

Chapter 4

Children's Literature for Inclusive Education

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to find out the degree of training that future teachers have in dealing with diversity in the classroom using children's literature as a teaching resource. To this end, a comparative study has been carried out between two Specialisms taught in the Degree in Early Childhood Education in the Faculty of Education of the University of La Laguna (Tenerife): Specialism in Motivation to Reading and Specialism in Attention to Diversity. Semi-structured questionnaires have been used to carry out the comparative study of the answers of the students of both Specialisms to key dimensions, such as the knowledge; they have diversity in the classroom, as well as the use of children's literature as a resource to achieve a change in attitudes and educational progress of all the students. Finally, it has been concluded that the students do not have the knowledge, nor do they have the resources to take advantage, in their future professional experience, of the possibilities offered by children's literature as a cultural instrument for transmitting values and approaching reality.

INTRODUCTION

UNESCO (2005) defines inclusive education as the “process of identifying and responding to the diversity of needs of all students through increased participation in learning, cultures and communities, and reducing exclusion in education.”

Inclusive education is possible when it is understood that each school has different characteristics, interests, abilities, and learning needs. In this sense, children's language and literature are cultural instruments that transmit values that must be enhanced in the field of education. The variety and thematic quality of children's literature make it an essential resource for teachers in inclusive schools: functional diversity, interculturality, affective-sexual diversity... are topics that it deals with without ambiguity, taking into account the social reality with which students coexist (Llorens & Belda, 2017).

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The concept of diversity covers multiple aspects, not only alluding to the diversity of languages, religions, or ethnicities, but also to variables such as gender, age, disability, or disability diversity, according to ideologies, belonging to different social classes, etc. As Alegre indicates (2000): “We must learn to live together, therefore, with the uncertainty that arises from the complexity and diversity” (p. 15).

At school, attention to diversity should be considered as an action that seeks to meet the various educational needs, which may be psychological, physical, sensory, or social. All pupils should be provided with and guaranteed as regular an education as possible, adapted to the needs and characteristics of each with a view to achieving their maximum school, personal and social development (Martínez, 2016).

This requires recognition of a plurality of educational needs, and inequalities must be addressed through the adoption of a model open and flexible education, allowing access and retention of all pupils, without exception, as well as acceptable outcomes (Vara & Vila, 2016).

The education system has an obligation to be prepared to attend all education. Teachers must be adequately trained to develop the skills of all their apprentices to the fullest. The current Organic Law 8/2013, for the improvement of the quality of education states it in its preamble:

All students possess talent, but the nature of this talent differs from one another. The education system must therefore have the necessary mechanisms to recognize and enhance it. The recognition of this diversity among students in their abilities and expectations is the first step towards the development of an educational structure that contemplates different trajectories. (p. 3).

The main purpose of inclusive education is to build an education project that involves all students in a community to learn together, regardless of their personal, social, or cultural conditions, even when they are disabled (Vara & Vila, 2016).

It is necessary to overcome barriers and to put the right to coexistence above all differences. It requires a global educational model based on commitment and negotiation among all members of the community: students, teachers, and parents since inclusion is not only for children with disabilities but for all those involved. Diversity enriches everyone, effective learning results from the collaboration and effort of all parties (López, 2012).

Children's Literature and Inclusive Education

The definitions that can be found about children's literature are very varied. For example:

That literary artistic production that has children as recipients. And that, in addition, due to its characteristics, it can contribute and communicate values of its socio-cultural context, initiating them into the literary culture and constituting the basis on which they can build their literary and reading competence. (Belda, 2018, p. 88).

It follows from this definition that every literary work inevitably transmits certain values and ideals that place children's readers in the social reality that has befallen them. The metaphorical language of literature provides the infant with “the knowledge and discovery of oneself and the other, and as a tool of socialization of the individual” (Calvo & Tabernero, 2015, p. 49). In Colomer's words “reading literature is, then, a good way to learn to establish meaning in the world” (quoted in López & Ocampo, 2018, p. 132).

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