

Polarization and DEI: Interventions in the School Setting

A summary of research findings and good practice to counteract social polarization in schools

Interventions and trainings that aim to increase **diversity, equity, and inclusion** (DEI) often backfire and meet resistance from students and staff. What does an intervention in the school setting need to actually **improve situations of social polarization**? This leaflet summarizes recent **research findings** and provides guidance around **best practices** regarding DEI interventions in a polarized school setting.



Findings

For students:



More promising

Interventions that use:

- role-plays and simulations
- arts-based methods
- community building and belonging (e.g., gender-sexuality alliances – GSA)
- social-emotional or social-cognitive skills training



Less convincing

Certain interventions might reinforce polarization:

- policy changes
- didactic lessons
- narratives transported through stories (e.g., testimonies, films, storybooks) that evoke feelings of guilt or threaten existing values



Combinations work better

Interventions with contact between polarized groups benefit from a combination with creative, arts-based, or empathy-focused approaches

For school professionals:



More promising

Alternative intervention approaches:

- peer discussion
- role-plays and simulations
- practice-oriented contact (e.g., field placements)



Less convincing

Trainings with didactic approaches work well in only roughly half of the cases



Combinations work better

Didactic interventions work best when combined with peer discussion, role-play and simulations, and practice-oriented contact approaches.



Use this guide to
supplement your
organization's tools
and resources



Recommendations for Practice

Student interventions: activity examples

- Arts-based and expressive activities: theatre play, making music, painting together, social games, singing, rhythmic games and dancing
- Social-emotional or social-cognitive skills training: perspective-taking games and thought experiments (e.g., imagining yourself in someone else's shoes); stress-management and relaxation (e.g., meditation), mindfulness diary
- Simulation and role-play games: try acting out a difficult situation; practice new skills in a simulated setting where making mistakes is allowed
- Elements of community building: bring together students with similarities but prevent feelings of exclusion

School professionals interventions: activity examples

- Simulations and role-plays: simulate challenging teacher-student interactions in a non-judgemental practice environment; try out new conversation or mediation techniques
- Peer discussions: facilitate small group and plenary discussions; value the individual points of view of all participants and foster a sense of community
- Contact: Field placements (e.g., pre-service educators teach classes), excursions (e.g., to queer neighborhoods, to places with a Black history), and other contact-based methods bring (future) staff in touch with their clientele and can lower bias toward outgroups

Resources

Clinical Polarization Team: (514) 267-3979

Clinical Polarization Team for more information, click [here](#)

Artistic Intervention Guides: [Théâtre Pluralité ÉLODIL](#) and [Art et Contes](#)

Scoping Review Müller M., et al. Interventions Addressing Current Social Polarization in the School Context: A Scoping Review. *Journal of Early Adolescence* (under review)

Selected examples of interventions: summary sheets: tinyurl.com/schoolinterventions

- Berger et al. 2016: Extended Class Exchange Program (ECEP) dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jsp.2016.04.003
- Berger et al. 2018: Call to Care-Israel (C2C-I) dx.doi.org/10.1007/s12671-018-0919-y
- Hartley et al. 2021: Search for Safety Program doi.org/10.7577/hrer.3951
- Miklikowska et al. 2022: Deliberative political classroom discussions doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2022.2032502
- Zambuto et al. 2022: NoTrap! against ethnic victimization doi.org/10.1037/dev0001343

