

The Benefits of Using Transformative Inclusion Practices and Action Research in Teaching Development and Active Participation of Roma Students in the Kindergarten

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Abstract : Roma children face discrimination in schools where they are the minority. On the other hand, teachers do not identify the specific needs of Roma students for educational and social inclusion and generally use a very restricted repertoire of insufficient strategies for helping them. Modern classrooms can and should look different. Therefore, engaging in transformational learning with young children is a deliberate choice. Transformation implies a different way of thinking and acting. This requires new knowledge that incorporates multiple perspectives and actions in order to generate experiences for further learning. In this way, we build knowledge based on empirical examples, and we share what works efficiently. The present research aims at assisting the participating teachers to improve their teaching inclusive practice, thus ultimately benefiting their students. To increase the impact of transformative efforts with a 'new' teaching approach, we implemented a classroom-based action research program for over six months in five kindergarten classrooms with Roma and non-Roma students. More specifically, we explore a) information about participants' experience of the program and b) if the program is successful in helping participants to change their teaching practice. Action research is, by definition, a form of inquiry that is intended to have both action and research outcomes. The action research process that we followed included five phases: 1. Defining the problem: As teachers said, the Roma students are often the most excluded group in schools (Low social interaction and participation in classroom activities) 2. Developing a plan to address the problem: We decided to address the problem by improving/transforming the inclusive practices that teachers implemented in their classrooms. 3. Acting: implementing the plan: We incorporated new activities for all students with the goals: a) All students being passionate about their learning, b) Teachers must investigate issues in the educational context that are personal and meaningful to children's growth, c) Establishment of a new module for values and skills for all students, d) Raising awareness in culture of Roma, e) Teaching students to reflect. 4. Observing: We explore the potential for transformation in the action research program that involves observations of students' participation in classroom activities and peer interaction. - thus, generated evidence from data. 5. Reflecting and acting: After analyzing and evaluating the outcomes from data and considering the obstacles during the program's implementation, we established new goals for the next steps of the program. These are centered in: a) the literacy skills of Roma students and b) the transformation of teacher's perceptions and beliefs, which have a powerful impact on their willingness to adopt new teaching strategies. The final evaluation of the program showed a significant achievement of the transformative goals, which were related to the active participation of the Roma students in classroom activities and peer interaction, while the activities which were related to literacy skills did not have the expected results. In conclusion, children were equipped with relevant knowledge and skills to raise their potential and contribute to wider societal development as well as teachers improved their teaching inclusive practice.

Keywords : action research, inclusive practices, kindergarten, transformation

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