

# Inventory and analysis of promising curriculum, pedagogy, and social climate interventions tackling inequalities

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<sup>1</sup> <https://educationendowmentfoundation.org.uk/evidence-summaries/teaching-learning-toolkit/>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this report, we identify, describe, and critically analyse promising interventions used in eight European countries to target social and educational inequalities through curriculum, pedagogy, and school social climate. Specifically, we conducted an inventory of promising interventions, within the classroom and school microsystems, aiming to promote educational equality and belongingness for immigrant, Roma, and low-income children attending early childhood and primary education provision in the Czech Republic, England, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, and Portugal.

The first section of this report provides a brief overview of existing evidence on social and educational inequalities negatively affecting children with immigrant or ethnic minority background or low-income status. It also presents a theoretical framework for designing and implementing coherent multicultural policies within the school system aiming to support educational equality and belongingness. Based on OECD (2010) and Berry (1984), and considering the literature reviewed by Aguiar et al. (2017), we acknowledge the significant role of language support in reducing the gaps between native students and students with an immigrant or ethnic minority background. This first section also provides relevant contextual information, by characterizing each participating country based on selected sociodemographic and educational indicators related to inequalities and policies aiming to address such inequalities.

The Methods section describes the procedures used to conduct the inventory (e.g., inclusion, exclusion, and priority criteria, search strategies, characteristics of coders and of the coding framework, etc.). Importantly, aiming to maximize our contribution to the field, we were especially interested in promising, recent, local, and less known interventions involving immigrant, low-income, or Roma children. *Promising* interventions were defined as innovative practices for which there is not yet (at this point) evidence of effectiveness available, based on Randomized Control Trials or Quasi-experimental evaluation studies. For the purposes of this inventory, an intervention could be considered promising for several reasons, including (a) the existence of unpublished evidence or evidence published in grey literature, (b) its innovative character (contextual novelty); (c) high consideration among stakeholders, etc. We considered interventions that target cognitive/academic, non-cognitive/socioemotional skills, or both, acknowledging the need for ensuring that all children develop a balanced set of skills that support individual lifetime success (Heckman, 2006). All considered, the interventions included in this inventory were selected based on the following selection criteria:

- Aiming to reduce social or educational inequalities or, conversely, promote educational equality and belongingness;
- Targeting 3- to 10/12-year-old children attending centre-based early childhood education settings and primary schools;
- With available evidence on disadvantaged children or specifically targeting children from disadvantaged backgrounds (e.g., immigrant background, Roma, or low-income families<sup>2</sup>);
- Implemented in or promoted by centre-based early childhood education settings or primary schools;

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<sup>2</sup> In the case of Poland, interventions targeting children from rural areas were also considered eligible.

- Focus on curriculum, pedagogy, and/or school climate;
- Designed and/or implemented in the last 10 years;
- Considered to be effective or promising, according to predetermined criteria;
- Coherent with the positive and strengths-based approach of ISOTIS;
- Described in a document, specifying goals and intervention strategies.

Whenever a considerable number of interventions was identified in one country, the following priority criteria were used to inform selection decisions: 1) ongoing; 2) focused on language supports; 3) local/less known; 4) sophisticated use of information and communications technology (ICT); 5) high reputation among stakeholders; and 6) diversity of types of interventions.

Over 500 interventions were identified during the search conducted by country teams, with over 100 considered eligible for this inventory. Based on the application of eligibility and priority criteria by country teams, a total of 78 interventions were selected for review and analyses. The Results section describes our findings and presents a portrait of promising recent, local, and less known interventions. The following findings are particularly noteworthy:

- While 79% of the interventions provided some type of language support, only 32% considered children's heritage language, even though 72% of the interventions targeted either immigrant, Roma, or mixed groups of children.
- Almost two thirds of the selected interventions were designed for primary school, with around 22% targeting specifically early childhood education settings.
- Around 15% of the interventions did not mention or make explicit any theoretical basis.
- 50% of interventions were delivered based on activities involving only children from the target groups, while around 42% of interventions were implemented through activities involving all children in the classroom.
- Nearly 46% of the interventions were delivered in the classroom, embedded in regular classroom activities or routines, and nearly 26% of the selected interventions were delivered outside the classroom, through special activities or services. Around 28% of the interventions included both classroom and pull-out activities.
- Around 53% of the interventions were delivered by the classroom teachers and nearly 39% of the interventions were delivered by the classroom teachers and other professionals.
- Half of the selected interventions included some use of ICT for delivering the intervention, providing resources for teachers, presenting information within other activities, facilitating children's reflection, assessing, and/or monitoring activities and children's learning.
- 41% of the selected interventions included explicit family involvement activities.
- 58% of the selected interventions have been evaluated.
- 6% of the selected interventions reported collaborative learning activities.
- 4% of the selected interventions provided information on the social composition of peer groups/dyads, describing performance homogeneity as the criterium for grouping.
- 4% of the selected interventions reported the use of anti-bias activities.

Overall, our findings suggest that participating countries are testing or implementing a considerable number of very diverse and often comprehensive interventions targeting social and educational inequalities through curriculum, pedagogy, and social climate. Language support seems to be widespread within these interventions, appropriately recognizing the foundational

nature of language skills for learning, communication, and belongingness. However, our theory-driven and evidence-based critical analysis of effective and promising interventions suggests there is considerable room for further development in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of such interventions. Specifically, comprehensive multicultural policies that explicitly support culture maintenance, communication, and positive contact among minority or disadvantaged and majority or advantaged students, through equity pedagogies, may be especially valuable in guiding future developments. Based on our findings, increased support for immigrant and minority students' heritage language and culture, while promoting positive contact and interactions between majority and minority children, seems to be a first key step towards designing and implementing transformative interventions that positively impact belongingness, wellbeing, social cohesion, learning, and lifetime success.

Based on our findings, and informed by theory and available evidence, we propose the following **recommendations for national and European-level policy-makers**:

1. When allocating resources for interventions aiming to promote equity and belongingness:
  - a. Prioritize strengths-based interventions that build on children's, families', and communities' resources (including minorities' languages and cultures as key to ensuring belongingness);
  - b. Prioritize interventions with a strong theoretical and empirical background;
  - c. Ensure that sufficient funding is available for the evaluation of the intervention effectiveness;
  - d. Prioritize high-quality research designs that allow causal inferences regarding intervention effectiveness.
2. Increase accessibility of data on interventions supported by public funding.
3. Ensure that national early childhood education and primary school curricula or curriculum guidelines consistently reflect multicultural policies that support the maintenance and development of heritage cultures, intergroup contact, and intercultural communication (Berry, 2013).

Further, **recommendations for practitioners** are formulated as a checklist for professionals aiming to design, implement, or evaluate interventions targeting educational and social inequalities for children with an ethnic minority, immigrant, or socioeconomically disadvantaged background in early childhood education settings and primary schools. Our checklist includes recommendations on (1) value-based starting points driving decision-making processes; (2) intervention strategies that are consistent with resource-based approaches and that are typically associated with equity and belongingness outcomes; (3) intervention features aiming to support the participation and competence of key actors; and (4) approaches to monitoring, evaluation, and dissemination as part of successful interventions. Specifically, we recommend the following:

1. Start early.
2. Develop the intervention within a coherent theoretical framework and based on strong empirical evidence.
3. Target a balanced set of skills, considering both cognitive or academic and socio-emotional outcomes.
4. Actively identify and acknowledge, and explicitly value, the resources of all children, families, and communities.

5. Value all languages and cultures equally and consider them as resources for teaching, learning, and succeeding in life.
6. Provide language supports to immigrant-background students concurrently to teaching the age-appropriate curriculum.
7. Intentionally support and explicitly value the development of the language and cultural heritage of immigrant and ethnic minority students.
8. Actively promote positive contact between minority/majority and/or advantaged/disadvantaged students through joint learning activities based on positive interdependence.
  - 8.1. Use cooperative learning to support the development of social skills, the reduction of prejudice, and the academic achievement of all students.
  - 8.2. Use heterogeneous grouping to allow for and support positive contact among diverse students.
9. Use interactive socio-cognitive training approaches (e.g., role-playing, simulation games, and group exercises) to support the development of anti-bias/anti-prejudice attitudes.
10. Actively support family participation (e.g., through bidirectional communication strategies, meaningful learning-at-home activities, active involvement in decision making processes at school, etc.).
11. Provide appropriate support and training to classroom teachers.
12. Use the potential of ICT to actively engage children in learning, support teachers, establish bidirectional communication channels with families, etc.
13. Monitor both student learning and sense of belongingness in the classroom and in school.
14. Use high-quality research designs to evaluate the effectiveness of the intervention/approach/strategy.
15. Make existing information about the effectiveness and feasibility of different intervention approaches and strategies readily accessible.

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**INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND SOCIAL SUPPORT  
TO TACKLE INEQUALITIES IN SOCIETY**



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