

How to develop intercultural competence in teachers? Evidences from the preservice teacher's practices

Formación docente en competencia intercultural ¿Cómo se desarrolla? Evidencias desde un prácticum orientado a fomentarla

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Background

In today's increasingly globalized society, teachers and researchers are ever more concerned with developing teachers' Intercultural Competence (IC). Various conceptual models allow the evaluation of IC development, but little is known about how this development occurs.

Aims

This article presents the results of an exploratory research to identify the learning processes leading to the development of the different IC dimensions. We will discuss a training experience framed within a teaching innovation project, carried out during the students' professional placements as part of the Primary Education Degree final year. This training experience sought to promote the development of student's IC.

Method & procedures

The study is part of a teaching innovation project conducted during the professional placements of the Primary Education Degree. The main objective of this placement was learning to design, implement and evaluate a didactic proposal, conceived as an interdisciplinary and inclusive learning-through-the-arts project. First, preservice teachers were asked to choose an artist to be the project's focal point. The fundamental principle of this methodology requires the artist to be chosen among those cultural representatives present in the class. The use of artistic forms was encouraged (prioritizing visual and plastic expression), and special significance was given to the process, not just the results. The participants were thirty-two preservice teachers who completed their placement at a multicultural primary school in Barcelona Province, within an area with a high percentage of immigrant and working-class population. This school is considered a center of high educational complexity, where both, school segregation, and a disadvantaged social composition prevails. The methodological orientation of the study was grounded on the Constructivist theory to account for educational phenomena using qualitative data. The researcher analyzes data by constant comparison, initially of data with data, progressing to comparisons between their interpretations translated into codes and categories. Based on previous literature, associated categories were identified. The authors analyzed the data using the qualitative data analysis software Atlas.ti. This labour-intensive process concluded with a coding system revealing how preservice teachers, participants in this research, developed their intercultural competence.

Results & discussion

Based on an evolutionary and qualitative approach to IC, the results allowed us to define four dimensions in which it was possible to identify gradual processes of learning and development of IC: (1) Receptivity to inclusive and intercultural education, (2) Openness to diversity, (3) Reflexivity and (4) Adaptability/flexibility.

These processes ranged from internal results -on a personal level with attitudes that needed to be strengthened- to external results on the level of interpersonal relations as skills to be developed- to manage multicultural diversity in the classroom successfully. Ideas for future actions related to the design and evaluation of teacher training practices aimed at IC development are discussed.

Conclusions

In summary, the results of this study confirm that the development of IC in the initial stages stems from the personal level being enriched by interpersonal relationships. This development is seen as an ongoing process in which individuals, in this case, preservice teachers, question and move away from ethnocentric cultural perspectives that deny or minimize cultural differences. On the other hand, our results reveal how each dimension has specific trajectories and processes in the development of IC. It was observed that the initial stages of each dimension move through the multiple meanings and uses of interculturality from a relational, functional perspective to a more developed and critical perspective where power structures are recognized and sought to be changed. From these results, the need for more training for future teachers together with the importance of evaluating and assessing the process strongly emerges. In this sense, the peculiarities of this placement regarding work in a context of great cultural diversity and high complexity, which was the scenario of the hereby analysed training experience, is considered by students as an essential learning context for the attention to diversity and the accompaniment of the children's acculturation process. All these allows for the integration of cultural heritage into the curriculum. The overly complex context is conceived as a scenario that challenges and exposes preservice teachers to develop components of IC, such as reflexivity and flexibility, skills that promote the identification of their own culture behaviours and attitudes which in turns improve their ability to act in new educational situations addressing cultural diversity. Likewise, we deem necessary to introduce intentional training that fosters the development of IC from an individual standpoint, starting from self-knowledge and questioning one's own cultural identity to move towards socio-cultural adjustment, corresponding to an ethnorelativist perspective that validates and integrates cultural differences in education. For this purpose, it seems appropriate to focus more strongly on reflection on practices.

Keywords: art education, initial teacher education, intercultural competence, preservice teachers, primary education

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