

Workshop for Key Stage 4 school students:

Is embryo research the limit?

Background

The ethics of embryo research are the subject of vigorous debate. This resource offers an opportunity to bring that debate into the classroom. It was developed with the support of the ESRC as an event for the Festival of Social Science.

Through this interactive workshop, GCSE students can learn more about embryo research and consider ethical issues of embryo research from a variety of different perspectives, exploring questions such as: What is an embryo? What is embryo research? Who decides what research is allowed to take place? Who should decide?

Initial debate and slideshow

This resource offers a **PowerPoint presentation** to introduce the topic and to begin the debate. You will need someone to lead the workshop, using the **workshop guide** provided to ask questions, move the slides on, and collect the students' responses. It is interesting to return to those responses at certain points as the workshop goes on to see whether the students' opinions have changed. As well as the leader, you will need three other adults or older students to lead the group discussions.

Group discussion

At the end of the slide presentation, the class should be divided into four groups. Each will represent a group within society which may have a particular opinion about whether embryo research should be permitted and how it should be regulated. Students should understand that this is similar to a role-playing activity, in that they are not being asked to present their own opinions, but to try to understand the position of the group they represent and the arguments that group might put forward. There is a '**cribsheet**' for each group leader to help move discussion along.

The four groups are the Church, Researchers and Medical Practitioners, the Government, and Parents. Group members should decide for themselves how to interpret those titles – 'Church' might be taken to mean anyone with a religious affiliation, including non-Christian, or the group might choose to reflect the views of a particular denomination. Similarly, 'Parents' might mean those who already have children, or those who are planning to have children. The 'Practitioners' group might be thought likely to be in favour of research, but the students should decide that for themselves. Those in the 'Government' group will probably have the most difficult task. Will they lead or reflect public opinion? Which body of public opinion – there are many different views? The Government will, in the end, be the law-makers – who will they be guided by to decide what the law should be?

Further prompts for discussion

Workshop leaders may also find it useful to research topical news items which can be discussed by each group, either from their own or from their adopted perspective. We have not provided these, as it is better to find completely up-to-date articles, but see below for examples of past articles which have been useful in prompting debate.

Group presentations

At the end of the time allowed for group discussions, the class should come back together to hear from each group. With the help of the group leader, each group will have recorded their thoughts and elected a spokesperson to present those thoughts to the whole class. The spokesperson will present the views the group thinks that the people they are representing – Government, Parents, Church, or Researchers and Practitioners - might espouse. There should be time for questions from other members of the class to each group.

Class discussion

When all the groups have presented their thoughts, the workshop leader will lead a whole class discussion on the topic of embryo research and the issues raised. Students should, at this point, have the opportunity to express their own opinions rather than imagining what the thoughts of others may be, although leaders may try to draw from them whether being required to consider the topic from a certain point of view has altered their opinions at all, or made them think again, at least. You may wish to return to the responses to questions posed at the beginning of the workshop to see if the students' ideas have changed at all, and how.

Past news articles

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/3341566/Embryo-research-a-source-of-hope-or-horror.html>

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1024248/Critics-embryo-research-absurd-claims-church-academic.html>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2001/jul/24/internationaleducationnews.catholicism>

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/science/science-news/3338897/Campaigners-against-human-embryo-research-launch-legal-challenge.html>

