



## Democratic Dialogue at School

An online game-based  
training tool on  
democratic dialogue  
for teachers

Learning, Teaching,  
Training Activity (LTTA)

**E-book of abstracts**

**symplexis**

## **Democratic Dialogue at School**

# An online game-based training tool on democratic dialogue for teachers

Learning, Teaching,  
Training Activity (LTTA)

## **E-book of abstracts**

1<sup>st</sup> DD@S LTTA, 9 & 10 May 2023, Athens Greece

Hosted by Symplexis & The Interorthodox Centre of the Church of Greece

Venue: Holy Monastery of Pendeli, 15236 P. Pendeli

<b>Project Title</b>	Democratic Dialogue at School: An online game-based training tool on democratic dialogue for teachers
<b>Project Acronym</b>	DD@S
<b>Programme</b>	Erasmus+ KA220-SCH - Cooperation partnerships in school education
<b>Grant Agreement No</b>	2021-1-BE02-KA220-SCH-000032794
<b>Duration</b>	01/01/2022 – 30/06/2024
<b>Countries</b>	Belgium, Italy, Greece, Cyprus
<b>Learning, Teaching, Training Activities</b>	LTTA 1 - Trials DD@S. Interactive training in focus groups from all participating countries, to exchange expertise about multicultural priorities, handling of diversity-related controversies and focus for implementation
<b>Country</b>	Greece
<b>Organized by</b>	Symplexis at the premises of The Interorthodox Centre of the Church of Greece (Holy Monastery of Pendeli, 15236 P. Pendeli)
<b>Results' Title</b>	E-book of abstracts
<b>Contributors</b>	Edited by SYMPLEXIS (Greece) & ERASMUSHOGESCHOOL BRUSSEL (Belgium) with input from all partners: CENTRO PER LO SVILUPPO CREATIVO DANILO DOLCI (Italy), ISTITUTO D'ISTRUZIONE SUPERIORE EINAUDI PARETO (Italy), CENTRE FOR ADVANCEMENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT IN EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY LTD – CARDET (Cyprus), UNIVERSITY OF NICOSIA – UNIC (Cyprus), INTERORTHODOX CENTRE OF THE CHURCH OF GREECE (Greece), GO! TECHNISCH ATHENEUM ZAVELENBERG SINT-AGATHA-BERCHEM (Belgium).
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<b>Dissemination Level</b>	Public
<b>Version: 0.3 - Date</b>	22/11/2023

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ISBN: 9789464443882



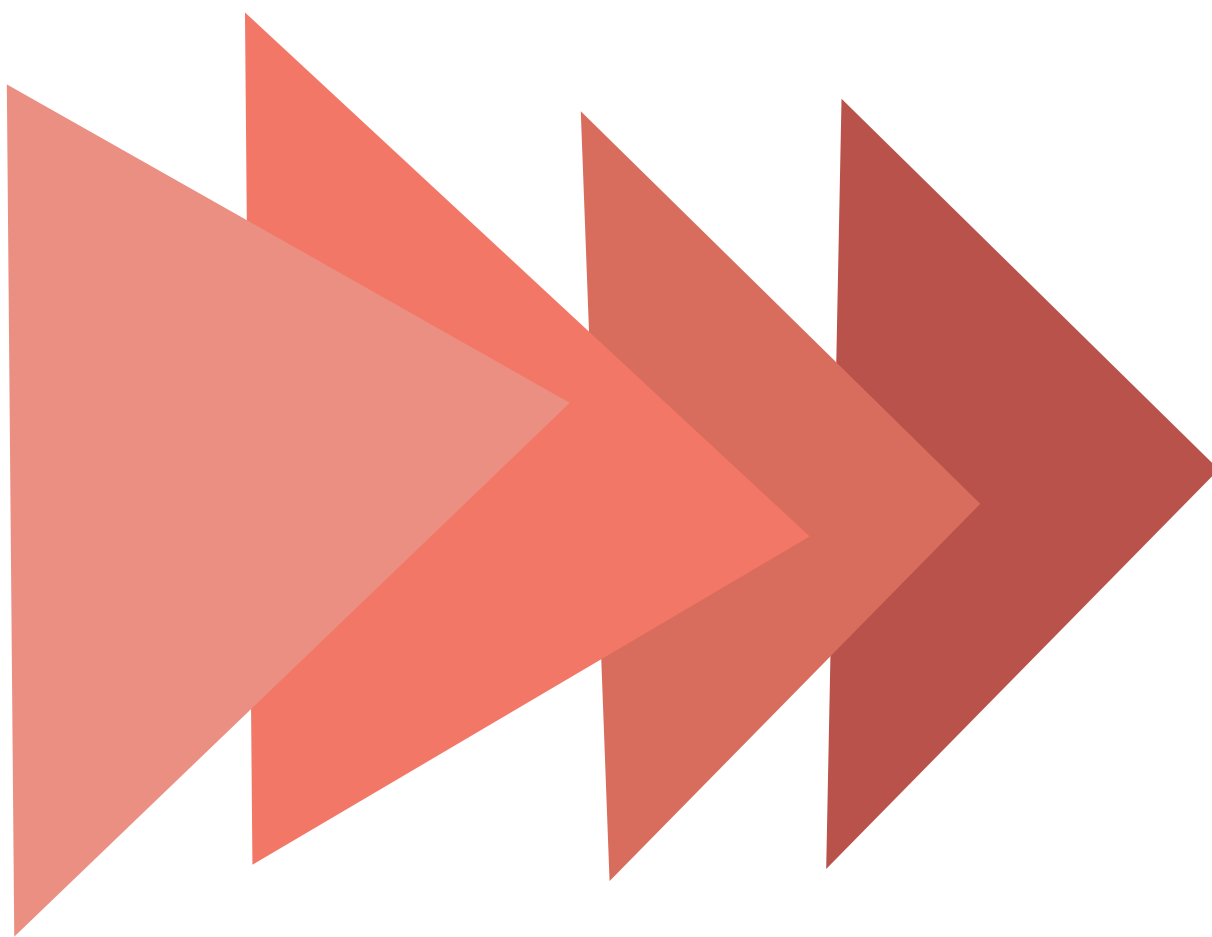
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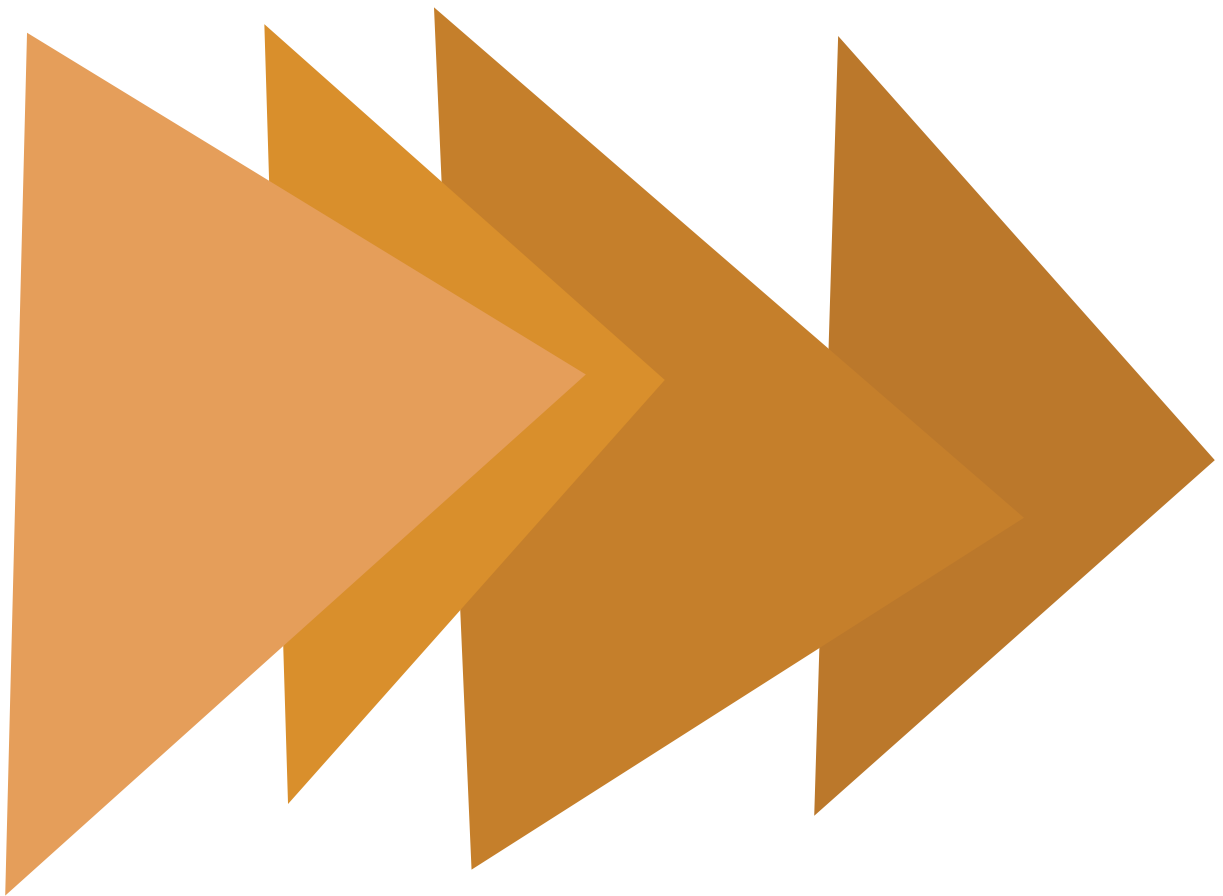
Please cite as: Erasmus+ Project DD@S: Democratic Dialogue at School. An online game-based training tool on democratic dialogue for teachers (2023). E-book of abstracts, DD@S 1<sup>st</sup> Learning, Teaching, Training Activity, 9-10 May 2023, Athens Greece. Project Number: 2021-1-BE02-KA220-SCH-000032794.

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# The DD@S Erasmus+ Project



The Erasmus+ project “Democratic Dialogue at School: An online game-based training tool on democratic dialogue for teachers” (DD@S, ddasproject.eu) believes in the strength of dialogue to tackle intolerance and discrimination at school aiming to stimulate inclusive education all over Europe. It is implemented from 01/01/2022 - 30/06/2024 in four EU countries (Belgium, Greece, Italy, Cyprus) with the participation of the following partners:



Erasmushogeschool  
Brussel  
Belgium  
Coordinator



Centro Per Lo Sviluppo  
Creativo Danilo Dolci  
Italy



Istituto D'Istruzione  
Superiore Einaudi Pareto  
Italy



Centre For Advancement  
Of Research And  
Development In  
Educational Technology  
Ltd – Cardet  
Cyprus



University Of  
Nicosia – Unic  
Cyprus



Symplexis  
Greece



Interorthodox Centre Of  
The Church Of Greece  
Greece



GO! Technisch Atheneum  
Zavelenberg  
Sint-Agatha-Berchem  
Belgium

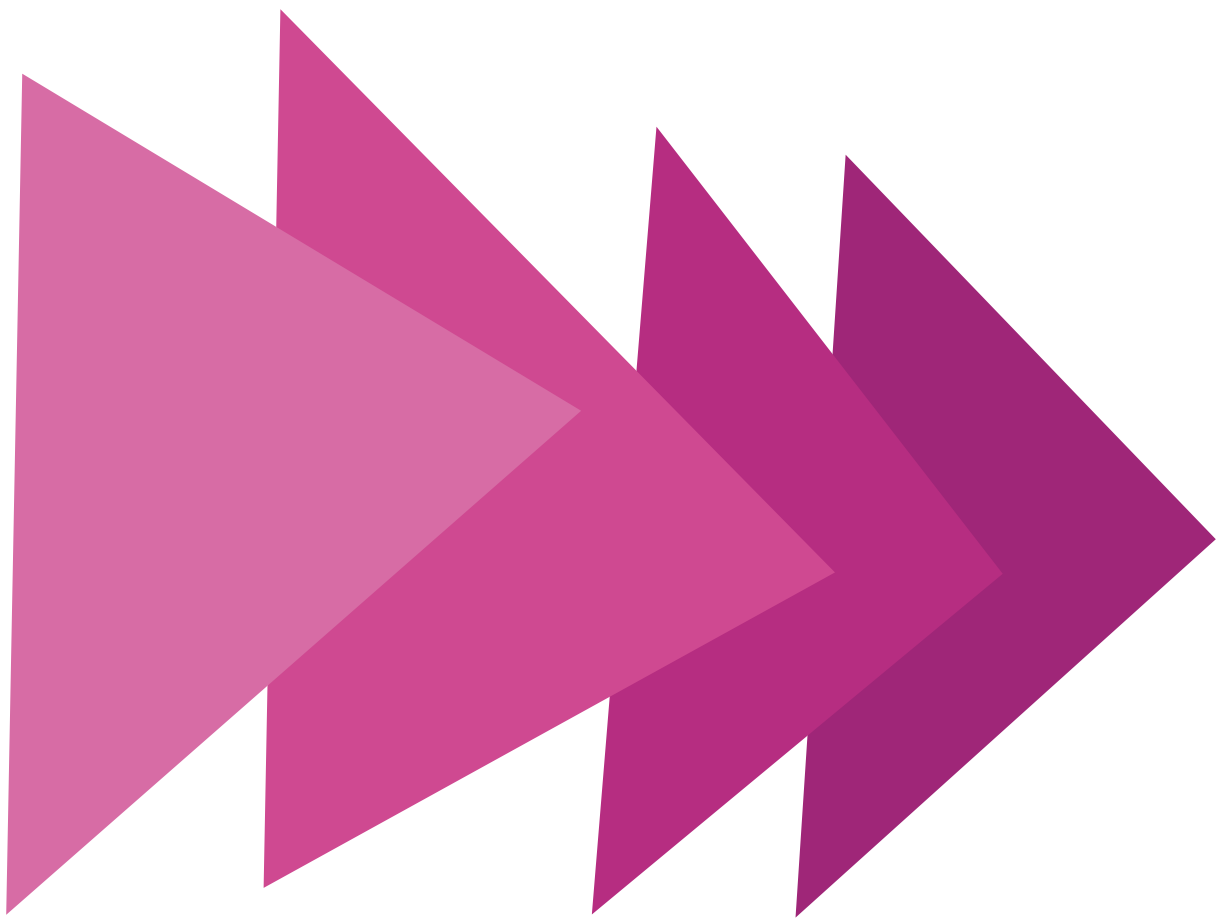
DD@S aims at empowering European secondary school teachers in dealing with multicultural challenges at school. The project will contribute in the professional development of teachers, and educators in general, helping them to acquire effective dialogue skills to cope with ethnic, religious and multicultural conflict situations and discussions on various controversial issues at school.

The DD@S Work Packages (WP) and results include the following

- **WP1: Toolkit DD@S including good practices.** The first WP is a toolkit that offers all instruments for schools who feel the need to empower teachers and pedagogical professionals in democratic dialogue, to promote an inclusive climate at school, helping the school teams build their own training strategy and policy to implement at school.

- **WP2: Teacher modules for using DD@S.** This WP consists of teacher modules that aim to provide a structured guide for teachers on dealing with controversial and diversity related conflicts at school by using the DD@S method. This practical guide combines theory and practice by providing theoretical background, full written scenarios and useful tips and related sources about the nature of each training case study and possible conflict resolution strategies.
- **WP3: Gamification based e-learning platform of DD@S.** The scope of the third WP is to engage teachers in an interactive online training: the DD@S training, which is a gamification based online training platform where they can practise and train democratic dialogue skills in different training scenarios.
- **WP4: e-publication with policy recommendations.** The last WP is an e-publication with policy recommendations to contribute to the implementation of DD@S, based on the experiences acquired during the project implementation, and the information and suggestions collected.

# The scope of the 1<sup>st</sup> LTTA





The **DD@S' Learning, Teaching, Training Activity** was planned at a key moment in the project's timetable: it has been the kick off for the pilot testing phase of the DD@S educational material to be embedded into an online platform.

The main objective of the project's **1<sup>st</sup> LTTA**, held in **Athens, Greece on the 9 & 10 of May 2023** was to organize trials for the DD@S project, through an interactive training in focus groups with the participation of teachers from all participating countries.

For the first time after almost one year and a half of online collaboration, project participants of all partner countries met each other in real person and were accompanied by at least 10 teachers or related professionals to:

- exchange in-service experiences from schools in the participating countries
- exchange expertise from all participating countries
- train-the-trainers: train teachers in using the DD@S material and platform and all guidelines, to fulfil their role in the pilot testing at their school, in the following project phase
- facilitate the organisational process of focus groups with the project participants.

A total of 56 teachers and education professionals met face-to-face to share their expertise on multicultural priorities, managing diversity controversies and to provide valuable feedback for the development of the project's toolkit, training programme and gamified e-learning platform.

The LTTA's activities have involved the following:

- a two days seminar with presentations from project staff and invited speakers from all participating countries (abstract available in the present e-book)
- intervision meetings for expertise exchange between project staff, teachers and invited participants
- practical learning activity with the DD@S tool followed by a workshop democratic dialogue (including self-reflection)
- train the trainer workshops & organisation of focus groups

The activity has resulted in:

- the present online abstract book (which material will be also incorporated per case in the teachers' modules of the project)
- an implementation network of trained teachers and related professionals that will act as "ambassadors" within the pilot testing phase

- consensus reports and summary of the intervision meetings (available only for the project partners for the finalisation of the DD@S platform)
- evaluations from the participants (collection of data available only for the project partners to guide the finalisation of the teacher modules and further development of the DD@S platform).

The DD@S' 2<sup>nd</sup> LTTA will focus on the ambassadors of the project, aiming at providing training for all participants in the full implementation of DD@S. This activity, building on the results of the 1<sup>st</sup> LTTA, will aim at a sustainable implementation and dissemination of the project final results (toolkit, training platform and teacher modules) in each country.

# Agenda



# **LTTA, DAY 1: Tuesday 9 May 2023**

**09.45–10.00 Registration**

## **Welcome & Introduction**

**10.00–10.30 Online & in person**

Welcome by Christina Bonarou (Symplexis, LTTA's organiser)

DD@S: Short introduction to the project and the objectives of the LTTA (online presentation by Veerle Van Raemdonck, project coordinator)

Ice breaking activity (by Symplexis' team)

**10.30–11.00 Coffee Break**

## **Plenary Session 1: Keynote presentations on intercultural communication and discussion of controversial issues at school**

**11.00–12.30 Plenary session (Online & in person)**

“The elephant in the classroom”: Why we should teach/discuss controversial issues at school — **Christina Bonarou, Symplexis & Hellenic Open University, Greece**

Identifying teachers' needs for teaching controversial issues in the classroom — **Christiana Karousiou, University of Nicosia & Chrysanthi Konstanti, CARDET, Cyprus**

Evidence-informed coping strategies for teachers: the case of democratic dialogue — **Muhammet Safa Göregen, Erasmushogeschool Brussel, Belgium**

Reciprocal maieutic approach of Danilo Dolci for community analysis & empowerment — **Antonella Alessi, Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo “Danilo Dolci”, Italy**

**12.30–13.30 Short tour of the Holy Monastery of Pendeli & Light Lunch**

**Plenary Session 2: DD@S Toolkit including good practices**

**13.30–14.30 Plenary session (Online & in person)**

Comparative results of the DD@S survey: Skills and inabilities of teachers in dealing with controversy –  
**Muhammet Safa Göregen, Erasmushogeschool Brussel, Belgium**

Introduction to the DD@S Toolkit of good practices: supporting, inspiring and empowering schools & teachers – **Christina Bonarou, Symplexis, Greece**

**Parallel Sessions (2a, 2b, 2c, 2d): DD@S Toolkit including good practices**

**14.30–15.30 Training workshops – Focus groups on the implementation and discussion of good practices**

Facilitators:

Team A — **Christos Nasios & Sergios Voilas, Interorthodox Centre of the Church of Greece**

Team B — **Ida Mariolo & Loredana Rizzo, Istituto Istruzione Superiore Einaudi Pareto**

Team C — **Muhammet Safa Göregen, Erasmushogeschool Brussel, Belgium**

Team D — **Nicoletta Pantela, CARDET, Cyprus**

**15.30–16.00 Coffee Break**

**16.00–17.00 Training workshops (cont.) & feedback collection**

**17.30 Closing of the 1<sup>st</sup> Day & Social dinner**

## **LTTA, DAY 2: Wednesday 10 May 2023**

### **10.00–10.30 Registration & Welcome**

Energiser activity (by Symplexis' team)

### **10.30–11.00 Coffee Break**

### **Plenary Session 3: DD@S training programme – Teacher modules' presentation**

#### **11.00–13.00 Online & in person**

Introduction to the DD@S Training course for school teams, teachers and school leaders in Europe & presentation of Module 0: Introduction to democratic dialogue and communicating controversial issues at school — **Christina Bonarou, Symplexis, Greece**

Module 1: Discussing socio-political issues with your students — **Muhammet Safa Göregen, Erasmushogeschool Brussel, Belgium**

Module 2: Dealing with religious and ethical topics at school — **Christos Nasios & Sergios Voilas, Interorthodox Centre of the Church of Greece**

Module 3: Topics concerning vulnerable groups (e.g. migrants, refugees, people from disadvantaged environments, people with disabilities) — **Christiana Karousiou, University of Nicosia & Chrysanthi Konstanti, CARDET, Cyprus**

Module 4: Gender related discussions in class — **Katarina Vuksan, Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo "Danilo Dolci", Italy**

#### **13.00–14.00 Light Lunch**

### **Parallel Sessions (3a, 3b, 3c): DD@S training programme – Modules activities**

#### **14.00–15.00 Training workshops – Focus groups implementing activities from the DD@S modules and feedback collection**

Facilitators:

Team A — **Christos Nasios & Sergios Voilas, Interorthodox Centre of the Church of Greece**

Team B — Katarina Vuksan & Liliana Cipolla, Centro  
per lo Sviluppo Creativo “Danilo Dolci”

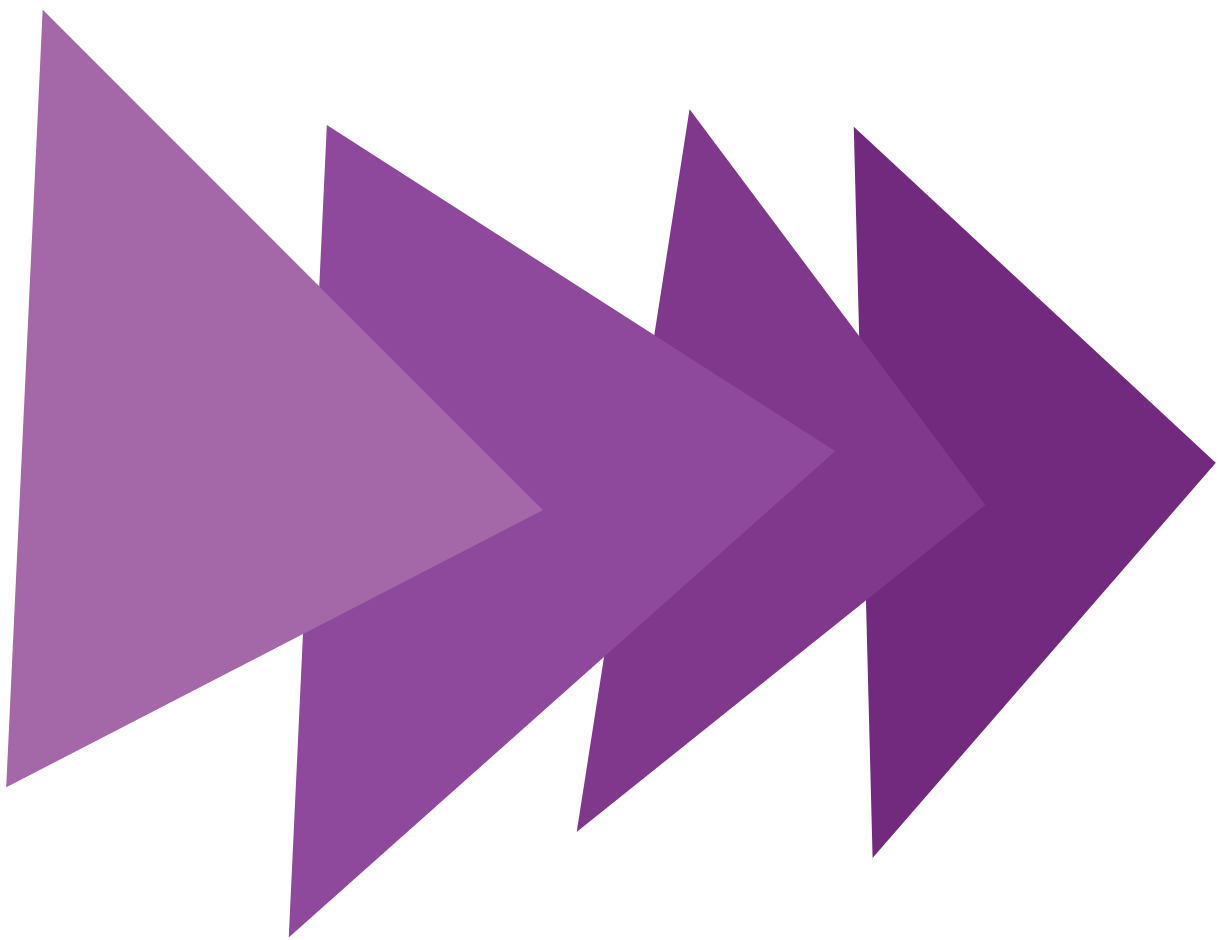
Team C — Veerle Van Raemdonck, Erasmushogeschool  
Brussel & Valerie Verbeelen, GO! TA Zavelenberg

**15.00–15.30 Coffee Break**

**15.30–16.00 Training workshops (cont.) & feedback collection**

**16.00–17.00 Closing of the 2nd Day: Plenary discussion, Q&A,  
Evaluation of the LTTA**

# Plenary Session 1: Summaries of the keynote presentations on intercultural communication and discussion of controversial issues at school







## **“The elephant in the classroom”: Why we should teach/discuss controversial issues at school.**

Christina Bonarou, Symplexis &  
Hellenic Open University, Greece

### **How does the elephant enter the classroom?**

The metaphorical phrase “the elephant in the room” refers to a major problem or controversial issue that is obviously present but is avoided as a subject for discussion. Some scholars trace the roots of the idiom to a fable called “The Inquisitive Man” (1814), written by Ivan Krylov, Russia’s best-known fabulist and poet. In the story, a man visits a museum and notices a multitude of tiny animals, but... not the elephant! This fable was later referenced even by Fyodor Dostoyevsky in his book “Demons”. Since the 20th century, the phrase has become increasingly popular. For example, in 1902, a New York Times article used it to describe the way the media kept ignoring a political scandal of the time.

Coming to the present time, in the context of the DD@S Erasmus+ Project, we bring into focus “the elephant in the classroom”. Thinking about a “stereotypical classroom”, the first things that usually come to our mind include: Desks in rows, in pairs or in a U-shape, one teacher standing in front of 20 or 30 seated students, a blackboard or whiteboard or PPT presentation with lesson’s notes and exercises, posters or maps hanging on the walls, students paying attention to the lecture, students taking notes and asking questions, but also students whispering to one another about irrelevant issues or students talking all together making noise.

However, a stereotypical classroom can include nowadays -metaphorically speaking- so much more. The following indicative list of people addresses students -but also teachers- and often they “talk” all together simultaneously!

- Family members and friends of all students and the teacher. Also, community members, religious organizations, role-models and other persons who have a strong influence on the class members’ ideas, beliefs, feelings and views about themselves and the world around them;
- Journalists and reporters disseminating conflicting news about current events and issues that affect our lives;
- Scientists and writers with contradictory points of view;
- Politicians with various ideologies;
- Famous stars, athletes and influencers sharing their opinion on various everyday topics;
- Anonymous people/strangers commenting on social media on local, national or global current events.

Controversial issues — also known as “the elephant” — have entered the classroom. In other words, we refer to (Council of Europe, 2015; Oxfam, 2018):

- More or less “sensitive topics” that evoke strong feelings & views;
- Issues that divide opinion not only among participants in a class discussion but in communities and the wider society in general;
- Issues that affect the socio-political, cultural, economic or environmental context in which people live;
- Issues that usually concern questions of value, ethics and beliefs and are usually complicated, with no “clear” and “easy” answers;
- Issues on which people often hold strong views based on their own experiences, interests, values and personal context, as well as those of their “inner circle”.

Issues like immigration, terrorism, war, religion and extremism, race and racism, LGBTIQ+ rights & human rights in general, gender equality, sexism, climate change, health, politics, poverty, technology are big in our lives (and the news) in many countries and neither can nor should be ignored.

Controversial issues vary in place and time, are long-standing or very recent and can be from local to global, e.g. from the mosque building in a neighborhood to reducing the impacts of climate change at international level. Many topics can become controversial and new controversies appear every day, through public channels like news media, electoral politics, and social media -especially in the context of “fake news”.

## **Many teachers hesitate or avoid discussing controversial issues into their class, under fears such as the following:**

- Controversial issues could spark conflict between students and/or teachers or result in reprimands from the school director or parents.
- Teacher’s authority and reputation could be undermined if the situation goes out of control.
- Teachers feel “unqualified” or “untrained” to be involved in such discussions.
- Relationships between students and/or teachers could be harmed, especially if the expressed opinions and attitudes lead to some students – in particular from vulnerable groups– feeling offended, harassed or marginalized by other students and/or the teacher.

Controversy is a growing part of life, and therefore of school life and school is supposed, among others, to prepare students for whatever lies ahead in life, including having challenging discussions with people who might hold different opinions.

Through the development of dialogue skills, schools fulfil their role as democratic institutions. Debate, discussion and dialogue are often used interchangeably; however, their intentions differ. Debates and discussions are oppositional, while dialogue is collaborative and transformative. That is why teachers need to promote dialogue. Discussing sensitive, controversial issues and providing age-appropriate learning opportunities around controversial issues prepares students for democratic participation in later life and can make a positive contribution to young peoples’ personal and emotional development.

### **Building a beneficial friendship with the “elephant”**

Teachers don’t need to be “subject experts” or have all the answers to teach/discuss controversial issues. Teaching controversial issues means first of all being able to embrace the fear of saying “I don’t know (...but let’s find out together)”! It also means to avoid bias and seek for balance and objectivity; to combine approaches, depending on the students’ profile, maturity and skills, cultural & social context, and other related factors, so as to create a respectful learning environment and also a safe space for fruitful dialogue.

It is crucial for teachers to equip themselves with the skills for dealing with controversial issues and use them to benefit their class. Controversial issues in class should be related to “open questions” -not “settled” ones and should be explored under different perspectives (Journell 2020; McAvoy & Ho, 2020). The decision to frame an issue as open or settled, needs to be thoughtful and based on available facts. For example, according to Journell (2020), the real-

ization that the Earth is round has been settled scientific fact for at least 500 years; however, there are currently groups of people who insist that the Earth is flat. We believe that none of us would decide to “teach the controversy” of whether the Earth is round based on the beliefs of a small percentage of misguided persons!

Depending on the issue, teachers should set some realistic goals and open a dialogue/start teaching controversial issues (Emerson et al, 2012):

- to help students view the topic from a multiple point of view;
- To encourage students to look for reliable sources and seek different perspectives;
- to engage them in critical thinking and analysis (e.g. of official policies);
- to show students how misinformation is constructed and help them get better at detecting it; or simply
- to raise awareness. In fact, a much safer place to start is by raising awareness about issues at a society level rather than individual level – this, in turn, might also challenge the actions of students and affect their attitudes, as well, in a positive way.

## References

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# Identifying teachers' needs for teaching controversial issues in the classroom.

Christiana Karousiou, University of Nicosia  
& Chrysanthi Konstanti, CARDET, Cyprus

## Introduction

The present keynote presentation focuses on the results of the online focus group discussion that was organised by the University of Nicosia (UNIC) and CARDET for the needs of the DD@S Erasmus+ Project. The discussion took place on the Webex platform on November 9, 2022 with the participation of 11 female secondary school teachers with 3-20 years of teaching experience.

The aim of the focus groups was to examine participants' views, thoughts and direct experiences related to teaching/discussing controversial issues. The main topics discussed included the following: attitudes in teaching controversial issues, teaching practices, teachers' confidence – autonomy -professional development, and also challenges and needs in terms of dealing with controversial issues in schools.

## Teachers' attitudes in teaching controversial issues (CIs)

The focus group participants from Cyprus showed a positive attitude towards introducing controversial issues (CIs) in their classrooms. After all, CIs are considered as part of everyday school life and it is teachers' responsibility to address them. In addition, CIs should be an integral part of the curriculum for students' citizenship. Teachers acknowledge the importance of CIs, commenting that such issues enable students to take an informed position, make judgments, and take responsibility.

Moreover, CIs promote democratic thinking and the development of tolerant attitudes. Frequent opportunities should be given to students so as to talk about CIs in the classroom, meaning that they could address relevant questions, make claims, and support these claims with evidence. Through the discussion it was made evident that students affected by one situation are willing to join in discussions of controversial issues. On the other hand, disengaged students show reluctance towards discussing such topics.

## Teaching practices

The main practices discussed for teaching CIs in the classroom are:

- Engage students in a dialogic process through democratic dialogue to enhance collective thinking, resolve misconceptions, and co-construct knowledge;
- Conduct classroom discussions between the teacher and students (teacher-whole class, teacher-student groups, teacher-individual students) or between students (in group-work/pair-work contexts);
- Set ground rules for classroom discussion to guarantee everyone a voice to express their opinion and encourage respect for whoever wishes to speak;
- Use techniques such as presenting real-life scenarios, problem-solving activities, engaging students in collaborative assignments with CI topics, encouraging them to seek information, ask questions, discover, and participate in dialogue;
- Encourage students to create videos, songs, and role play with the use of technology to initiate dialogue amongst them.

### **Teachers' confidence and autonomy**

An important outcome of the focus group was that teachers feel more confident and competent in facilitating discussions on issues that students can relate to.

Key factors affecting teachers' confidence and autonomy that require particular attention include the following:

- Lack of academic autonomy;
- Lack of skills and knowledge;
- Lack of time;
- Parental and local society reaction;
- School administration, school ethos and culture;
- Class management, problems;
- Professional inadequacies in relation to the use of appropriate teaching methods to initiate such discussions.

### **Teachers' professional development**

Teachers need to develop a range of skills to handle controversial issues in the classroom and overcome a lack of adequate training that holds them back. It is also crucial for teachers to be able to acknowledge and manage their own biases, protect vulnerable individuals and marginalized groups, and present issues even-handedly.

Participants highlighted that there is an urgent need for well-developed training courses and school-based training and communities of practice. Inviting school

experts to help teachers facilitate discussions on CI is also very helpful, while feedback should be considered as an integral part of every successful training.

## **Practical Recommendations**

Practical suggestions which emerged from the focus group discussion are summarized as follows:

- Creating a school ethos in which controversial issues could be addressed
- School leaders need to offer the necessary academic freedom
  - Distributed leadership
  - Professional development opportunities and
  - Guidance and support.
- Parental involvement in school activities with respect to CI
- Provide ongoing and school-based in-service training to teachers to handle CI in the classroom.
- Design the classroom environment appropriately to instil respect for different ideas.
  - Create a safe environment for students to engage in debates with people who have different opinions.
  - Carefully manage discussions on controversial issues to promote freedom of expression, inclusion, tolerance, and human rights.

## **Conclusion**

Teachers face several challenges with respect to discussing CI in their classrooms. Even though they are willing to introduce CI in their classrooms, there is difficulty in handling the discussion of sensitive and controversial issues due to lack of academic autonomy, skills, time and training. Parental reaction, local society, school administration, school ethos and culture, class management, problems, and professional inadequacies in relation to the use of appropriate teaching methods are amongst the factors that inhibit the initiation of such discussions. Through the careful management of discussions on controversial issues and provision of adequate and proper training to teachers, schools can deal with CI in an efficient way to promote freedom of expression, as well as inclusion, tolerance, and human rights, and prevent, or counter, the use of hate speech in their setting.

# Evidence-informed coping strategies for teachers: the case of democratic dialogue.

Muhammet Safa Göregen,  
Erasmushogeschool Brussel, Belgium

## Introduction to democratic dialogue and challenges for contemporary society and education

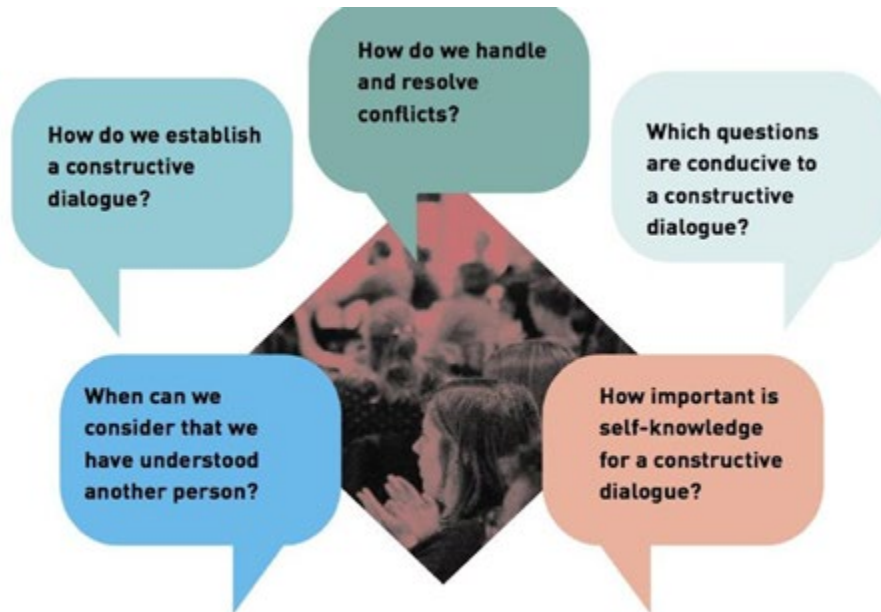
Democracy without dialogue is unthinkable, but finding ways to talk about disagreements in an open and respectful atmosphere isn't easy at all. Teachers and students come from increasingly divergent socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Varying opinions and perspectives about a mixed society can be enriching but are not always considered as advantageous by all those who are involved.

It can be a real challenge for practitioners to moderate discussions on sensitive social issues or start a constructive dialogue and engage in a fruitful conversation when radical views are expressed. At the same time, a growing number of young people -in particular youth at risk- feel excluded and misunderstood which leads to disinterest in civic participation. An open and constructive dialogue can provide an answer to this social challenge.

In 2014, a study was conducted by the King Baudouin Foundation, focusing on differences in religion and beliefs, particularly between Muslims and non-Muslims, and the sources of tension, which in turn led to more topics being off-limits in the classroom in Brussels schools.



However, democratic dialogue should be an integral part of school life: it supports schools, organisations and companies in engaging in constructive dialogue on sensitive and controversial themes through workshops, seminars and tailor-made projects. Controversial topics vary: from Darwin's theory of evolution, homosexuality and gender issues to Israeli-Palestinian conflict and refugees; and from religion to racism and so many more. A number of questions might also arise for teachers, nowadays:



## **Dialogue tools, strategies and the role of ideologies**

To foster a multidisciplinary discussion on controversial topics, relevant stakeholders and experts could be also involved -except from teachers- such as: psychologists, philosophers, communication specialists or various experts per case, e.g. experts in Islam and theology.

Key tools that promote communication and dialogue include:

- Socratic dialogue;
- Intercultural communication;
- Non-violent communication;

As for the strategies that prevent polarisation, awareness & self-perception are the doorway to a fruitful dialogue.

Self-Perception is related to the idea that people (teachers in our case) have about the kind of person (and the kind of teacher) they are:

- What does it mean to be “a teacher”?
- What does education mean for me?
- How do I relate to new societal challenges?
- What is my biggest prejudice?

Cultural awareness can be divided in cultural self-awareness and general cultural awareness:

- Cultural self-awareness: insight into one's own cultural values and standards.
- General cultural awareness: to recognize culturally/ideologically sensitive subjects and be able to establish a constructive dialogue.

Ideologies can play a critical role in promoting or inhibiting dialogue:

- Assimilationist schools expect minorities to “be like majorities” (only speaking Dutch at school, no headscarves...)
- “Color-blind” schools claim it is best to treat everybody like an individual, without making distinctions based on student's socio-cultural backgrounds.
- Multiculturalist schools emphasize the importance of different sociocultural contexts and say that students and educators are committed to learn, understand & value cultural diversity.

Multicultural approaches and open dialogue can result in:

- Higher intergroup empathy
- Better understanding of structural inequality
- More positive attitude towards members of other socio-cultural groups
- Increased likelihood to collaborate with, or take action on behalf of other sociocultural groups

### **In a nutshell:**

“It is crucial to develop tools for teachers and pupils to talk about and deal with diversity in the most beneficial way” (Prof. J. De Leensneyder).

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# Reciprocal maieutic approach of Danilo Dolci for community analysis & empowerment.

Antonella Alessi, Centro per lo Sviluppo  
Creativo “Danilo Dolci”, Italy

## Who is Danilo Dolci?

Danilo Dolci (1924 - 1997) was an Italian sociologist, poet, educator and one of the first activists of the pacifist & non-violent movement in Italy. He is well-known for his fight against Mafia and poverty and spent his whole life trying to transform dreams into projects. Also known as the Italian Gandhi, he was nominated for the Nobel Prize 9 times.

## Danilo dolci in Sicily: a non-violent revolution

The starting point of his work was to study the conditions of society and try to find the possible elements of change. Dolci committed himself to working with the communities helping them to express themselves, to have their voices heard in a non-violent manner.

Dolci started using hunger strikes, sit-down protests and non-violent demonstrations as methods to demand the regional and national government to make improvements in the poverty-stricken areas of Sicily. In order to involve and empower people, Dolci used an approach called “reciprocal maieutic approach”. Initially it was used between groups of people and addresses to discuss their problems.

He gave the people (fishermen and peasants) the conviction that they could be relevant for their own future that could make a change. He made them realise that people together are stronger and everybody being in connection inside a group can be an element of change.

## Milestones of his life and activism

### DANILO DOLCI IN SICILY: A NONVIOLENT REVOLUTION

#### MILESTONES of His Life and Activism



## Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA)

*"Many participants realised they had deeper needs and dreams - RMA workshops tend to transform such needs and personal dreams in shared objectives in order to make the become common social development projects" (Barone, 2010).*

Reciprocal Maieutic Approach (RMA) is a process of collective exploration that takes, as a departure point, the experience and the intuition of individuals. RMA was developed from the Socratic concept of "μαιευτική", which refers to midwife (the woman who helps a pregnant woman to give birth to her child): every act of educating is a giving birth to the full potential of the learner.

Socratic Maieutic is one-directional, whilst Dolci's Maieutic is reciprocal: each member helps the other to give birth to his/her potential, giving life to a new community. No boss, no leader but facilitators. RMA workshops try to introduce the dialogue in communities and to give the floor to all. The approach is based on emphatic and reciprocal communication. Its main emphasis is in the capacity to involve all the people participating in the meeting in order to involve and empower people.

The RMA workshops are based on self-analysis and community analysis concerning needs and desires aim to seed active questions. Apart from contribut-

ing to personal development, they aim to stimulate the acquisition of several soft skills, such as social skills, active participation, creativity, and organisational and self-evaluation skills.

RMA gives emphasis on the individual and group experience. Key-points of this method are the following:

- Deep grassroots analysis/participation of everybody in the process whereby we understand our real needs and our responsibility to make a change.
- Connection with reality in order to identify concrete problems, develop reciprocal awareness and find positive solutions.
- Building complex images of reality through the plurality of points of view and everyone’s contribution.
- By recognising people’s abilities, this can help them open up and trust they will find their own way, acting joyfully.
- It is possible to integrate different experiences by recognising gaps and intolerable wastes.
- It supports the creation of a new vision of life.

RMA is based on the following concepts:

- **Experience:** every person has an inner heritage resulting from their experience;
- **Dialogue:** the tool used to promote research and active participation;
- **Knowledge:** knowledge is created within the group; therefore, it is dynamic and constantly evolving;
- **Change:** each person within the group can be an agent of change;
- **Concreteness:** the process is connected to reality and the problems experienced by the community;
- **Complexity:** one can understand how complex reality is only by gathering different viewpoints;
- **Sharing:** participants are involved in a horizontal process and share the power.

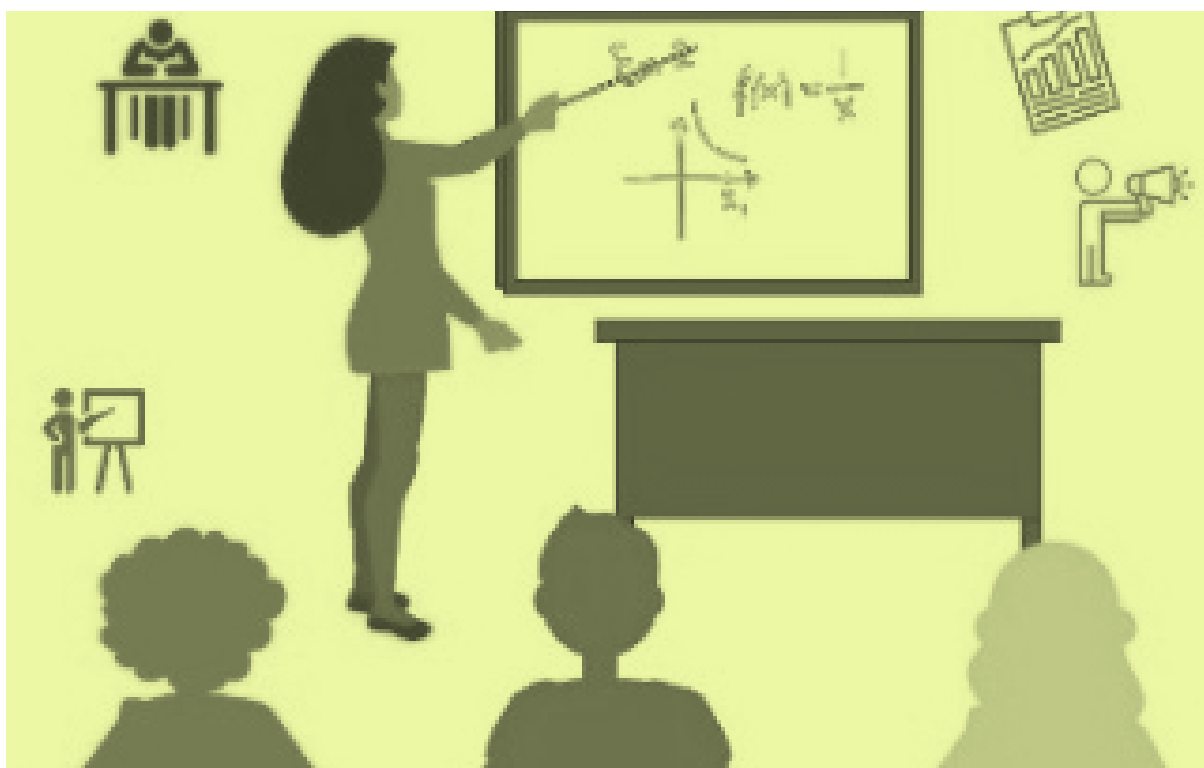
### The reason of RMA nowadays

Unilateral transmissive model	Reciprocal Maieutic Approach
Inhibition of thought	Critical thinking
Competition	Cooperation
Revolt/Resignation/Impatience	Independence/Autonomy

Unilateral transmissive model	Reciprocal Maieutic Approach
Passivity	Ability to research
Repetition	Creativity
Indifference	Participation
Closure	Empathy
Surliness/Anger	Kindness
Unilaterality	Reciprocity
Fear	Respect
Repression	Freedom
Immobilism	Transformation
Mistrust	Trust
Me	Us

## RMA's main topics

**Teaching:** literally “to give instruction, “to point out”, “to persuade”. It implies unidirectional transmission of a priori defined disciplinary contents where students just have to passively assimilate them.



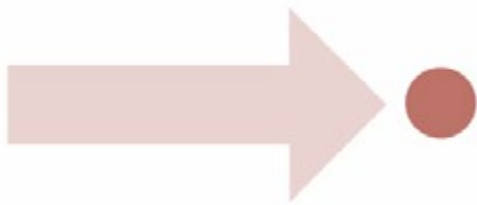
**Educating:** (from e-ducere, literally to take out). According to Dolci, to educate means: learning how to look and observe all together, learning to listen and communicate reciprocally, favoring natural curiosity to discover and each individual's creativity.



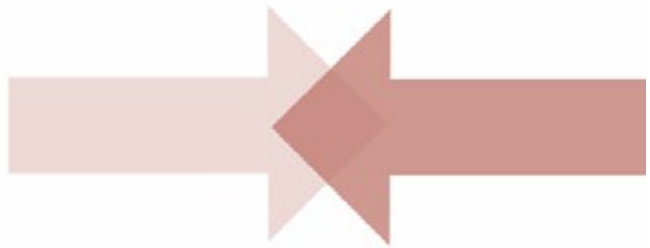
**Transmission:** (from trans-mittere, literally “send across”). It is unidirectional, with an active role (the sender) and a passive one (the receiver). It can become violent.

**Communication:** (from cum-munus, literally “gather gifts”). It is a bidirectional process that presupposes active participation, the ability to express, to listen and to receive feedback at the same time. It is closely related to creativity and personal growth.

## Transmission



## Communication



**Transmission** (from trans – mittere, literally “send across”). It is unidirectional, with an active role (the sender) and a passive one (the receiver). It can become violent.

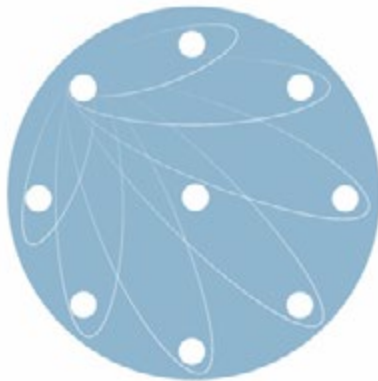
**Communication:** (from cum – munus, literally “gather gifts”). It is a bidirectional process that presupposes active participation, the ability to express, to listen and to receive feedback at the same time. It is closely related to creativity and personal growth.



**Power:** (literally “to be able to”). It means potentiality, strength, virtue, ability to operate. It strengthens and emancipates everyone, developing also democratic participation. It is linked to being creative.

**Domination:** (from domination, literally “to rule”). Domination defines a violent relationship between the active subject affecting a passive one by economical, ideological or political instruments.

## Power



## Domination



**Power:** (literally “to be able to”). It means potentiality, strength, virtue, ability to operate. It strengthens and emancipates everyone developing also democratic participation. It is linked to being creative.

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## Conclusion

Danilo Dolci was an educator who, fighting against mafia domination, put in place, in the 20th century Sicily, a “liberating” pedagogy whose aim was to provide everyone with the tools to start a process of emancipation.

Throughout his whole life, Danilo Dolci tried to find out those connections and possible communications in order to release that creativity hidden in each person and he called this research “maieutic”, taking this term from the philosophical structures, and integrating it in a social, educational and civil practice. During his life, Dolci worked closely to the people and to the disadvantaged and oppressed groups of the western Sicily in order to study the possible ways of change and the potential for a democratic social redemption.

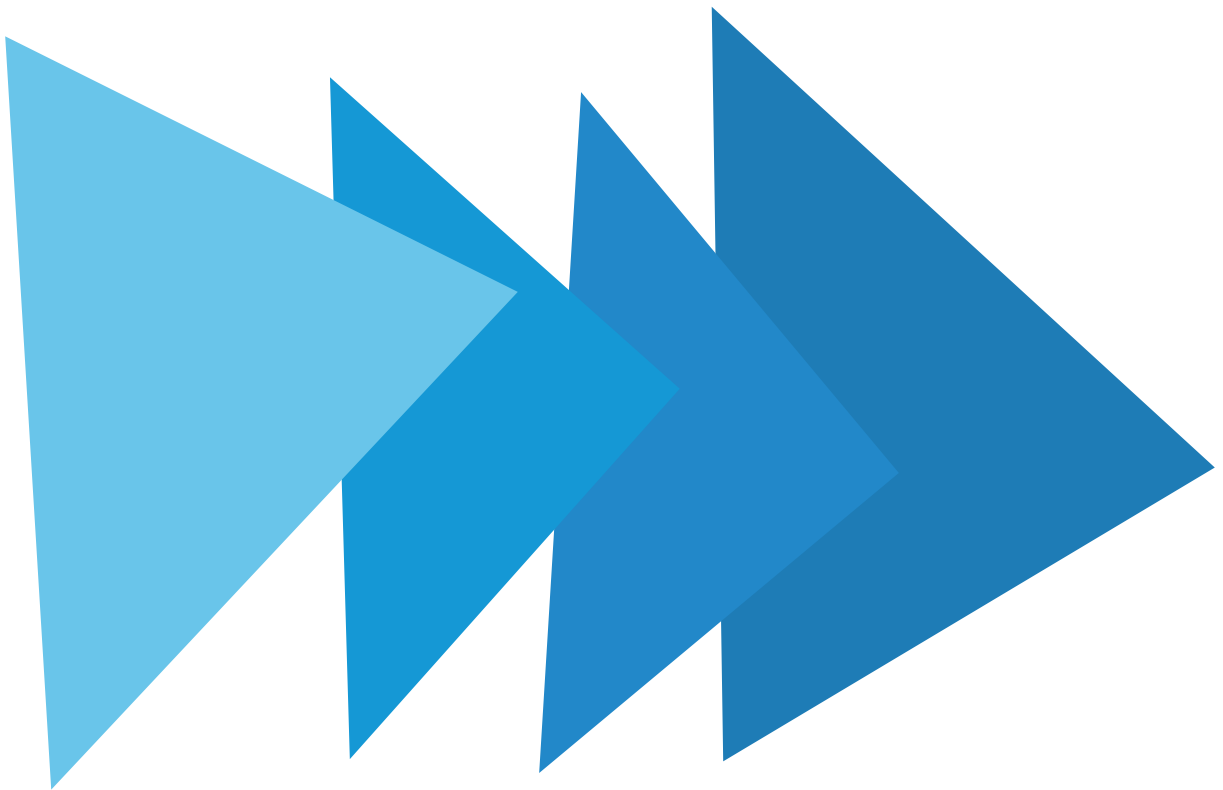
His methodological approach constitutes an important characteristic of the social and educational Danilo Dolci work: rather than spreading ready-made

truths, he believed that no real change could be achieved without the involvement and direct participation of the people concerned. As a result, he started from the belief that in Sicily, as in the rest of the world, the resources for the change are present and should be searched and evoked in the people themselves. In this sense, Danilo Dolci considers the educational and maieutical commitment as a necessary element in order to create a more opened and responsible civil society.

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# Plenary Session 2: DD@S Toolkit including good practices





## Results of the DD@S survey: Skills and perceptions of teachers to deal with controversy in the classroom.

Muhammet Safa Göregen & Veerle Van Raemdonck, Erasmushogeschool Brussel, Belgium

### Introduction and context

Sociocultural and religious diversity in society challenges education because of an increasing socio-economic, ethnic and religious diversity of both pupils and teachers. This challenge can positively influence life at school. However, it also leads to conflict situations due to differences in norms, values and beliefs between pupils, teachers, parents or others. These differences can lead to controversies and polarisation at school (Kavadias et al, 2016; Geldof et al, 2016). Although the cause or content that leads to controversy may vary, these challenges for schools apply at European level. (Grossen & Muller, 2020; Herzog-Punzenberger et al, 2020). But teachers feel unconfident in dealing with controversial themes in the classroom (Van Alstein, 2018; Marechal et al, 2014). Although many good practices are being shared in professional learning communities, it is unclear how teachers feel about dealing with controversy and facilitating dialogue about controversial topics. Another gap is a clear understanding of the school topics that lead to conflict and polarisation, especially in European context. This survey addresses those gaps. It aims to provide a clear view on controversial situations in schools in Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Belgium. Additionally, it maps the coping strategies and perceptions of European teachers on their coping behaviour to deal with controversy in the classroom.

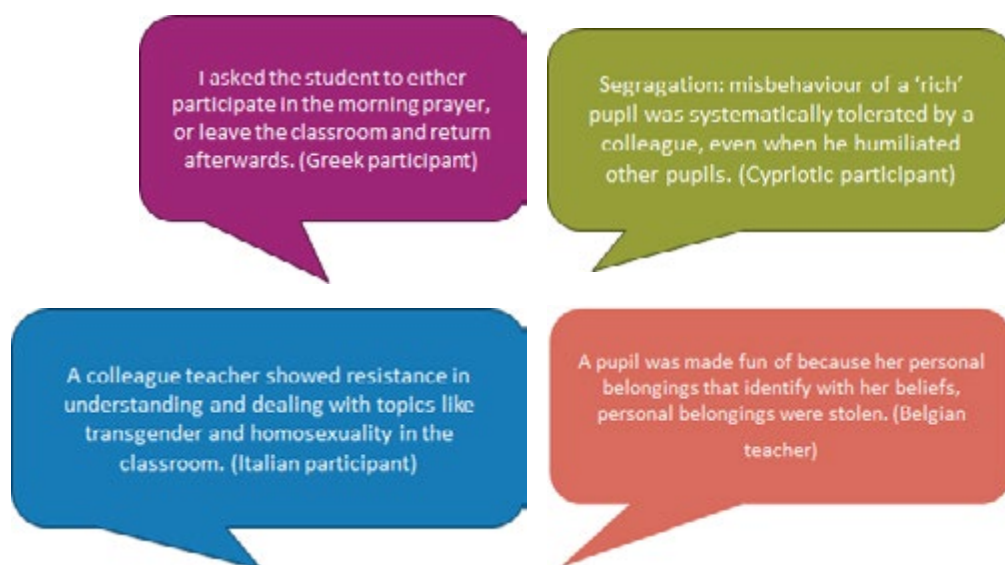
### Methods

Participants in this study are primary and secondary school teachers in 4 European countries: Greece, Cyprus, Italy and Belgium and was based on con-

venience sampling. The sample included teachers recruited in the network of the partners in the Democratic Dialogue at School project (DD@S). Subjects of the study participated in a semi-structured survey about controversial issues at school. This survey was co-created with all partners in the project, to ensure applicability on the different school contexts. Data were analysed with cross tabulation, using IBM® SPSS Statistics version 28.0.1.1.

## **Results**

The survey resulted in answers of 162 respondents in 4 different countries: Belgium (n=19), Italy (n=48), Greece (n=45) and Cyprus (n=50). More than half of the participants (62%, n=102) indicated that they regularly experience controversial situations at school. The main actors involved in controversial situations are pupils (n=55, 34%) and colleagues (n=33, 20%). A small proportion of the teachers report parents as an actor in difficult situations (n=9; 6%). Conflicts mainly arise in issues about the social and personal context of teachers and pupils, whereas religious, political and linguistic issues are also reported as contexts of controversy. In all participating countries, the common ground of controversy in the classroom relates to a different framework concerning socio-cultural values and conflicts based on ethnicity or religion.



In general participants feel comfortable in discussing these difficult topics in the classroom (85,3%, n=138). There are small differences in the perception of Belgian and Greek teachers versus Italian and Cypriot teachers. Table 1 describes differences in comfort compared to the nature of controversial themes.

Topic	fully agree	agree	disagree	fully disagree	it's not my job
<b>Philosophical</b>	35%; n=58	49%; n=80	9%; n=14	2%; n=4	3%; n=6
<b>Religious</b>	32%; n=52	52%; n=85	9%; n=14	1%; n=2	6%; n=9
<b>Political</b>	19%; n=31	45%; n=73	20%; n=32	7%; n=11	9%; n=15
<b>Discrimination</b>	43%; n=71	50%; n=81	2%; n=4	2%; n=4	1%; n=2
<b>Poverty</b>	43%; n=70	48%; n=78	6%; n=9	1%; n=2	1,5%; n=3
<b>Terrorism</b>	38%; n=62	45%; n=73	10%; n=16	2%; n=4	4%; n=7
<b>Gender equality</b>	54%; n=88	42%; n=68	2%; n=4	0,5%; n=1	0,5%; n=1
<b>Sexual orientation</b>	30%; n=50	46%; n=74	11%; n=18	6%; n=9	7%; n=11
<b>Racism</b>	45%; n=73	48%; n=77	6%; n=9	0,5%; n=1	1%; n=2
<b>Cultural identity</b>	53%; n=86	41%; n=67	3%; n=5	1%; n=2	1%; n=2

Table 1: Feeling comfortable to discuss controversial themes, teachers' perceptions in percentage

In general, teachers feel comfortable to discuss the topics of discrimination, poverty, gender equality, racism and cultural identity. Other themes such as religious and political issues, show greater variety. Also, the theme of terrorism is difficult to discuss. There were no explicit differences in the perception based on the different countries.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Perceptions about controversial themes are rather positive. Most teachers who participated indicate they don't feel a lot of discomfort in discussing those themes in the classroom. Some of the participants feel it is not their job to discuss these issues. This is related to the topic: political themes, sexual orientation, religious issues and terrorism.

This survey has an important limitation. Because of the selection of participants, conclusions cannot be generalised to the whole population of teachers. There is a selection bias because teachers have participated on a voluntary basis, which creates the possibility of selecting teachers who are more interested in these topics. Nevertheless, it also indicates that within the schools that participated differences in feelings and perceptions about dealing with controversy are present. Teachers who feel more at ease than others, might play a facilitating role within the school community to tackle controversy or conflictual situations at school.



# Introduction to the DD@S Toolkit of good practices: supporting, inspiring and empowering schools & teachers.

Christina Bonarou, Symplexis, Greece

*It does not matter how many resources, means or tools are available. If you don't know which ones are right for you and how to use them, nothing will ever be enough.*



Untitled creations by [Gürbüz Doğan Ekşioğlu](#)



## The DD@S toolkit

The first working package of the DD@S project seeks to offer to schools & teachers various, useful instruments aiming to:

- empower teachers and pedagogical professionals in democratic dialogue
- upskill teachers in teaching/discussing controversial issues in their classes
- promote an inclusive climate at school
- help school teams build their own training strategy and policy to implement at school.

### Educational toolkit

A collection of related resources or tools that either selectively or all together can guide users and assist them in their work, e.g. to develop a plan, organize efforts, implement activities, follow evidence-based recommendations or meet evidence-based practice standards so as to achieve a desired outcome.

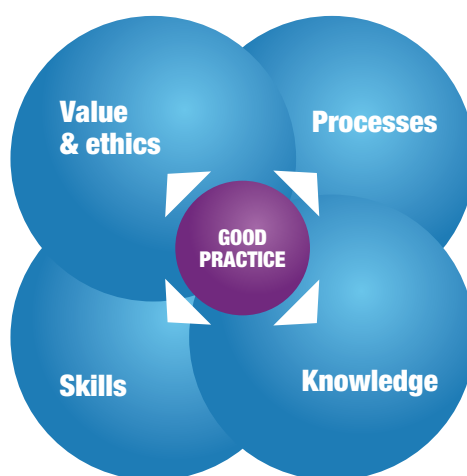
Partners were invited to collect and present promising, good or best practices related to the scope of the DD@S project which is the empowerment of European secondary school teachers in dealing with controversial issues and multicultural challenges at school and promoting democratic dialogue and inclusive class climate. Partners could build on the results of their DD@S national field research, on their own organizations' experience and further research, so as to collect and present 2-3 good practices per partner. A relevant template for recording and presenting the promising practices was provided by Symplexis & Erasmus University, along with relevant guidance.

A thread common to most definitions implies...

- strategies,
- approaches and/or
- activities

...that have been shown through research and evaluation to be

- effective,
- efficient,
- sustainable and/or
- transferable, and
- to reliably lead to a desired result.



“Good practices” can be defined in multiple ways.

## Criteria for selection of promising, good or best projects, practices and tools

<p><b>Technical and administrative feasibility</b> (easy to learn and implement)</p>	<p><b>Relevance to the aim and objective of the DD@S project</b></p>	<p><b>Relevance to the target groups</b> (addressing secondary school teachers, but also school heads or other stakeholders involved in school education and relevant policy)</p>
<p><b>Effectiveness and success</b> with measurable impact</p>	<p><b>Efficiency</b> (should produce results with a reasonable level of resources and time)</p>	<p><b>Replicability, adaptability &amp; sustainability</b></p>

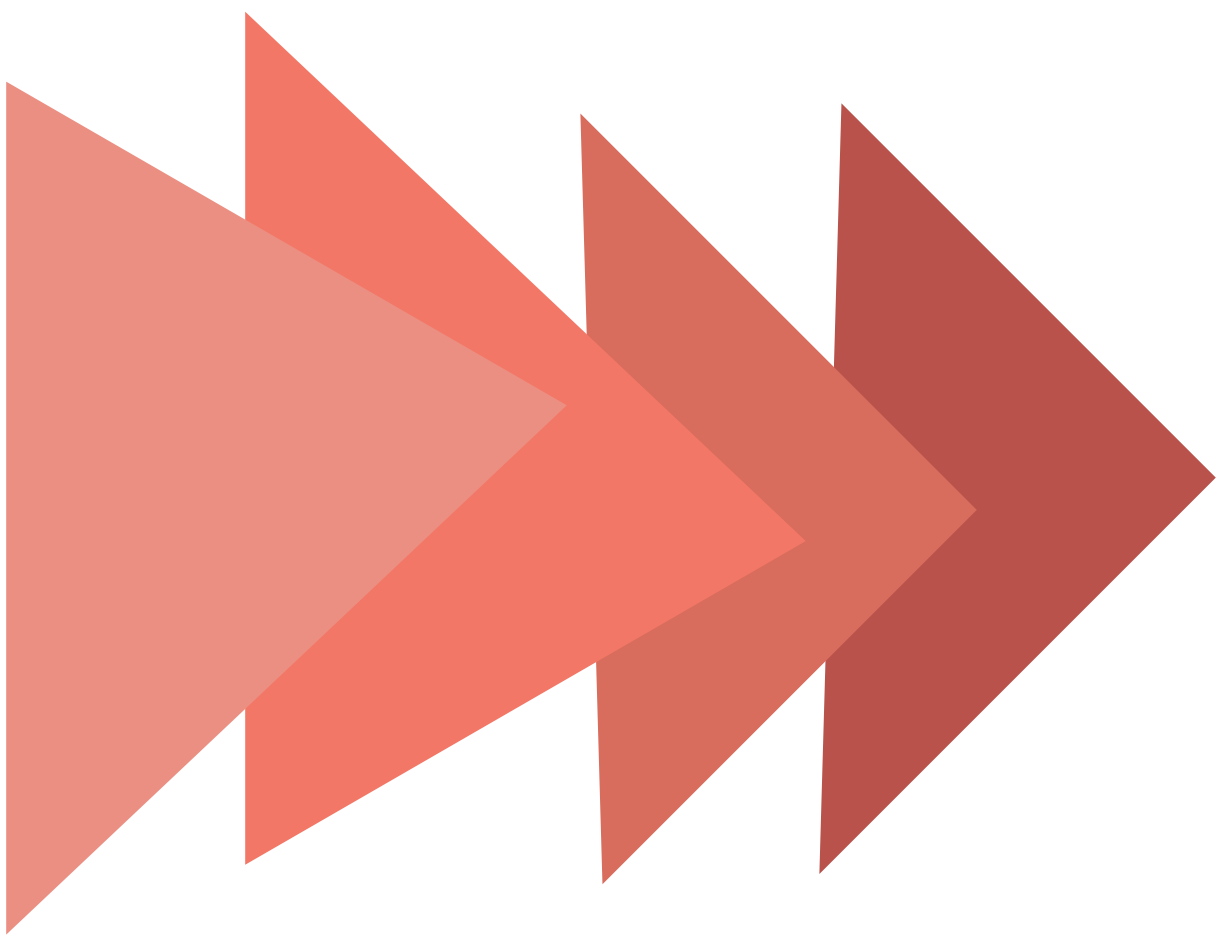
**List of promising, good, best practices collected so far** (more details about the following will be included in the DD@S Toolkit soon to be uploaded on the project’s website).

1. **Game cards** to guide a democratic dialogue on controversial topics (a tool for Teams of school teachers and school board).
2. **Children of Abraham** (a strategy for Teachers of Religious Education (i.e. interreligious/integrative curriculum of Religious Education).
3. **Enhancing active citizenship through debate - Erasmus+ project** aiming at implementing the International Debate in the curriculum (for high Secondary School teachers & Students 15-18).
4. **Teaching controversial issues (training pack for teachers):** Living with Controversy - Teaching Controversial Issues Through Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights (EDC/HRE). A **professional development programme (in multiple languages)** by the The European Wergeland Centre (EWC), the Council of Europe (CoE), the European Commission (EC) et al. to support and promote the teaching of controversial issues in schools in Europe.
5. **Managing Controversy: A Whole-School Training Tool.** A self-reflection toolkit for school leaders and senior managers.
6. **Equity and Inclusion in Education: Finding Strength through Diversity.** A policy report by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).
7. **Theory into Practice Strategies: Inclusive Practices for Managing Controversial Issues in the Classroom.**
8. **PRACTICE – Preventing Radicalism through Critical Thinking Competencies** (EU project) - MODULE 1: Controversial Issues.
9. **Reciprocal Maieutic Approach of Danilo Dolci** - Method for democratic dialogue and self-analysis.

10. **“Io la mafia non la digerisco”** (“I don’t digest mafia”) – A project for 11-15 years old students.
11. **“KAICIID - DIALOGUE CENTRE”** (King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz International Centre for interreligious and intercultural Dialogue) - an intergovernmental organization providing a learning platform, webinars, online resources, tools & policies addressing educators of religious leaders, school teachers, policy makers.
12. **Signposts – Policy and practice for teaching about religions and non-religious world views in intercultural education.** Manual for teacher trainers and education policymakers.
13. **“Game to EMbrace INtercultural education” – GEM IN**, Erasmus+ project providing a board game and complementary tools (educational programme & pedagogical kit), as well as policy recommendations. It addresses secondary school teachers, non-formal educators, Students/ young people aged 14–18.
14. **UNESCO’s e-Platform on Intercultural Dialogue.** Global collaborative hub/e platform with good practices, glossary, publications etc.

# Parallel Sessions (2a, 2b, 2c, 2d): DD@S Toolkit including good practices

**Training workshops - Focus groups on the implementation and discussion of good practices**



## **Team A: Religious symbols in public areas/school (summary).**

Facilitators: Christos Nasios & Sergios Voilas,  
Interorthodox Centre of the Church of Greece

A good practice activity exploring whether religious symbols can be a cause of separation or an opportunity to enhance the acceptance of diversity.

Sub-activities implemented:

- “Find your pair!” Energiser activity and pairing up participants
- TPSS -Think, Pair, Square, Share:
  - Individual reflection of each participant on the question under investigation (THINK)
  - We make pairs and discuss the question (PAIR)
  - We create groups of four and discuss the issue further in order to review the individual views and format common views expressing the group (SQUARE)
  - Presentation of ideas by each group to the whole class. Discussion in the plenary (SHARE)
  - One sentence summarising the theme & aim

## **Team B: “This House Believes That...” — Enhancing active citizenship through debate (summary).**

Facilitators: Ida Mariolo & Loredana Rizzo, Istituto  
Istruzione Superiore Einaudi Pareto, Italy

Putting in action the methodology of debate in the classroom to manage controversial issues and increase democratic dialogue (rules/roles/ times).

- Simulation of impromptu debate with participants.

## **Team C: Compassionate themes in the Abrahamic tradition — Towards an integrative approach of Religious Education (summary).**

Facilitator: Muhammet Safa Göregen,  
Erasmushogeschool Brussel, Belgium

Focusing on topics that foster mutual dialogue within the Abrahamic tradition.

- Comparison of Abrahamic texts in order to have a meta-discussion.
- Comparison of texts from the Hebrew Bible, the Christian Bibles, and the Qur'ân
- Four tracks on fostering interreligious dialogue between the Abrahamic tradition;
  - Compare and discuss the Ten Commandments in light of the Abrahamic tradition
  - Compare and discuss the sacrifice of Abraham in light of the Abrahamic tradition
  - Compare and discuss the creation story (Genesis) in light of the Abrahamic tradition
  - Compare and discuss God's attribute of mercifulness in light of the Abrahamic tradition

Materials needed: Pens & printed texts.

## **Team D: “Whose side are you on?” — How to approach conflicting opinions and truth-claims in the classroom (full instructions).**

Facilitator: Nicoletta Pantela, CARDET, Cyprus

Introduction: Teachers are entitled to their views like anyone else. However, this does not necessarily mean that they ought to share them with students, nor that they should favour the students who share their views. So how is a teacher meant to respond to conflicting opinions and arguments in class? Whose side should they take? This exercise is designed to present participants with a range of pedagogical approaches to this question and their respective advantages and disadvantages.

Aim: To explore the advantages and disadvantages of different pedagogical approaches to diversity of opinion in the classroom.

Objectives: Participants will become aware of a range of positions they can take on controversial issues; will understand their respective advantages and disadvantages; and identify the situations in which each can be usefully employed.

**Duration:** 1 hour and 40 minutes

**Resources:** Paper & pens, Position cards, Paper clips, Handouts

**Preparation**

- Print the 6 position cards - There will be six groups, so one position card for each group.
- Make copies of the Handout on Teacher Roles in Classroom Discussion —one for each participant.

## Implementation

Time	Steps
10 min.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Inform participants that: <i>“The DD@S toolkit consists of a number of best practices related to teaching or dealing with controversial issues in the school environment. This activity is one of the many included in the toolkit. After the toolkit is available to you, you will find many more activities to explore.”</i></li> <li>2. <b>Remind participants that conflict of opinion is one of the defining features of a controversial issue.</b> One of the challenges of teaching controversial issues is deciding on the position one should take in relation to this. Should teachers take sides? If so, whose side? If not, how do they ensure that issues are handled fairly and that the process of discussing them is a purely educational one? <b>Explain that there are different positions a teacher can take on this and the activity in which they are about to participate is designed to help them evaluate some of these.</b></li> <li>3. Divide the participants into <b>6 groups</b>.</li> <li>4. Give each group <b>one position card, a pen and a piece of paper (= split in the middle and write advantages/ disadvantages on the top).</b></li> </ol>
40 min.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ask groups to consider the position set out on their card and <b>discuss the advantages and disadvantages of adopting this as a policy for teaching controversial issues. Make sure they leave space at the bottom of the list for other teams to add their ideas when is their turn.</b></li> <li>2. <b>After 15 minutes - ask the participants to give the position card along with the paper (with the adv/disadv) to the team next to them.</b> Each team should have a different position card to work with than before.</li> <li>3. Again, ask groups to consider the position set out on their new card, discuss <b>where they disagree or think something is missing, and add any additional beliefs they have on the list.</b></li> <li>4. <b>Repeat the above step (3) every 5 minutes, so all groups (ideally) work with all position cards.</b></li> </ol>
15 min.	<p>Each group <b>presents what they discussed on the FIRST position card they worked with</b> with the other teams, comment. OR <b>Group Discussion:</b> Take 2 of the statements with their adv/disadv lists and discuss them with examples from the teachers’ experiences.</p>
5 min.	<p><b>Give out the Handouts:</b> a) ask participants to read them quietly, noting the additional information and the names given to different positions; b) this is for them to take home.</p>



Time	Steps
15 min.	<p><b>Feedback</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(<a href="#">PADLET link</a>) To collect teachers' best practices from their teaching experiences ask them to complete the padlet that includes the following questions: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Were there any pedagogical approaches that you found particularly interesting or relevant to your teaching context?</li> <li>How might you use this information in your teaching practice?</li> <li>What did you find most helpful about this activity?</li> <li>What did you find least helpful about this activity?</li> </ol> <p><b>Alternatively:</b> ask the above questions in a focus group discussion.</p> </li> <li>Collect all the papers with the position cards and the advantages and disadvantages lists.</li> </ol>
5 min.	Closing - ask if they have additional comments etc.

## SUPPORT MATERIAL:

### Position Cards

Always make your own views known	Make sure students are presented with a wide range of different views on every issue	Try to support particular students or groups of students by arguing on their behalf
Adopt the role of a neutral chairperson – never let anyone know your own views	Challenge students' views by arguing the opposite from them	Always promote the "official" view on an issue - what the authorities expect you to say

## Teacher positions on controversial issues

**Stated Commitment: In which the teacher always makes known his/her views during discussion.**

### Potential strengths

- Students will try to guess what the teacher thinks anyway. Stating your own position makes everything above board.
- If students know where the teacher stands on the issue, they can discount his or her prejudices and biases.
- It's better to state your preferences after discussion rather than before.
- It should only be used if students' dissenting opinions are treated with respect.
- It can be an excellent way of maintaining credibility with students since they do not expect us to be neutral.

### Potential weaknesses

- It can stifle classroom discussion, inhibiting students from arguing a line against that of the teacher's.
- It may encourage some students to argue strongly for something they don't believe in simply because it's different from what the teacher thinks.
- Students often find it difficult to distinguish facts from values. It's even more difficult if the purveyor of facts and values is the same person, i.e. the teacher.

**Stated Neutrality: In which the teacher adopts the role of an impartial chairperson of a discussion group.**

### Potential strengths

- Minimizes undue influence of teacher's own bias.
- Gives everyone a chance to take part in free discussion.
- Provides scope for open-ended discussion, i.e. the class may move on to consider issues and questions the teacher hasn't thought of.
- Present a good opportunity for students to exercise communication skills.
- Works well if you have plenty of background material.
- Credibility with students since they do not expect us to be neutral.

### Potential weaknesses

- Students may find it artificial.
- Can damage the rapport between teacher and class if it doesn't work.
- Depends on students being familiar with the method elsewhere in the school or it will take a long time to acclimatize them.
- May simply reinforce students' existing attitudes and prejudices.
- Very difficult with less able students.
- The role of a neutral chair doesn't always suit the teacher's personality.

**A Balanced Approach: In which the teacher presents students with a wide range of alternative views**

**Potential strengths**

- One of the main functions of a humanities or social studies teacher is to show that issues are hardly ever black and white.
- Necessary when the class is polarized on an issue.
- Most useful when dealing with issues about which there is a great deal of conflicting information.
- If a balanced range of opinion does not emerge from the group, then it is up to the teacher to see that the other aspects are brought out.

**Potential weaknesses**

- Is there such a thing as a balanced range of opinions?
- It avoids the main point of conveying the impression that ‘truth’ is a grey area that exists between two alternative sets of opinions.
- Balance means very different things to different people – teaching cannot be value-free.
- Can lead to very teacher-directed lessons – with always intervening to maintain the so-called balance.

**The Devil’s Advocate Strategy: In which the teacher consciously takes up the opposite position to the one expressed by students or in teaching materials.**

**Potential strengths**

- Great fun and can be very effective in stimulating the students to contribute to discussion.
- Essential when faced by a group who all seem to share the same opinion.
- Most classes seem to have a majority line which needs challenging.
- Livens things up when the discussion is beginning to peter out.

**Potential weaknesses**

- Students may identify the teacher with the view he or she is putting forward – parents may worry.
- It may reinforce students’ prejudices.

**Ally: In which the teacher takes the side of a student or groups of students**

**Potential strengths**

- Helps weaker students or marginalised groups in class to have a voice.
- Show students how arguments may be built on and developed.
- Helps other students to appreciate ideas and arguments they might not otherwise hear.
- Sets an example of collaborative working.

**Potential weaknesses**

- Other students may feel it is a subtle way of the teacher promoting his or her own views.
- Other students may see it as favouritism.
- Makes students think they don’t have to bother arguing their corner because you will do it for them.

**Official Line: In which the teacher promotes the side dictated by the public authorities**

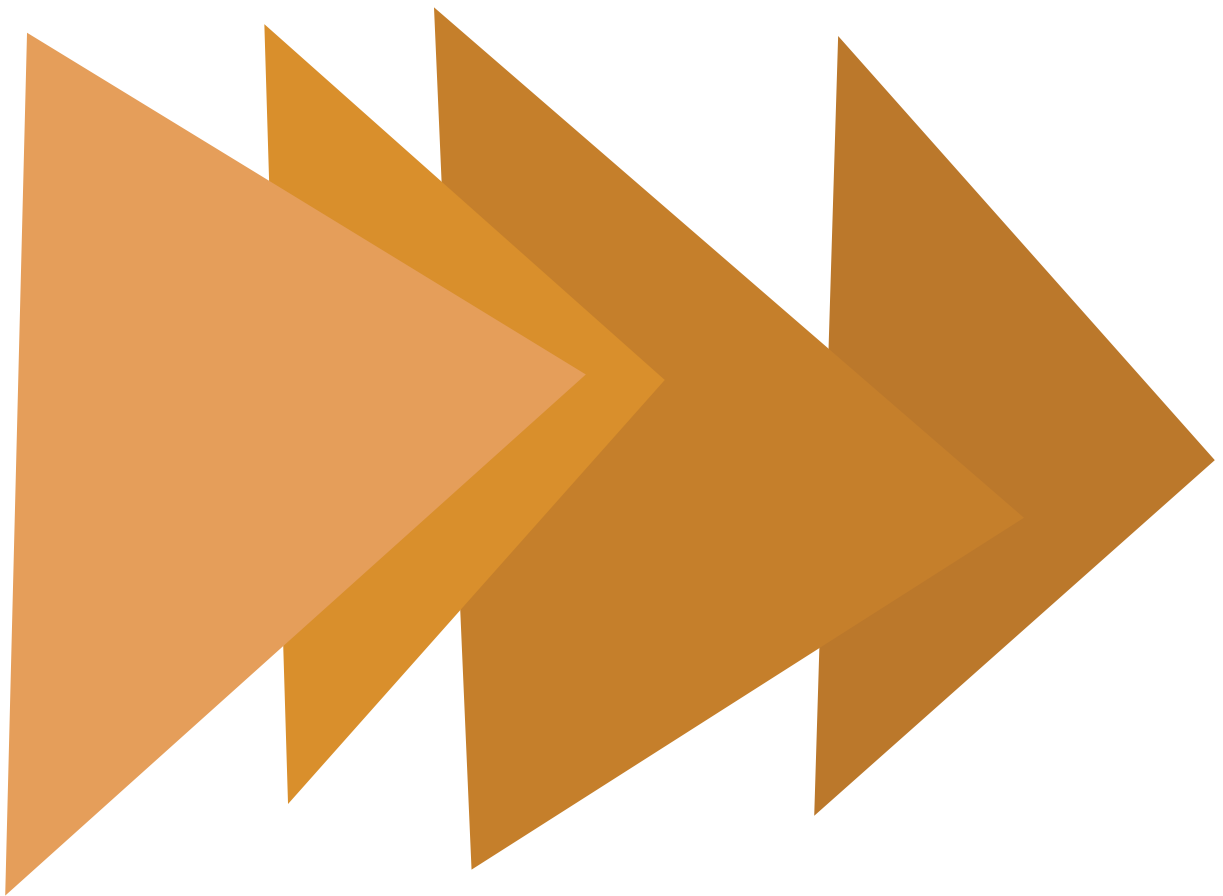
**Potential strengths**

- Gives the teaching official legitimacy.
- Protects the teacher from recriminations by the authorities.
- Allows the proper presentation of views which
- students may have previously only half understood or misunderstood.

**Potential weaknesses**

- Makes students feel the teacher is not interested in hearing their views, only his or her own.
- Can make teachers feel compromised if they don't share the official view themselves.
- There can be conflicting official views promoted by different public authorities, so which does the teacher follow?
- There isn't always an official view.
- It is possible for an official line to be in breach of human rights legislation.

# Plenary Session 3: DD@S training programme — Teacher modules' presentation





## **Introduction to the DD@S Training course for school teams, teachers and school leaders**

### **What is the aim of the DD@S Training Course?**

The DD@S training course consists of teacher modules that aim to provide a structured guide to dealing with controversial and diversity-related issues in schools, using democratic dialogue as a method.

The course addresses school teams, teachers and school leaders in Europe and will be incorporated in the project's online learning platform. The e-course will be soon available via the project's website with free registration for all and will:

- combine theory and practice
- provide interactive activities & various learning scenarios
- offer background information about the nature of each training case study and possible conflict resolution strategies
- include useful tips and reading sources.

The DD@S Course –as in the case of the DD@S toolkit- has been developed by all partners in response to the primary survey carried out in Belgium, Italy, Greece & Cyprus.

Therefore, the DD@S Course also seeks to offer to schools & teachers’ competencies (knowledge, skills and attitudes) so as to:

- Empower & upskill them in teaching/ discussing controversial issues in their classes using dialogue as the optimal method
- Help them promote an inclusive climate at school
- Facilitate school teams built their own training strategy and policy to implement at school.

The course is NOT aimed directly at the students who want to improve their skills. We aim to train teachers to improve their skills and enable them to create diversity tolerant, inclusive classes with students - future active citizens - who can engage in fruitful dialogue and develop critical and conversational skills.

## **The structure of the DD@S Training Course**

The “DD@S Training course for school teams, teachers and school leaders in Europe” is divided into four learning modules, plus an introductory module, covering the following thematic areas:

- Module 0: Introductory module on democratic dialogue and communicating controversial issues at school
- Module 1: Discussing socio-political issues with your students
- Module 2: Dealing with religious and ethical topics at school
- Module 3: Topics concerning vulnerable groups (e.g. migrants, refugees, people from disadvantaged environments, people with disabilities)
- Module 4: Gender related discussions in class

This handbook contains a short first draft of the aim and learning objectives of each module.

## **Module 0: Introduction to democratic dialogue and communicating controversial issues at school**

This module aims at introducing participants to democratic dialogue and controversial issues in the school environment and explore strategies for turning such issues into positive pedagogical opportunities.

Through this module, learners (teachers, educators, school leaders, staff and related stakeholders) are expected to:

- Get familiar with an introductory theoretical framework around democratic dialogue and controversial issues
- Reflect upon their role in dealing with controversial issues in the class and with the causes and challenges related to such issues
- Acknowledge the value of engaging students in dialogue on controversial issues in class.

As a result of attending this module, participants will be able to:

- Define basic terms and concepts related to democratic dialogue and controversial issues at school
- Prepare a lesson or start a discussion around a controversial topic in class (general guidance)
- Implement teaching strategies and techniques that promote open and respectful dialogue, turning their classroom into a “safe space” for the exploration of controversial issues.

## **Module 1: Discussing socio-political issues with your students**

This module aims at introducing the Democratic Dialogue method to improve communication skills when dealing with controversial topics in a classroom. The module encourages a constructive dialogue based on mutual understanding in order to counteract negative perceptions and polarisation and transform sensitive discussions into an enriching learning experience to promote civic participation.

Through this module, learners (teachers, educators, school leaders, staff and related stakeholders) are expected to:

- Learn the principles of the Democratic Dialogue method
- Improve the professional dialogue skills through three communication models
- Develop a culture-sensitive basic attitude

As a result of attending this module, participants will be able to:

- Use the Democratic Dialogue (DD) method when dealing with a controversial topic
- Integrate dialogue techniques in the practice in order to deal constructively with controversial issues



- Encourage a constructive dialogue and transform sensitive discussions into an enriching learning experience
- Handle from a culture-sensitive basic attitude towards sensitive situations.

## **Module 2: Dealing with religious and ethical topics at school**

This module has been developed to support educators in dealing with religious and ethical topics at school. It is intended for a wide audience, including education policymakers and officials, teacher trainers, teachers, principals and head teachers, staff in teacher unions and professional associations, and members of NGOs. The module is relevant for both primary and secondary education and can also be used in non-formal education settings.

Through this module, learners are expected to:

- recognise in time behaviours and expressions that reflect stereotypes and prejudices
- raise awareness about the main religious issues that can divide students
- strengthen their capacity to deal successfully in the classroom with controversial issues concerning religions and non-religious world views
- enhance their skills in order to promote openness, acceptance, respect and solidarity at schools.

## **Module 3: Topics concerning vulnerable groups**

This module focuses on issues of race, gender, sexuality, and abilities in the classroom. Teachers will gain knowledge and skills necessary to effectively address such controversial issues with a special focus on vulnerable groups.

Through this module, learners (teachers, educators, school leaders, staff and related stakeholders) are expected to:

- Conceptualize the importance of addressing controversial issues such as race, gender, sexuality, and abilities in the classroom
- Identify and address common biases and stereotypes related to vulnerable groups
- Use effective communication strategies to engage in respectful and productive conversations about race, gender, sexuality, and abilities
- Apply practical strategies for addressing controversial issues about race, gender, sexuality, and abilities.

## **Module 4: Gender related discussions in class**

This module aims at bringing students/teachers/school staff into contact with terms and concepts of gender, making them aware of their experiences and identity and those of others, combating stereotypes based on gender, reflecting on incidents of violence that may occur within schools, learning how they could be prevented and how to deal with them.

Through this module, learners (teachers, educators, school principals, staff and related stakeholders) are expected to:

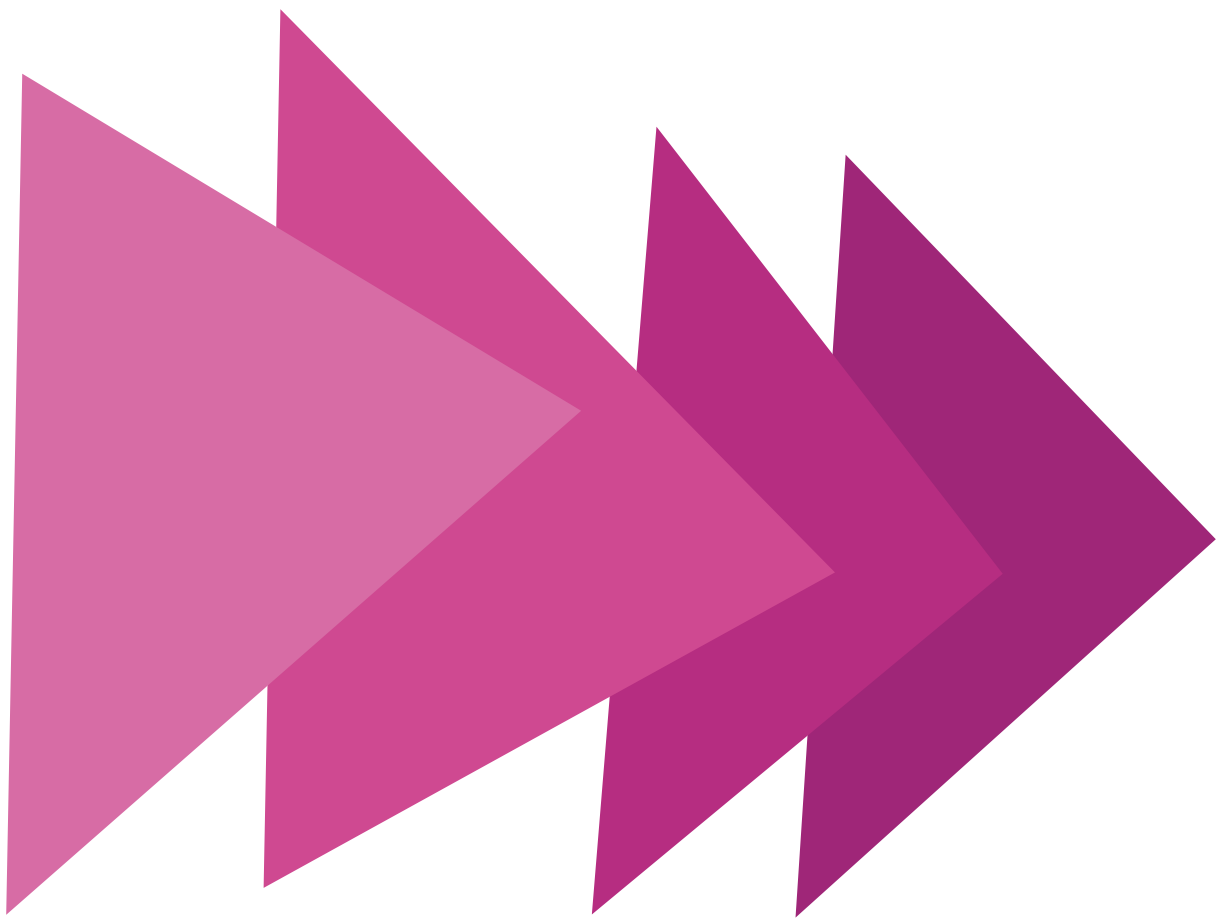
- Get familiar with terms and concepts related to gender
- Reflect about students' stereotypes and gender-based violence at school, and how to prevent or deal with them
- Reflect about causes and consequences of gender-based violence in order to combat its causes.

As a result of attending this module, participants will be able to:

- Understand and define basic terms and concepts related to gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation and emotional orientation
- Clarify the meaning of gender-based violence, be able to recognize it and consider its impact of GBV on those affected by it, especially pupils
- Start or address a discussion related to gender diversity when perceived as a controversial issue.
- Promote open and respectful dialogue in class regarding gender-related issues, preventing gender-based stereotypes and violence.

# Parallel Sessions (3a, 3b, 3c): DD@S training programme – Modules activities

**Training workshops – Focus groups  
implementing activities from the DD@S  
modules and feedback collection**



## **Team A: “Does Islam belong to Europe?” (summary)**

Facilitators: Christos Nasios & Sergios Voilas,  
Interorthodox Centre of the Church of Greece

An activity aiming to explore aspects of the phenomenon of Islamophobia through teaching practices appropriate to the school context.

Sub-activities:

1. Positive-Negative. After some “provocative” or controversial questions/statements on the issue, participants will be asked, depending on their opinion, to go to the “positive” or “negative” side of a corridor (depending on whether they agree with the statement or not). Those who have doubts or do not want to answer can stay in the centre.
2. Debate. Participants will be divided into two groups and prepare arguments to support two different points of view. After the first round of the debate, the teams change position and have to come up with new arguments. The aim is to go deeper into the issue and put themselves in each other’s shoes.

## **Team B: A scenario-based activity responding to cases of bullying on the grounds of gender (summary)**

Facilitators: Katarina Vuksan & Liliana Cipolla,  
Centro per lo Sviluppo Creativo “Danilo Dolci”, Italy

An activity that allows teachers/school staff to reflect on incidents of violence that may occur within schools and to think about their perception of the event and what could be done to prevent it. Materials needed: Paper boards and markers. Feedback collection: through Jamboard & Mentimeter.

## Team C: A Democratic Dialogue about climate change activism in the classroom (summary)

Facilitators: Veerle Van Raemdonck,  
Erasmushogeschool Brussel & Valerie  
Verbeelen, GO! TA Zavelenberg, Belgium

The democratic dialogue method is applied to the case of climate activism at school. Participants are assigned to one of both groups: pro or contra. Then the scenario or case is presented. Several reflective questions guide both groups through the case and conflict. Afterwards, the methodology is illustrated based on this case and the experiences of participants.

*Case: "Because of climate actions of students, polarization dynamics within the class group result in two groups. One group of students shares the opinion that truancy for climate change is only an excuse for absenteeism. Activists are said to be hypocrites because they still use the car to go to school. This results in conflict."*

Participants will share their answers in an online platform (wooclap). This is also the starting point to explain the dynamics that are created using the Democratic Dialogue method. To participate in the online quiz, it is advised that participants have a smartphone. To access the quiz, a QR code will be provided.

# Photo-memories from Athens' LTTA





Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission under the Erasmus+ Programme. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. [Project Number: 2021-1-BE02-KA220-SCH-000032794]

ISBN: 9789464443882

