

Peers' Alterity in Inverted Inclusion: A Case Study

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Abstract : At the early stages of adolescence, young people, regardless of a disability or not, start to establish closer friendship ties. Unlike previous developmental phases, these ties are rather reciprocal, more committed, and require more time. Friendship ties during adolescence allow the development of social and personal skills, specifically the skills to start constructing identity. In an inclusive context that incorporates young people with a disability, friendship among peers also takes place. Nonetheless, the relation is shaped, among others, by the alterity construction about the other with disability. Research about peers' relation between young people with and without disability in an inclusive context has shown that the relation tends to become a helper-helpee relation, where those with a disability are seen as people in need. Prejudices about the others' condition or distancing from the other because of his/hers disability are common. In this sense, the helper-helpee relation, as a non-reciprocal and protective relation, will not promote friendship between classmates, but a rather asymmetric alterity. Our research is an explorative case study that wants to know how the relation between peers is shaped within a different inclusive program, where also the integrated group has special educational needs. Therefore, we analyze from a qualitative and quantitative approach the data of an inverted inclusive program. This is a unique case of a special public school for visual disability in Germany that includes young people from a mainstream school who had learning difficulties. For the research, we analyze data from interviews, focal interviews and open-ended questions with an interpretative phenomenological analysis approach. The questionnaires include a five point Likert scale, for which we calculate the acceptance rate. The findings show that the alterity relation between pupils is less asymmetrical and represents a rather horizontal alterity. The helper-helpee relation is marked by exchange, since both groups have special educational needs and therefore, those with visual disability and those with learning difficulties help each other indistinctly. Friendship is more present among classmates. The horizontal alterity peers' relation is influenced by a sort of tie, where none of the groups need more or less help than other groups. Both groups identify that they themselves and the other have special needs. The axiological axe of alterity is not of superiority or inferiority, recognizing each other's differences and otherness. Another influential factor relates with the amount of time they spend together, since the program does not have a resource room or a teacher who teaches parallel lessons. Two probable causes for that rather equal peer relation might be the constellation of fewer pupils per classroom and the differentiated lessons taught by teachers with a special educational formation.

Keywords : alterity, disability, inverted inclusion, peers' relation

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