



ADDRESSING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES IN EDUCATION: POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPOWERING EDUCATORS THROUGH A GAMIFIED ONLINE TRAINING

INTRODUCTION

Controversial issues, such as politics, religion, and ethics, present challenges for educators. This study examines how educators manage these issues and evaluates the effectiveness of the DD@S Training Course, an online tool designed to enhance educators' skills in fostering democratic dialogue and managing controversy.

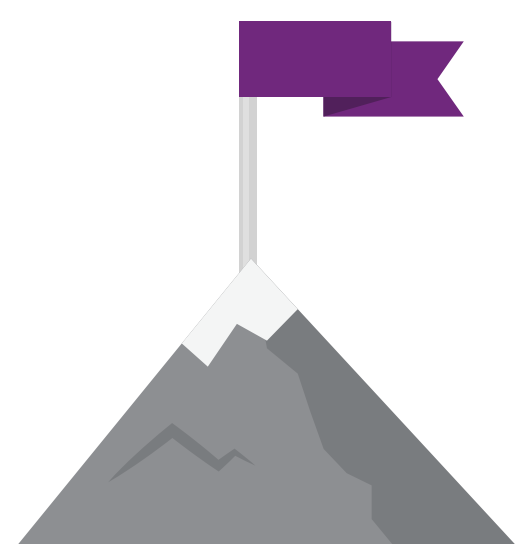


BACKGROUND AND NEEDS

- European classrooms are becoming more diverse, with varied social, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds.
- Controversial topics like religion, politics, and ethics frequently arise, but educators often feel unprepared to handle them.
- Traditional training methods need updating to address these challenges and equip educators with practical skills.

STUDY

An online survey and focus groups were conducted in **Belgium, Cyprus, Italy, and Greece**. The survey, completed by **162 secondary school teachers and leaders**, identified controversial situations and assessed educators' responses. Additionally, **42 educators** participated in **focus groups**, providing qualitative insights into their attitudes, practices, and challenges in teaching controversial topics.



KEY FINDINGS

Controversial Situations and Diversity in the European Classrooms:

- 97% of educators in Belgium, 68% in Cyprus, and 54% in Greece and Italy reported significant social diversity in their classrooms.
- 66% of educators in Cyprus and 65% in Italy reported linguistic diversity among their students.
- Notable religious diversity was reported, particularly in Greece and Cyprus, with minorities other than Orthodox Christianity.
- There is variability in confidence levels among educators, with Belgian and Italian educators generally more confident.
- Two out of three educators encounter controversial situations regularly.

Challenges Faced by Educators:

- Sexual orientation, gender identity, and extreme political ideologies are difficult to address due to the Greek curriculum constraints and lack of training.
- Topics like the headscarf, homosexuality, and evolution theory are particularly challenging due to Belgium's diverse population.
- Academic autonomy and parental reactions pose significant obstacles in Cyprus despite educators' strong willingness to engage with controversial issues.
- In Italy, issues such as euthanasia, suicide, the death penalty, migration, and gender-related topics require specialised training in conflict resolution and democratic dialogue.

THE DD@S TRAINING COURSE

In response to these challenges, the **DD@S Training Course** (<https://elearning.ddasproject.eu/>) was developed as an online, game-based professional development tool. It includes **five educational modules focusing on democratic dialogue, sociopolitical issues, religious and ethical topics, race, gender, and sexuality**. The course incorporates scenario-based learning, interactive exercises, and collaborative problem-solving, providing educators with practical tools to manage controversial discussions in their classrooms.

<https://ddasproject.eu/>



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Reform national policies to include comprehensive, context-sensitive training frameworks.
- Integrate gamified training, such as the DD@S Course, into professional development programmes to boost teacher confidence and skills.
- Support interdisciplinary approaches to ensure complex issues are addressed holistically.
- Establish safe spaces within schools to facilitate open dialogue on sensitive topics.
- Promote team teaching and peer learning communities to share strategies and resources.
- Engage parents and community stakeholders in open conversations to foster shared understanding and support educational goals.

