

# DESIGNING THE DIALECT3 TOOLKIT: ADVANCING INCLUSIVE EDUCATION THROUGH FOOTBALL AND PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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Inclusive education should be a priority in educational policy. According to Physical Education teachers, there is an urgent need for educational initiatives, as the guidelines in the curriculum are minimal. Within the framework of the DIALECT3 project, an educational tool was developed that utilizes football and Physical Education to promote inclusive learning. The toolkit not only provides knowledge but also inspires educators to reflect on their pedagogical and teaching approaches. The goal is to create a learning environment free from stereotypes, where free expression, inclusion, and acceptance are not just concepts but fundamental values.

## *Introduction*

The desk research carried out in the framework of the DIALECT3 project revealed that racism is largely based on values of intolerance defined as the unwillingness or refusal of individuals to accept beliefs, opinions, practices, or behaviors that are different from their own. As revealed, intolerance can take various forms of expression, ranging from avoidance of interaction to acts of hatred and physical

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harm. At the same time, xenophobia, as a form of intolerance, entails strong negative emotions, such as hostility or hatred, and is most often directed against members of other ethnic, religious, cultural, or sexual orientation.

The use of sport to promote mutual respect and tolerance between individuals, particularly young people, has proven to be an effective tool for preventing anti-social behavior, violence, crime, and drug use (UN Office for Drugs and Crime, 2018). Football can inspire people, break down racial and political barriers, promote gender equality and combat discrimination (UN Digital Library, 2019). It is much more than just a game, it manages to connect the world and delivers important lessons about cooperation, mutual understanding, and societal change. Initiatives such as “football3”<sup>1</sup>, “Kick It Out”<sup>2</sup> and “Show Racism the Red Card”<sup>3</sup> have highlighted the role of football in combating racism, encouraging stakeholders to act against discrimination and promote tolerance and equality both within football and beyond.

The findings of the needs analysis confirmed the necessity of addressing such phenomena through sports in general, and football in particular, due to its power to change perceptions, confront prejudice, and improve behavior.

In addition to sport, education and the school environment are key areas for addressing racism and discrimination. According to physical education professionals, the two most significant barriers to creating an inclusive school that fosters tolerance and equality for all students are the deep-rooted societal stereotypes – particularly around gender and diversity – that are often reflected and reinforced within the school setting and the lack of a structured support framework from the Ministry of Education, Religious Affairs and Sports for implementing new, inclusive methods and activities.

While the first issue requires long-term, global societal change, the second represents a more immediate and achievable goal.

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1. Football3 handbook. How to use football for social change. <https://morethanprojects.actionaid.it/en/projects/dialect-community-building-through-football/>

2. <https://www.kickitout.org/>

3. <https://www.theredcard.org/>

Establishing a comprehensive support system and providing educators with professional tools and training are feasible issues toward building a truly inclusive and equitable school community that can and should be addressed.

In this direction, the national Physical Education curriculum should be enriched with appropriate materials focusing on inclusive education and the promotion of tolerance. An analysis of the current lower secondary school Physical Education curriculum<sup>4</sup> revealed significant gaps and highlighted the urgent need to emphasize inclusive education, intersectionality, and pedagogical practices that foster tolerance.

At present, the focus of the new Secondary Physical Education curriculum is on promoting lifelong physical activity for health and quality of life. While Physical Education teachers are equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to teach physical education and coach athletic and motor activities, they are not trained in strategies or practices for handling complex situations or addressing intercultural issues such as understanding and accepting diversity, fostering respect, and encouraging mutual support.

By integrating these elements, both the curriculum and educators would be better prepared to meet the diverse needs of students and promote an inclusive and safe learning environment. This integration could be achieved both intersectionality by incorporating students' experiences into the educational process and pedagogically, using practices that promote intercultural dialogue, meaningful communication, constructive cooperation, teamwork, and the management of racist incidents.

Enhancing teachers' knowledge, developing their skills, and fostering a positive attitude toward inclusive teaching should be a central pillar of educational policy. Teachers, as the primary actors of student education, must be equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and educational tools to incorporate inclusive pedagogical methods and teaching strategies into their instruction, as well as techniques for addressing issues of racism and resolving conflicts peacefully.

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4. <https://iep.edu.gr/el/nea-ps-provoli>

According to lower secondary school Physical Education teachers who participated in the study, there is an urgent need for the organization and implementation of training initiatives and informational seminars. They reported that the guidance and examples of best practices provided in the current Physical Education curriculum are virtually nonexistent. Their responses highlighted a critical need for proper training and resources, as many feel unprepared to address the diverse needs of their students or to manage crises and conflicts in the classroom and school environment. As they described, their reaction to student altercations was often limited to breaking up the conflict without engaging in further discussion, helping students process their emotions, preventing future incidents, or fostering a sense of group responsibility and cohesion.

In conclusion, what teachers teach (curriculum), how they teach (pedagogy), and how they monitor student learning (assessment) are key factors in either promoting or hindering diversity and inclusion in the classroom. Pedagogical practice, lesson content, and the method of assessing both the goal and outcome are the three core components in designing and implementing inclusive teaching. It is essential that teachers understand the importance of these elements to foster harmonious coexistence and effective collaboration among students within the school environment.

Recognizing this need, the DIALECT3 project developed a handbook aimed at providing Physical Education teachers with an innovative educational tool to support the development of students' social and life skills, while also combating racism and deconstructing stereotypes in education. Through playful and modified football-based activities, the handbook seeks to help students understand the negative impact of stereotypes and discrimination, the importance of meaningful communication, and the need to develop respect for others' differences. At the same time, it promotes the enhancement of students' self-esteem and self-confidence, while encouraging them to experience trust and respect from their classmates. Although the handbook was designed for use in lower secondary education, its activities can be adapted and effectively applied in primary schools as well.

## Aims

The aims of the toolkit were based on those of previous DIALECT projects<sup>5</sup>, which focused on the development of specific social issues and life skills. However, in this case, a combination of the two was made. Thus, the social goals were defined as the main ones, while the life skills were integrated as sub-goals within each of them.

Specifically, the social goals include:

*Privileges:* A set of unearned benefits society gives to people based on certain aspects of their identity including race, class, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, language, geographical location, ability, and religion, among others.

*Inclusion/Exclusion:* Individuals may experience exclusion in various ways and at different levels, such as unemployment or underemployment, and discrimination based on race, religion, ethnicity, gender identity, national origin, etc.

*Interculturalism:* Focuses on bringing together individuals from different groups to foster a sense of belonging and social integration at the community level.

*Othering:* This emerges when societies undergo major rapid changes in a short period of time (e.g., sudden influx of migrants). The process of defining who belongs and who does not within a group of people is known as “the sense of the other.” It is important to understand that the perception of the other is not about liking or disliking someone, but is based on conscious and unconscious beliefs that certain social groups are a threat or not, due to nationality, religion, gender, etc.

*Stereotypes:* These are mental shortcuts used by the brain to help individuals process incoming information. When encountering someone for the first time, the brain automatically generalizes and categorizes that person as part of a group. The problem with

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5. DIALECT TOOLKIT. Disrupting polarization: building communities of tolerance through football. <https://www.actionaid.gr/ta-nea-mas/dialect-htizontas-anektikes-koinotites-meso-toy-podosfairoy>

stereotypes is that people judge others based on the characteristics of the group they belong to rather than on their individual traits. Stereotypes can only be eliminated when individuals start seeing and treating others as people, not merely as members of a group.

Life skills include:

*Conflict resolution:* Conflicts may arise when people disagree, do not share the same values, or interpret situations differently. Conflicts are a part of everyday life and stem from human interaction and relationships. Especially among different ethnic and social groups, conflicts may emerge due to differing customs, traditions, and worldviews. They often appear through the differing perception of the “other,” resulting in discrimination and exclusion.

*Communication:* This is an important skill in combating racism, discrimination, and xenophobia. The ability to have constructive discussions about differences, beliefs, and values is essential in all areas of daily life - from sports to personal relationships - to remove barriers to tolerance and inclusion. Good communication involves both the ability to clearly express one’s ideas and opinions to others, and the capacity to discuss and negotiate a variety of diverse issues.

*Reflection:* This refers to reflecting on prejudices and stereotypes. Individuals may hold negative beliefs and be biased against certain groups due to racist and xenophobic statements or actions by their parents, friends, politicians, or other adults. Practicing reflection is important for gaining a deeper understanding of the causes behind such attitudes and behaviors toward others, as well as their impact.

*Active listening:* This involves listening and responding to the speaker with the goal of achieving mutual understanding. Specifically, active listening refers to a person’s ability to stay attentive to the speaker, understand, and convey non-verbal messages.

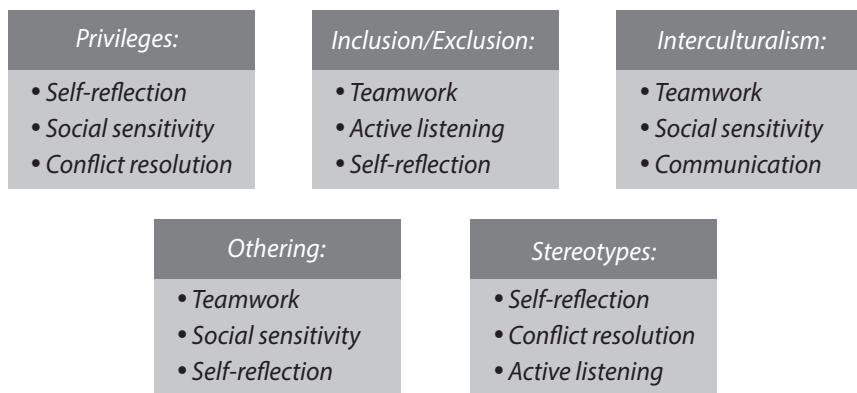
*Teamwork:* This is important for social inclusion, as it involves participating in group efforts to achieve common goals in the most effective way. Teamwork is connected to many interpersonal skills such as communication, cooperation, respect, fair play, and more.

*Social sensitivity:* This is the ability to perceive and understand the feelings and viewpoints of others. It is a critical skill for individuals

as they navigate social interactions and contexts, interpret messages, and process information. It is often linked to empathy, as it includes the experience of understanding another person's thoughts, feelings, and perspective.

The combination of the goals mentioned above is illustrated in the figure below (Figure 1).

Figure 1: The aims of the DIALECT3 toolkit



## Content

As mentioned earlier, football was chosen as the means to achieve the goals of the educational tool. The activities indicated involve adaptations of the sport aimed at developing students' specific social skills and life skills. The content was developed in accordance with the new structure of didactic scenarios that will be implemented in education.

A didactic scenario is a learning framework with specific goals, sub-goals, learning outcomes, learning theories, and teaching strategies. Compared to a lesson plan, it spans more than one teaching session, approaches the subject matter more broadly, emphasizes the active participation of students in the learning process, and focuses on more complex objectives. Students' experiences are typically utilized, and events from their everyday lives are incorporated, making the learning process more accessible, engaging, and effective.

Additionally, the didactic scenario is tailored to specific subjects and units of the curriculum. It supports learning through exploration and discovery, and encourages the development of social skills such as problem-solving, decision-making, critical thinking, and communication.

Physical Education offers a favorable environment for the implementation of didactic scenarios due to the nature and flexibility of the subject. The active participation of students in group activities and games requires the demonstration of various skills such as cooperation, communication, decision-making, conflict management, etc., to achieve a common goal by all students. Moreover, lack of knowledge of the dominant language does not pose a barrier to participation and learning.

For the purposes of this toolkit, five didactic scenarios were designed, each targeting one of the five social skills. Each scenario included activities aimed at developing the respective sub-goals.

### *Learning outcomes*

By using the toolkit, physical education teachers will be able to:

- › Modify football activities and games to serve the goals and needs of their students.
- › Implement adapted activities and games using modern pedagogical methods and educational strategies.
- › Create new games and activities aimed at developing students' social and life skills.
- › Evaluate the effectiveness of the goals and sub-goals.
- › Incorporate student feedback into their lesson to ensure that all participants understand the objectives.

### *Pedagogical practices*

To create an environment that promotes open dialogue, active listening, and respectful communication among students, educators should implement specific pedagogical practices. These practices not

only enhance learning but also foster empathy and understanding. Specifically, educators should:

*Establish clear expectations and basic rules* in collaboration with students to ensure a safe and inclusive learning environment where everyone feels valued and respected. Expectations regarding behavior, respect, and participation should be clearly communicated to students at the beginning of the academic year.

*Foster a safe atmosphere* where everyone is open to sharing opinions, can assert their views respectfully, and treat others as they wish to be treated. To support this, educators should set rules for equal participation in discussions, promote active listening, and encourage the respectful exchange of diverse perspectives.

*Use inclusive language* that acknowledges and respects the diversity of students in the classroom, considering factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, abilities, and other identities. Inclusive language uses welcoming words and expressions, avoiding generalizations about specific groups (e.g., “Muslims” or “girls”) that may lead to unintentional exclusion. While such phrases may not be intentionally harmful, they can often have a negative impact on students. Equally important is the recognition and incorporation of students’ personal experiences into the learning process, which promotes participation and emotional connection with the content.

*Promote positive and meaningful relationships with students.* Educators must cultivate a supportive environment by showing genuine interest, respect, and care for the personal well-being of their students. It is important to establish a climate of trust where students feel comfortable seeking guidance, expressing their concerns, and speaking freely without fear of criticism.

*Address undesirable behaviors promptly*, establishing clear protocols for handling incidents of bias or discrimination that may arise in the classroom. Taking appropriate actions to manage and resolve such incidents reinforces a sense of accountability among all involved students and contributes to the creation of a safe and effective learning environment.

*Incorporate collaborative learning*, including activities that encourage teamwork, empathy, and appreciation of different perspectives. Group composition should vary, giving different students the opportunity to collaborate each time. This facilitates interaction and strengthens understanding among a wider range of students.

*Facilitate reflection and student self-assessment*, helping students explore their own biases, opinions, and experiences related to diversity and acceptance. To achieve this, educators can integrate self-assessment activities, allowing students to evaluate their learning outcomes, analyze their personal beliefs, and consider alternative perspectives.

*Encourage the expression of different perspectives* and value the contributions of students with diverse backgrounds and experiences. Special importance is given to creating opportunities for students to share their cultural traditions, experiences, and knowledge, thereby enhancing mutual understanding and inclusion.

Additionally, it is widely known that personal biases and beliefs can influence and distort an individual's perception. For this reason, educators must ensure that every speaker has completed their thought and that all students have correctly understood the information. This can be achieved through clarifying questions or expressions such as: "To make it clearer, do you mean..." or "If I understood correctly, you are saying that...", thus facilitating accurate understanding and meaningful communication in the classroom.

Another important factor in meaningful communication is body language. Therefore, educators must give equal importance to both verbal and non-verbal communication, ensuring that the interlocutor fully understands the information. To achieve this, they should maintain eye contact with the speaker, stay focused, avoid side conversations, and use body language - such as facial expressions and gestures - to encourage students to actively participate in the discussion.

## *Learning strategies*

For the purposes of this toolkit, Universal Design for Learning (UDL)<sup>6</sup> has adopted an educational framework that ensures equal learning opportunities for all students. UDL strategies include teaching methods and tools that help educators create an inclusive learning environment. The UDL framework is based on three fundamental principles: engagement, representation, and action & expression. Each principle is accompanied by a set of guidelines that offer evidence-based approaches to optimize the learning experience. The goal is for educators to improve how they present information, enhance students' learning engagement, and expand their opportunities for expression and participation. The UDL principles can be applied both in the overall course design and in individual teaching units.

Specifically, the principles focus on the following:

*Engagement:* This refers to the “why” of learning. Students are motivated and actively involved when there is interest and intrinsic motivation to learn. For this reason, educators should discover students' motivations, explore their interests and needs, and set engaging and meaningful learning goals.

*Representation:* This refers to the “what” of learning. Presenting the subject matter in varied and flexible ways is critical for successful learning. Educators need to recognize how students best process information - whether verbally, visually, or through a combination of both - and use different media and presentation techniques to facilitate understanding.

*Action and Expression:* This refers to the “how” of learning. Students express their knowledge and skills in different ways. For this reason, educators should provide them with a variety of alternative forms of expression, demonstration, and assessment, tailored to their individual needs and abilities.

The integration of specific strategies such as collaborative learning, group work, and problem-solving activities can help educators create an inclusive and cooperative learning environment, where students

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6. Universal Design for Learning (UDL). <https://udlguidelines.cast.org/>

from diverse cultural backgrounds, genders, and other identities work together, learn from one another, and develop essential teamwork and collaboration skills. Specifically, educators should:

*Form mixed groups* that include students with diverse backgrounds, genders, abilities, and skill levels, and encourage students to collaborate with classmates they may not usually interact with. This promotes intercultural understanding and cooperation.

*Incorporate fun team-building activities* to foster trust, cooperation, and effective communication among group members. These activities may include problem-solving challenges, trust-building exercises, or collaborative games that require teamwork.

*Apply the jigsaw method*, where students are divided into smaller “expert” groups to study specific topics or skills and then reassemble into their main groups to share what they have learned. This approach promotes interdependence, collaboration, and the exchange of diverse perspectives and expertise.

*Enhance learning* by presenting students with real-world problems or scenarios that require group collaboration and teamwork to solve. Encourage students to analyze the issue from multiple angles, consider different viewpoints, and work together to develop creative and inclusive solutions.

*Assign students* the role of teaching a specific skill or concept to their peers within the group. This approach not only strengthens collaboration but also promotes the exchange of knowledge and perspectives among students.

*Assign group tasks* that require students to work together toward a common goal, allowing them to draw on their diverse backgrounds, skills, and experiences to contribute to the overall outcome.

*Engage students* in role-playing or simulation activities that require collaboration to solve problems or make decisions. These activities can simulate real-life situations and encourage students to consider different perspectives and develop empathy.

*Acknowledge and highlight group achievements*, emphasize the value of teamwork, diverse contributions, and inclusive practices.

## *The role of the physical education teacher in the implementation of the toolkit*

Teachers play a dual role in applying the manual during physical education classes. On the one hand, they are responsible for the planning and proper execution of the activities; on the other, they act as a facilitator, guiding student discussions before and after the lesson. They monitor the progress of the activities, intervene in cases of disagreement, record and assess the learning objectives and desired outcomes. At the same time, they serve as a role model, upholding the agreed principles and rules within the class.

Focusing on the facilitator's role *during the lesson*, the teacher should:

- › Maintain consistent eye contact with all students.
- › Speak with a slow, steady, and calm voice.
- › Remind students of the rules in the event of any violations.
- › Ensure that all students understand the rules.
- › Make calm and discreet remarks to students showing negative behavior, without publicly exposing them. They should be asked to identify and name the rules they have violated.
- › When necessary, apply the time-out method, giving the student exhibiting persistent negative behavior space and time to step back from the situation and reflect on their behavior.

At the end of the lesson, the teacher should:

- › Reward and reinforce positive behavior, both verbally and non-verbally.
- › Speak privately with students who display recurring unwanted behaviors.
- › Encourage students to evaluate their own behavior through self-assessment processes.
- › Facilitate discussion on alternative behaviors when negative ones are observed, thereby promoting student awareness and responsibility.

## *Conclusions*

The goal of this manual is not only to equip educators with the necessary knowledge and tools to cultivate students' social and life skills. It also aspires to provoke reflection and inspire them to deeply reconsider their pedagogical approach, teaching methodology, and the way they build relationships with their students. Through this process, it aims to foster an educational environment free from stereotypes - where free expression, inclusion, and acceptance are not merely concepts, but fundamental values that shape the learning experience.

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