

Interventions Against Social Polarization in the Classroom

Selected Examples

Extended Class Exchange Program (ECEP)



Overview

Approach:

Direct intergroup contact with artistic activities and compassion training for empathy and tolerance

Scope:

Xenophobia
Highly polarized groups

Sample population:

Israeli-Jewish and Israeli-Palestinian students
Grades 3-4

Results

Fewer negative stereotypes, feelings, and discriminatory tendencies between groups

Intervention

12 4-hour bi-monthly meetings of three mixed groups (15-18 students per group)

Components:

- warm-up
- three 1-hour artistic activities in each session
 - ➡ social/art: social games, visual art
 - ➡ music: playing instruments, performing rhythmic activities, writing songs
 - ➡ movement: dancing, body-oriented games
- group discussion
- mindfulness practice
- closure exercise
- additional: 24 45-minutes bi-monthly sessions of KTH (Israeli social-emotional learning program to promote civic values and learn social-emotional skills)

Source and detailed description

Berger, R., Benatov, J., Abu-Raiya, H., & Tadmor, C. T. (2016). Reducing prejudice and promoting positive intergroup attitudes among elementary-school children in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. *Journal of School Psychology, 57*, 53–72. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2016.04.003>



Call to Care-Israel (C2C-I)

Overview

Approach:

Social-cognitive and social-emotional skill training to promote care and compassion

Scope:

Xenophobia
Highly polarized groups

Sample Population:

Jewish-Israeli students
Grades 3-5

Results

Higher readiness for social contact with outgroup and less negative prejudice

Intervention

24 45-minute sessions, once per week, around three areas: receiving care, self-care, care for others, also disliked people

Components:

- warm-up: bring objects associated with safety, draw pictures of safe places, look at pictures of loved ones
- identify and acknowledge daily care moments
- imagine a significant person associated with care and love
- practices for mindfulness, self-affirmation, empathy, perspective-taking, and pro-social behaviors
- relaxation and stress-management strategies
- group activities: sharing emotions, role-playing difficult situations
- homework: practicing skills with family members, mindfulness diary, 5-minute mindfulness or compassion meditation every morning

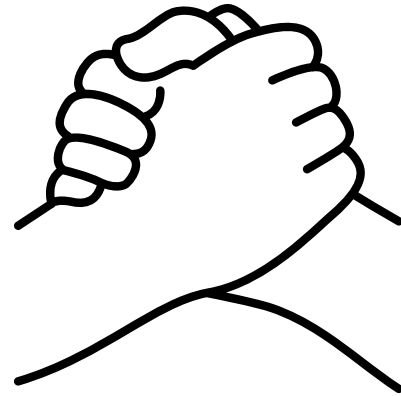
Material

https://static-content.springer.com/esm/art%3A10.1007%2Fs12671-018-0919-y/MediaObjects/12671_2018_919_MOESM1_ESM.pdf

Source

Berger, R., Brenick, A., & Tarrasch, R. (2018). Reducing Israeli-Jewish Pupils' Outgroup Prejudice with a Mindfulness and Compassion-Based Social-Emotional Program. *Mindfulness*, 9(6), 1768–1779. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12671-018-0919-y>

Skills and Contact Interventions



Overview

Approach:

Direct intergroup contact
with social-cognitive and
social-emotional skill
training

Scope:

Xenophobia
Highly polarized groups

Sample Population:

Palestinian-Israeli and
Jewish-Israeli students
Grade 5, age 10-11

Intervention

12 45-minute bi-monthly skill training
sessions and 12 4-hours bi-monthly
intergroup meetings (mixed, 15-18 students)

Components skill training:

- practices for non-judgmental attitudes, cognitive and emotional empathy, compassion, and perspective-taking

Components contact meetings:

- warm-up
- experiential work related to theme of session
- group discussions
- 1-hour artistic activities in rotation (music, movement, social play)
- breaks with games and snacks

Material

<https://ars-els-cdn-com.proxy3.library.mcgill.ca/content/image/1-s2.0-S0022440519300469-mmc2.docx>

Results

Less acceptance for social exclusion based on ethnicity; skill training alone led to the same outcomes -> can also be used where direct contact is not possible!

Source and detailed description

Brenick, A., Lawrence, S. E., Carneiro, D., & Berger, R. (2019). Teaching Tolerance or Acting Tolerant? Evaluating Skills- and Contact-Based Prejudice Reduction Interventions Among Palestinian-Israeli and Jewish-Israeli Youth. *Journal of School Psychology*, 75, 8–26.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2019.07.001>

In Search of Safety Program (Australian Red Cross)



Overview

Approach:

Intervention with elements of didactic lessons, storytelling (testimony or film), and arts-based activities (games)

Scope:

Racism
Xenophobia

Sample Population:

Australian students
Age 10-12

Intervention

90-minute session to reduce children's prejudice toward asylum seekers and refugees

Components:

- presentation with overview of human rights, information about asylum seekers, and definitions of asylum seekers and refugees
- imaginative perspective-taking game: imagine that someone is coming to harm your family; you have 15 minutes to pack six items and pick six people to bring with you
- Film "Seeking Refuge" or testimony of person with refugee background

Other Resources and More Information

<https://www.redcross.org.au/act/community-conversations/learning-resources/>

Considerations

- Intervention content specific for Australian context
- Intervention more likely to be effective for people with mild prejudices or positive attitudes toward outgroups

Source

Hartley, L., Fleay, C., Pedersen, A., Cook, A., & Jeram, A. (2021). "It Put Me in Their Shoes": Challenging Negative Attitudes towards Asylum Seekers among Australian Children. *Human Rights Education Review*, 4(2), 85–104. <https://doi.org/10.7577/hrer.3951>

LGBTQ-supportive practices and GSA



Overview

Approach:

Community building,
professional development,
and inclusive curricula

Scope:

Homophobia
Transphobia
Well-being of LGB-students

Sample Population:

Secondary school US-
students
Grades 9-12

Intervention

Implementing a combination of different
LGBTQ-supportive practices

Components:

- Gender-sexuality alliances (GSA)
- Safe spaces
- Support anti-harassment behavior
- Encourage staff to professional development
- Facilitate access to health, social, and psychological service providers
- LGBTQ-relevant curricula and resources

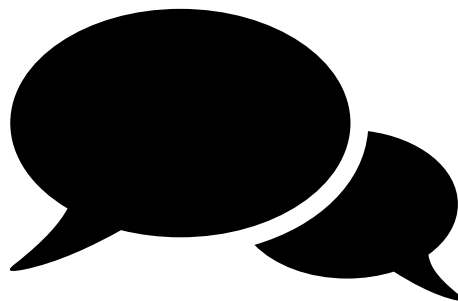
Considerations

LGBTQ-supportive practices were associated with positive outcomes for LGB and heterosexual students, but have not been tested for transgender students.

Source

Kaczkowski, W., Li, J., Cooper, A. C., & Robin, L. (2022). Examining the relationship between LGBTQ-supportive school health policies and practices and psychosocial health outcomes of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and heterosexual students. *LGBT Health*, 9(1), 43–53. <https://doi.org/10.1089/lgbt.2021.0133>

Deliberative political classroom discussions



Overview

Approach:

Teacher-led peer discussions

Scope:

Racism

Xenophobia

Sample Population:

Swedish students

Age 13-15

Intervention

Teacher-initiated deliberative political discussions to increase students' political interest and lower anti-immigrant attitudes

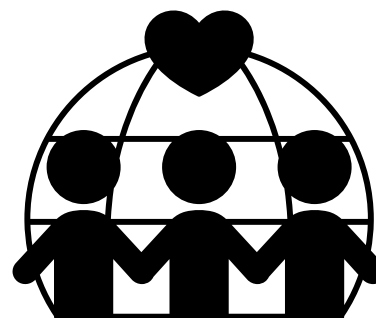
Considerations

In order for political discussions not to lead to more polarization and conflict, they should only be used in rather homogeneous, non-polarized groups and not be combined with inter-group contacts; it is important to first assess the current climate to estimate potential escalations of conflicts

Source

Miklikowska, M., Rekker, R., & Kudrnac, A. (2022). A Little More Conversation A Little Less Prejudice: The Role of Classroom Political Discussions for Youth's Attitudes toward Immigrants. *Political Communication*, 39(3), 405–427.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2022.2032502>

NoTrap! Against Ethnic Victimization



Overview

Approach:

Peer education by outgroup member (immigrant students)

Scope:

Racism
Xenophobia

Sample Population:

Italian middle high school students
Grades 7-10, age 11-17

Considerations

The risk of stigmatization for an approach that puts minority students in focus has to be considered

Intervention

One school year long anti-bullying intervention with focus on ethnic victimization

Three phases:

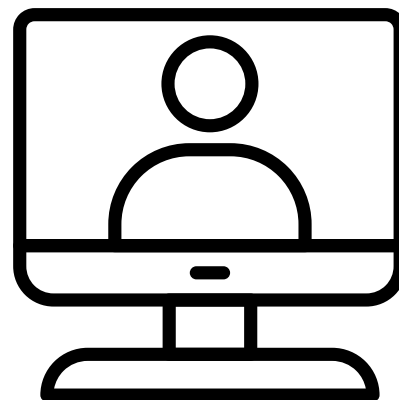
1. Two-hour meeting with whole class to raise awareness on bullying and cyberbullying; recruitment of immigrant students as peer educators
2. Training of teachers (4 hours; information about bullying, cyberbullying, and the program, workshop simulation) and peer educators (8 hours) – components:
 - listening skills
 - emotional competence and empathy
 - coping strategies against bullying
 - posters and role-play games
3. Peer educators lead two workshops for other students on emotions and coping strategies for bullying in group work

Source and detailed description

Zambuto, V., Stefanelli, F., Palladino, B. E., Nocentini, A., & Menesini, E. (2022). The Effect of the NoTrap! Antibullying Program on Ethnic Victimization: When the Peer Educators' Immigrant Status Matters. *Developmental Psychology*, 58(6), 1176–1187. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001343>

Step In Speak Up

Online Interactive Role-Play



Overview

Approach:

Online interactive role-play simulation

Scope:

Homophobia

Sample Population:

In-service middle and high school teachers

Results

Significant differences to control group in preparedness, likelihood, and self-confidence in managing bullying behavior

Intervention

Self-paced online role-play simulation to practice conversation strategies based on motivational interviewing (MI); takes between 45–90 minutes to complete

Components:

- learners interact in simulated mini-conversations with emotionally responsive and authentically reacting virtual students
- simulates instances of harassment and use of homophobic language
- insight into virtual students' thoughts to foster understanding and empathy
- virtual coach provides real-time feedback and suggestions

Program description and demo:

kognito.com/solution/step-in-speak-up/

Source

Bradley, E., Albright, G., McMillan, J., & Shockley, K. (2019). Impact of a Simulation on Educator Support of LGBTQ Youth. *Journal of LGBTQ Youth*, 16(3), 317–339.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19361653.2019.1578324>

LGBTQ-focused Service-based Intervention



Overview

Approach:

Contact-based approach
with service-based field
placement

Scope:

Homophobia
Transphobia

Sample Population:

Pre-service high school
teachers

Results

The service-based learning
group had higher perceived
self-efficacy for working with
LGBTQ youth and active-
empathic listening skills.

Intervention

3 hours of pre-placement LGBTQ-focused
training and 9 hours of service-based field
placement at a GSA at a local high school

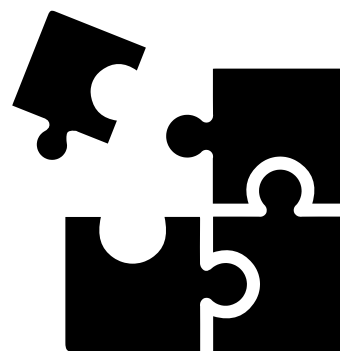
Components:

- Topics of pre-placement training:
 - working competently with LGBTQ populations
 - practicing skills like creating positive teacher-student relationships and listening empathically
 - supporting high school students
 - understanding gender, discrimination, prejudice, and stereotypes (incl. case studies)
 - preparing to work with assigned GSA
- Service-based placement:
 - GSA observation
 - lesson planning and implementation
 - mentor discussion and feedback

Source

Coulter, R. W. S., Colvin, S., Onufer, L. R., Arnold, G., Akiva, T., D'Ambrogi, E., & Davis, V. (2021). Training Pre-Service Teachers to Better Serve LGBTQ High School Students. *Journal of Education for Teaching: International Research and Pedagogy*, 47(2), 234–254. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02607476.2020.1851137>

Collaborative Teacher Study Groups for Cultural Competence



Overview

Approach:

Professional development with the use of stories, art, and contact

Scope:

Racism

Sample Population:

In-service Social Studies and English Language Arts teachers at secondary schools

Intervention

4-weeks intensive professional development focused on African American history, literature, and culture with inclusion of spatial thinking and technology; led by scholars of African American history

Components:

- Field trips to historical sites and African American history museums (12 hours)
- Creating a web-based map for classroom use that includes historical and literary content
- Read historical documents and literature, analyze primary sources
- Watch films and artwork, listen to music
- Dedicated time to read, review, and discuss independently

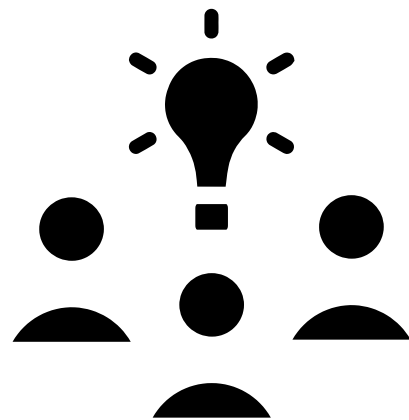
Results

Most participants showed slightly increased cultural competence and reported a broader cultural awareness, which would influence their teaching practice.

Source

Johnson, C. S., Sdunzik, J., Bynum, C., Kong, N., & Qin, X. (2021). Learning about Culture Together: Enhancing Educators Cultural Competence through Collaborative Teacher Study Groups. *Professional Development in Education*, 47(1), 177–190.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/19415257.2019.1696873>

RaceWork's Tripartite Model of Race-Visible and Antiracist Praxis



Overview

Approach:

Community building and
peer discussions

Scope:

Racism

Sample Population:

A small group of in-service
elementary, middle, and
high school teachers

Intervention

Study authors met with teachers for three
hours monthly over two years in a critical
support group

Components:

- Community building
- Discussing antiracist practice and White identity
- Sharing stories of experiences
- Theory readings
- Making commitments to concrete actions

Results

Participants emphasized a sense of group identity and accountability to the group, which produced a desire to act.

Source

McManimon, S. K., & Casey, Z. A. (2018). (Re)beginning and becoming: Antiracism and professional development with white practicing teachers. *Teaching Education*, 29(4), 395–406.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10476210.2018.1506429>