

THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESSES IN MULTICULTURAL EDUCATION: CLASSROOM SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT

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The increasing number of immigrant students in Elementary and Secondary Education classrooms conditions the development of the teaching-learning processes. The teacher must not only teach the content prescribed by the official curriculum, but must also develop a set of teaching skills that enable him to meet the wide range of abilities and interests of his students. The inclusive school combines quality teaching with the teacher's dedication of individual attention to his students. However, human resources available in schools are not always enough for students' knowledge acquisition. The current model of multiculturalism has moved to the area of education in an attempt to approximate society and education. Even though this action strengthens the quality of teaching, teacher training remains in the same parameters as 10 years ago. The new teacher's profile not only adheres to the academic requirements but must go much further. Thus, he must be able to capture the attention of his students and meet their needs. In order to develop this teaching, he combines the theoretical framework of multiculturalism and comprehensive education. The inclusive school development contributes to achieving teaching skills that allow specific attention to learner's needs.

Keywords: multiculturalism, teaching-learning processes, didactics, methodology, classroom organization criteria, inclusive school

Methodology and classroom organization criteria must conform to the development of the teaching-learning process, by focusing on students' interaction with their peers, homogeneous and heterogeneous grouping and the diversity of teaching situations. When it comes to considering teacher training, the university level must be completed with the teachers' constant updating of their knowledge, so that they are able to combine in their teaching the new demands in the socio-educational perspective. The development of teaching programs involving the use of Information Technology and Communication is a major breakthrough in the classroom that allows individual attention and an acquisition of knowledge in a personal learning stage. New trends in multiculturalism move beyond traditional didactic paradigms and emphasize the creation of a necessary classroom social environment in the teaching-learning process.

The teaching-learning processes in multicultural education: classroom social environment

From the latter part of the twentieth century to the present, developments in education in Spain have been significant. The transition to democracy and also its consolidation have made possible significant socio-economic development, with the interchange of several governments of different political standpoints. This situation has also affected the educational system, which has been influenced, no doubt, by the lack of political consensus regarding general educational guidelines.

In this sense, there has been much debate on school integration and attention to the diversity of students, being increased in recent decades from the perspective of Spanish education (Elboj et al., 2002; Arnaiz, 2003; Arnaiz, 2009; Montón, 2003; Echeita, 2006; Huguet, 2006; Moriña, 2008; Aguado & Del Olmo, 2009; Echeita et al., 2009; Aguado, 2010; Oller & Colomé, 2010). In this sense, the work carried out by several research groups is noteworthy: for example, the group INTER has undertaken preventive work against racism in schools (Fernández-Montes & Müllauer-Seichter, 2009); experiences with critical analysis of link classrooms as a measure for integration, describing the extent of integration and emphasising that integration should not be included as mere assimilation (Terrén, 2004) and nor should intercultural education be approached as specific attention when there are students of other ethnic groups or nationalities, but from a more open conception of the term *diversity*, without pejorative or segregating connotations, but rather, as an enriching and empowering tool of the possibilities for coexistence. Inclusive research from a biographical narrative approach of great interest has also been addressed (Susinos & Parrilla, 2008).

In Spain, in the last few years, diversity has been closely associated with the incorporation of immigrant students to education, and too often with the difficulties of such a process. In this sense, we want to capture the evolution in the incorporation of these students to education in Spain, highlighting the data in this first decade of the twenty-first century, in order to emphasize the need for change in educational practices so as to develop more inclusive approaches – non-segregating – in the educational institution itself and, therefore, with the necessary involvement of the various educational agents.

Table 1. *Foreign students in Spain (Source: MEC – Spanish Ministry of Education, 2010).*

	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
ALL CENTERS	201.288	300.495	392.774	449.936	518.167	594.077	682.460	730.118	733.993
Andalucía	22.024	31.193	43.199	50.432	59.516	69.644	79.526	86.298	86.194
Aragón	5.020	8.487	11.451	13.462	16.198	19.364	23.239	25.890	25.855
Asturias (Principado de)	1.624	2.517	3.094	3.588	4.076	4.621	5.661	6.299	6.412
Balears (Illes)	8.340	11.950	14.867	16.384	18.531	20.736	22.724	24.963	26.334
Canarias	13.203	17.102	20.432	23.316	24.896	27.111	29.455	30.197	29.185
Cantabria	1.034	1.806	2.503	2.994	3.540	4.420	5.523	6.332	5.963
Castilla y León	5.815	9.220	11.573	14.508	16.665	20.795	24.690	26.662	27.381
Castilla-La Mancha	5.700	9.749	13.154	16.642	19.158	23.857	29.190	31.680	32.934
Cataluña (1) Comunitat Valenciana	36.301	54.009	77.017	92.012	110.260	126.874	142.827	159.288	161.505
Extremadura	23.099	37.905	52.793	62.071	70.834	81.651	91.782	98.337	92.813
Galicia	1.878	2.595	3.058	3.411	3.955	4.683	5.273	5.889	5.929
Madrid (Comunidad de)	3.497	5.317	6.539	7.121	8.850	10.277	11.302	12.984	13.373
Murcia (Región de)	55.534	80.156	95.407	99.867	109.164	120.400	141.791	143.150	144.360
Navarra (Comunidad Foral de)	8.126	13.705	18.457	21.455	25.785	28.367	32.825	32.125	33.391
País Vasco	3.499	5.442	6.762	7.467	8.056	9.067	10.198	10.854	10.772
Rioja (La)	4.240	6.038	7.881	10.170	12.788	15.383	18.153	20.378	22.103
Ceuta	1.500	2.600	3.426	4.075	4.841	5.727	6.944	7.405	7.631
Melilla	135	136	182	228	251	256	338	379	420
	719	568	979	733	803	844	1.019	1.008	1.438

The situation in Spain has not been peculiar, since diversity has been a challenge in the different educational systems. Thus, Ainscow and César (2006) and Ainscow, Booth and Dyson (2006), from an international perspective, have conceptualized inclusion from several perspectives of growing interest, as shown in Giné et al. (2009:14-19):

1. *Inclusion related to disability and to special educational needs.*
2. *Inclusion in response to behavioural problems.*
3. *Inclusion as a response to the groups most at risk of exclusion.*
4. *Inclusion as the promotion of a school open for everybody.*
5. *Inclusion as education for all.*
6. *Inclusion as a principle for understanding education and society.*

Inclusion, from a more international perspective (Booth, Nes & Stromstad, 2003; Farrell et al., 2007; Hick, Kershner & Farrel, 2008; Norwich, 2008) implies diversity, learning, participation, democracy and global relationship to society as a whole, beyond the school institution itself.

The different institutions, in this case the *Council of Europe*, has conceptualized the *multilingual and multicultural competence making*

reference to "the ability to use language for communication purposes and to participate in an intercultural relationship ... Not regarded as the superposition or juxtaposition of distinct competences, but as the existence of a complex or even composite competence that the user must employ" (Council of Europe, 2001:167).

But it is necessary, beyond the conceptualization of inclusion, to emphasize the need to develop a series of strategies, programs and best practices emanating from educational policies that promote equity and equal opportunities. Among those best practices, Villar Angulo and Alegre de la Rosa highlight *"originality versus labelling or classification, to favour heterogeneous over homogeneous groups, to provide differentiated over uniform responses, to encourage coeducation against sexism, equity against injustice, participation versus marginalization, continuous and formative assessment against discontinuous and sumative evaluation, thus promoting orientation and collaboration."* (2010:24-25, our translation).

But there are some aspects that may enable and/or complicate the implementation of inclusion from an educational perspective. In this sense, Giné et al. (2009:24) highlight a number of factors that favour inclusive education:

1. *Collaboration among teachers.*
2. *Cooperation among students in the learning process.*
3. *Shared problem-solving, particularly in relation to conduct disorders.*
4. *Heterogeneous and flexible groupings.*
5. *Effective teaching methodologies based on the psycho-pedagogic evaluation, high expectations, individualised monitoring and evaluation.*

In a complementary manner, several authors (Echeita, 2006; Marchesi & Martin, 1998) draw on other relevant aspects to perform global actions that favour inclusion in an educational institution:

1. *Importance of an educational project shared by the entire educational community and which stresses the richness of diversity (Gijón & Fages, 2008).*
2. *Encouragement of reflection on one's own teaching practice.*
3. *A school climate that fosters prevention as the key to educational development.*
4. *Encouragement of an interdisciplinary, integrated and coordinated work, by promoting good practice and flexibility in school organization itself.*
5. *Dynamism of the school with the community environment, as well as with relevant networks with different members of the educational community.*

And, from a model for improving both teaching quality and those processes framed in educational institutions, other authors (Macarulla & Saiz, 2009:21-25) suggest approaching attitudes that either impede or hinder the inclusion of all students, with a series of proposals, among which we note as most significant the following:

1. *To plan and define specific strategies to promote inclusion, by addressing that fears that can arouse in different educational agents.*
2. *To improve information and training to management teams and boards of teachers.*

3. *The need to develop exchanges of inclusive practices and experiences with other institutions.*
4. *To enhance continual advice for improvement.*

Macarulla and Saiz (2009:26-29) go on to emphasise other useful strategies from the experience of centres that have chosen and committed themselves to inclusion:

1. *To establish partnerships with professionals closest to the inclusive approach.*
2. *To promote the implementation of concrete activities with those agents that are relatively reluctant, in order to assess partial experiences.*
3. *To improve the visibility of the capacities of those who have been diagnosed or labelled with very low expectations of performance.*
4. *To empathize with the various actors in the educational community, with a view to analysing different experiences of inclusion versus segregation.*

If we now move on from broader to more specific issues in referring to an educational centre, and we situate in the classroom, as reflected by several authors (Ainscow et al. 2001; Bielaczyc & Collins, 2000; Tharp et al. 2002; Giné et al., 2009) a number of key aspects to enhance the inclusion must be considered:

1. *The importance to develop activities of interest for students, facilitating problem solving in an interactive and collaborative manner.*
2. *To foster an emotional climate where every participant, every student feels included, valued and reinforced in their participations.*
3. *Openness to customs and lifestyles from other cultures that can be enriching for everyone.*
4. *To enhance simultaneous and different spaces, related to interests and objectives, thus allowing different tasks.*
5. *Promoting self-regulated learning, where the ability of personal autonomy is reinforced.*

In a school, the various institutional documents – Educational Project, School Coexistence Plan, etc. – are clearly important to propose and implement the commitment to a set of values and proposals for working with diversity (Essomba, 1999; Essomba 2008). References are many. Thus, Bryam (1997) proposes a model curriculum developed through the inclusion of attitudes of curiosity and openness, knowledge of different groups, the ability to interpret and relate, to discover and interact and also critical cultural awareness. Intercultural mediation is, in this sense, an interesting and encouraging attempt to improve the social climate of schools, and also the coexistence among all the agents involved.

One key aspect is to consider that inclusion involves more than the special needs of students (Thomas & Loxley, 2007:182) and the key relies upon inclusiveness and also upon a new conceptualization of diversity.

From this perspective, the role of teachers and also of each tutor becomes very relevant. That is the reason why collaborative work becomes necessary and natural, in order to achieve the development of the potentialities and capabilities of each student, especially in those centres where the presence of students of immigrant families is higher (Gairín & Iglesias, 2008). In this sense, culture of collaboration by the faculty and groups and departments of

teachers as collegiate bodies within a school is directly related to a number of important attitudes when it comes to working in those sessions among professionals proper: the need for complementarities, the importance of autonomy and personal initiative to contribute to the achievement of common objectives, consistency between the individual professional work and the educational project and the curriculum itself (Molina & Illán, 2008), strategic plans, valued and promoted by the educational community, empathy as the ability to take the place of and stand in the shoes of different partners, from their professional culture as well as other participants in the educational process, other external institutions, the student's family and his wide world of experiences, etc. – and finally, creativity as a skill that allows a continual attitude of searching, deepening and research in order to improve the quality of the different learning processes, all of which will affect the analysis of discourses of both families and professionals and students (Colectivo IOE, 2007).

And if the diversity approach is taken to its logical conclusion, other measurable aspects should be included, given their importance, among the objectives to be achieved with the collaboration of the entire educational community. In this way, Ainscow and Miles (2009:167-169) propose to implement different inclusive educational systems in an enlightening and interesting way in order to support educational policies in this respect, through a reference framework with indicators showing level of performance:

1. *Concepts:*
 1. *Inclusion as a global aspect which structures educational policies and practices.*
 2. *Consideration of all students, approaching them in a comprehensive manner.*
 3. *Inclusive education goes well beyond training institutions in the educational context. It is necessary to approach it and work within it as a network with health, social, etc. aspects.*
 4. *Continuous evaluation and improvement may be elements that promote inclusion practices.*
2. *Educational policies:*
 1. *Educational authorities should incorporate inclusive policies in their trends of action.*
 2. *Leaders, professionals and administrators must think critically to fight against non-inclusive practices.*
3. *Educational structures and systems:*

Prioritizing socially vulnerable groups, and with economic resources.
4. *Educational practices:*

Importance of professional training in educational culture change, emphasizing diversity as enrichment.

The indicators are related to inclusion rates (Booth & Ainscow, 2002) in order to attain a collaborative way to achieve quality education for all students, promoting equal opportunities.

And with a view to achieving these objectives, didactic proposals (Cots et al., 2010) and methodologies must change (Cardona, 2006). Cooperative learning becomes very important in order to promote inclusion in school. Different authors (Abad & Benito, 2006) have coordinated experiences and research which have sought to promote skills development, achievement of objectives, presentation of interdisciplinary contents to positively assess cultural diversity (Torres, 2008), from a new positioning of the actors

involved in the teaching-learning process, with an active and protagonist role of students themselves, with a mediating and facilitating role of teachers.

All these changes, very important at a methodological level, can be endowed with the synergy and empowerment through the development of different web resources (García, 2010) and also educational programs which involve the use of Information and Communication Technologies. In this way, they all stand for a breakthrough in the classroom that allows individual attention and knowledge acquisition in a stage of personal learning at different rates by each of the students, all of which are framed within the information society (Martínez & Bujons, 2001).

Finally, another important educational challenge is to improve and support the participation of all families in the management bodies of the centres, thus allowing for the wide variety of current situations, with special emphasis on those entering from other countries. In this sense, there exist data (Spanish Ombudsman or Defensor del Pueblo, 2003; Santos & Lorenzo, 2003) that locate the participation of immigrant parents below the overall average, a fact that indicates the need to implement programs of action that allow and give prominence to initiatives that will be led by families coming from different countries, for mutual enrichment.

Conclusion

It is important to note that the concept of inclusion is closely linked to education in values (Parrilla, 2005), since they are closely related to the mode and manner in which different students are catered for. The involvement of all members of the educational community – with particular emphasis on community participation (Leiva Olivencia, 2007) – equity, social cohesion, are all unifying elements of the educational work. This is the reason why it is necessary to implement actions aimed at students, so that they, far from assuming a passive role in their learning, may come to acquire a growing and active role with a view to managing with greater independence, success and quality (Susinos, 2009). There is no doubt that, far from addressing the problems and difficulties that occur specifically at school, it is necessary to face in a comprehensive way the role of society and cultural trends when it comes to designing an education accessible to everybody, promoting equal opportunities and with a particular emphasis on the different roles that different actors can play in education; particularly, we make reference to teachers and the necessary and relevant updates in their training (Sensi et al., 2001; López, 2002).

We feel it is important to assess progress made on implementing the "Index for Inclusion", a tool incorporated into various international institutions, with a view to enabling the improvement of self-evaluation in inclusive areas in the field of education, about culture, policies and educational practices (Ainscow & Miles, 2009).

It is very interesting to underline the positive aspects and achievements of intercultural mediation, and also to approach that work done on the perceptions and prejudices of the general public, not only of each educational community in specific centres, but also and especially of prospective teachers and teachers who will join the staff of teachers. All of them are crucial, and it will be essential to strengthen ties with the diverse educational institutions. On top of them, the media and the various social and political actors can play a vital role, so as not to rely all responsibility upon the educational environment.

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