### Methods

For the theoretical development of the framework, theoretical and conceptual approaches of teaching controversial issues in the international, Nordic and German discourses are reviewed and

systemized. For the empirical applicability of the framework, examples of animated videos of the German LARS-Project (Learning with Animated Films of real Scenes of Social Science Subjects) and examples from the videos that have been recorded in the QUISST-project (Quality in Social Science Teaching) are selected. These videos in the QUISST-project have been coded using the PLATO-framework, and it is possible to select sequences that contain discussion of controversial issues (from the Danish videos we have examples of the teacher organizing a weekly discussion of selected topics in the classroom). In the LARS-Project vignettes of authentic classroom cases of social science lesson in German secondary schools are animated to be introduced in pre-service teacher education settings. The animated sequences represent situations of ice-breakers, debates or classroom discussions which are selected because they raise challenges in the teaching of controversial issues. Animations will be available as Open Educational Resource (OER) with English subtitles at the time of the conference. Analyzing these sequences gives an aide on how discussions can be conducted and provide a starting point refining a tool for observation and analysis.

### **Preliminary findings**

We will develop a framework for analyzing controversiality in teaching which will be tested on videodata as mentioned above. This will provide the basis for developing a framework that can be applied to further analysis of empirical material. We will investigate both which aspects of controversial issues are present in the observed teaching, and how they are treated didactically in the teaching situation.

### **Results**

The theoretical work will result in a framework for observing and analyzing the prevalence of controversiality in social science teaching. The application of the framework on cases of teaching from Germany and Nordic countries (Denmark) will show how useful this can be in a setting of comparative analysis. Both the theoretical work and the preliminary empirical analysis are important steps towards a more common discussion on the field of controversiality in social science education, across countries and across educational traditions.

### **Theoretical and education significance**

The framework can form the basis for reflections on how an operationalization of controversiality could look like, and how this could be used in teacher education. It's important to keep in mind, that in the question of shaping controversiality as an element of teaching quality, professional teaching vision is less about recognizing clear solutions but more about identifying fields of friction. Particularly, OER video vignettes can be used to foster professional vision of teacher education students regarding the reflection of controversy in classes.

### **Relevance to the QUINT ambition**

Investigating controversiality as an aspect of quality in social science teaching enables us to enhance the discussion of quality in teaching in a way that captures aspects of teaching that have been described as important but are not operationalized or in other ways described in frameworks for investigating quality such as the PLATO framework. This study will therefore provide a valuable

contribution to the discussion of quality, also in a democratic perspective, as the ability to deal with controversies is an important competence in modern pluralistic societies.

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