INCLUSIVE CHILDREN'S LITERATURE WORKSHOP: EXPERIENCE REPORT

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ABSTRACT

In order to dialogue about inclusive education has the challenge of creating an atmosphere in which differences and diversities are accepted and appreciated. With the objective of providing favorable conditions for the awareness of diversity as a characteristic of humanity, we report the experience of the creation process and application of an inclusive literature workshop for students of Elementary School I. The results demonstrate that the methodology used was useful for identifying relevant points to be worked on with the children, favored the sense of recognition of individual and collective differences and provided a repertoire to strengthen the confrontation with issues related to bullying and self-image.

Keywords: school inclusion; multiculturalism; literary workshop

Talleres de Literatura Infantil Inclusiva: relato de experiencia

RESUMEN

Dialogar sobre educación inclusiva tiene como desafío crear una atmosfera en la cual diferencias y diversidades son aceptas y apreciadas. Con el objetivo de proporcionar condiciones favorables a la concientización de la diversidad como una característica de la humanidad, relatamos a experiencia del proceso de creación y aplicación de un taller de literatura inclusiva para alumnos de la enseñanza básica I. Los resultados demuestran que la metodología utilizada fue útil para identificar puntos relevantes a ser estudiados con los niños, favoreció el sentido de reconocimiento de las diferencias individuales y colectivas y ofreció repertorio para fortalecimiento del enfrentamiento a cuestiones relacionadas al bullying y autoimagen

Palabras clave: inclusión escolar; multiculturalismo; taller literario

Oficina de literatura infantil inclusiva: relato de experiência

RESUMO

Dialogar sobre educação inclusiva tem como desafio criar uma atmosfera na qual diferenças e diversidades são aceitas e apreciadas. Com o objetivo de proporcionar condições favoráveis para a conscientização da diversidade como uma característica da humanidade, relatamos a experiência do processo de criação e aplicação de uma oficina de literatura inclusiva para alunos do Ensino Fundamental I. Os resultados demonstram que a metodologia utilizada foi útil para identificar pontos relevantes para serem trabalhados com as crianças, favoreceu o senso de reconhecimento das diferenças individuais e coletivas e forneceu repertório para fortalecimento do enfrentamento a questões relacionadas ao bullying e autoimagem.

Palavras chave: inclusão escolar; multiculturalismo; oficina literária

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INTRODUCTION

Inclusive Education is a current educational paradigm in Brazil and in the world. Mistakenly, it is supposed to be the practice of including people with disabilities at schools. However, the referred educational model defends the right to education for everyone, no matter individual differences. In other words, working within the Inclusive Education model goes beyond approaching issues related to disability. It consists of acknowledging the existence of differences and, with them, the inequalities that need to be fixed. After all, once legitimized, such inequalities might fuel prejudice and suffering. Thus, the creation of environments in which differences and diversity are accepted and appreciated as an objective and, at the same time, a major challenge for Inclusive Education, according to Gilmore and Howard (2016).

Regarding the announced challenge, working on awareness and acceptance of different lifestyles and opinions was the objective of a teacher in higher education in the psychology course with her students in the Inclusive Education discipline. One of the activities proposed in this discipline was the writing of a book that approached one of the themes listed in the pedagogical plan, such as gender differences, family configurations, racism, sexism, and disabilities. Such task led students in the psychology course into contact with their differences and, in dialogue with their peers, they produced a material that could be used in professional practice for the same purposes. This flow allowed them to appropriate cultural meanings on differences, question them, re-signify them, and develop the same flow with children, using the produced books as mediators of this process.

The critical perspective on school psychology that selects Vygotsky's cultural-historical theory as the basis for understanding the processes of human learning and development affirms that social relations, within a specific historical context, are the central aspect in the constitution of human psychism (Vygotsky, 1985). Among so many spaces for social interaction, we have schools, which become privileged places for the practice of school psychologists. At schools, meetings are frequent and fundamental for the constitution of human psychism and social protagonism.

School psychology of critical perspective assumes that social relations play a relevant role in human learning and development. Both factors are part of a dynamic process, which is immersed in contradiction and is a result of interactions with other human beings. It is, therefore, a socio-historical perspective of being in the concrete, material world.

In order to promote an embracing, humanized environment at schools, according to Pontes and Guaraldo (2014. p. 4), education for "(...) survival, for freedom, for communication, and for transformation",

awareness, acceptance, and knowledge might contribute to greater understanding, empathy, and respect for diversity (Gilmore & Howard, 2016).

Literature portrays culture either in a real or fictitious way. However, every history contains traces of a social context, ideologies, and values. Thus, books might be powerful instruments by means of which children and adults can learn about themselves, about others, and about the world around them. Depending on content, books might also promote awareness on differences and similarities, self-acceptance, and acceptance of others. In addition, books might provide information that neutralize ignorance on distorted, mistaken perceptions, that sustain stereotypes on differences.

The execution of actions at school and the use of literature can be planned to that end, by means of methods, materials, and techniques for teaching and learning that provide answers to general and specific needs by the students." (Camargo, 2017, p. 1).

In fact, reading a story leads readers to appropriate the social dimension of a certain context. Thus, narrative makes readers think over plots, while benefiting the process of identification with characters and the feeling of affiliation to a certain territory. Therefore, it is possible to observe how the construction of characters leads readers to identify in a positive, empowered way, or in a negative way, while reinforcing stereotypes that place one in an oppressed, lower situation in society.

In other words, when one tells a story, the context gives us hints of other ways of living and being. Depending on the way stories approach individual differences, they can disseminate prejudice, oppression, and stereotypes. They can also sustain discriminations that cause psychological suffering and affect the construction of subjectivity for those who tell and for those who listen to the story.

Amaral (1994) warns us that the disabilities portrayed in school books affect the way society conceives and handles disabilities. The author emphasizes that the monsters/villains in the stories are invariably presented with some significant difference in the physical and sensorial whelms, in addition to being observed in most of the stories, hierarchic situations that produce suffering (sexism, racism, ableism etc.) by presenting situations where the accepted ways of living present themselves within conservative outlines corresponding to a dominant Eurocentric culture.

During the whole schooling process, children have access to a literary collection that must be chosen in accordance with the school's political-pedagogical project. Nowadays in Brazil, it is possible to observe the paradigm of the attempt at implementing inclusive education. Therefore, it becomes imperative to propose literature that contemplates the diverse forms of existence and destigmatizes individual differences.

Taking that into consideration, a group of university students of psychology, in collaboration with the teacher of the Inclusive Education teacher, produced and published a collection of children's stories approaching diverse themes such as sexism, racism, adoption, grief, disabilities, and family configurations (Braunstein & Suzuki, 2019). Later on, they used the material to realize a literary workshop with students in Elementary School I. the activity is presented in this experience report.

METHOD

The activity took place in an educational institution with students from Elementary School I. The groups were divided by year and for each year three or four workshop supervisors operated. The environment was well known by the students and the workshop was structured into three moments: 1) Warmup activity: check out the interaction among the participants; 2) Storytelling: dramatization in collaboration with the participants while promoting reflections, the process of identification with characters and the feelings of affiliation to the school environment; 3) Wrap-up activity: conversations on the experience with the intention to check out the perceptions and reactions of the children and confront them regarding hegemonic discourses, while aiming at an embracing environment that provides materials to understand and handle discrimination, and bullying, while optimizing the quality of relations at school.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The specific objectives with the groups from the 4th and 5th years were: 1) Approaching different configurations of family groups, 2) Minimizing prejudice regarding family configurations and 3) Reflect on the role played by family in the life of each one. For such task, researchers chose a story on family configurations named "The discoveries of Pingo".

Researchers observed, in this group, a prevalent separation in the relations between boys and girls, where both genders interacted very little, almost not at all, among themselves. When it comes to the invitation to take part in the warmup activities, most of the boys refused, and justified their refusal by saying that it was a "girl thing".

During the storytelling, the children, especially the girls, interrupted occasionally to share family configurations, a moment marked by the other students' obvious surprise at discovering the existence of classmates who had been adopted.

When listening to parts of the story describing families with same-sex parents, students (especially the male ones) said: "what do you mean?", "I have seen it before", "but that is not right", "but that is not normal". Researchers noticed facial expressions of curiosity and/ or astonishment. Such phenomenon was not observed in children who had previously reported having diverse family configurations, such as foster fathers or mothers.

During the interpretation of characters, some of the boys manifested a certain indignation at girls wanting to play the roles of male characters, "You are a girl. You cannot be a boy in the play – that is wrong".

The third stage contemplated a moment of conversation on the story, with a proposal to write their conclusions, perceptions, and feelings on little banners and stick them into little fake Styrofoam sweetmeats (a favorite of the main character). During the activity, there were moments of aggressiveness in a group of boys due to disputes over authority.

The students with intellectual disabilities remained excluded from the group for most of the time and had no empathy from classmates to help them accomplish the tasks, and facilitators were needed. In general, the children agreed that there are diverse families, and mentioned examples by their classmates, which were unknown until then. The words "family, love, affection, and union" were the most often used by the children to describe the meaning of family. The word "diversity" also appeared, as a reference to history and discussion.

The specific objectives with the groups from 1st to 3rd years were: 1) Create feelings of identity, 2) Perception of individual differences, and 3) Provide a repertoire of flexibility and acceptance of physical differences and of different tastes. In order to do that task, researchers selected aa story entitled "The beauty of the flowers", on the diversity of a girl discovering the diversity that exists within a classroom.

Like in the previous group, there was resistance by some of the children to realize the warm-up activity with hula hoops. Everyone participated though. Students were instructed to hold hands and pass around the hula hoops in a certain way. Facilitators kept reminding students of the need to help each other and that it was impossible to carry out the activity without teamwork. Researchers observed the students' total engagement to the activity. They hollered words of encouragement and tips to each other in other to accomplish the task. At the end of this activity, the children were encouraged to express their opinions and impressions concerning the dynamics. They raised issues concerning "teamwork", "one for all and all for one", "friendship", and "help", demonstrating comprehension of the positive aspects of union and collectiveness.

During the storytelling, the facilitators highlighted parts of the narrative referring to physical differences, tastes, and preferences, and asked the children questions. Thus, during the activity, children were stimulated to observe and report the differences present within the classroom. This activity led to questions involving racism, bullying, and sexism, which were approached in the workshops. Black children felt difficulty to declare the color of their skin. One of the children declared, "You can't say 'black'. It is prejudice." In order to finish the activity, with the mediation of the facilitators, the group

was encouraged to draw pictures of each other and reflect on differences.

CONCLUSION

The realized activities led psychology students to put into practice the aggregated contents of the Inclusive Education Discipline, so that they could appreciate critical practices that were not pathologizing and excluding in the profession. In addition, we highlighted the contributions to the process of teaching and learning by introducing students to other learning possibilities by means of dynamics, theater role plays, and round tables. Such dynamics, aligned with the proposed objectives aimed at reaching the goals of acknowledging and acceptance of other people's differences, while benefiting communication and quality relationships at school.

The observations of the workshop supervisors evidenced how difficulties were directly connected to sociocultural aspects and practices of the institution, while emphasizing the need for distance from the medicalizing logic and an approximation to critical practices that are aligned with humanization.

The proposed model was able to contribute to helping and identifying important subjective points, which need to be approached by the children. The model also led to reflections on matters involving racism, ableism, and family configurations, while opening doors for re-significations in the classroom.

Most importantly, we must consider that, despite the fact that the experience provided fertile fields for both parties, it is necessary to recurrently intervene towards effective promotion to diversity and inclusion in the context of the referred school.

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