

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY: THE ROLE OF MATHEMATICS IN A CURRICULAR ALTERNATIVE TO PROMOTE INCLUSION

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In Portugal, the goals of basic schooling stress the central role of attitudes, values and practices that contribute to engage students as legitimate participants in democratic learning communities. In the last decade, teachers who already had inclusive practices engaged in several types of projects, in which the different agents of the educational community had a more active role, giving voice to those who are usually less heard: pupils, parents, school staff (other than teachers) and other partners of the educational setting.

In this action-research project an alternative curriculum was developed in a class (14 pupils) during the 5th and 6th grades, in a school from a poor and multicultural area in Lisbon. This curriculum was conceived as a mediation tool for inclusive participation (Oliveira e César, submitted). A follow-up was implemented to assess its impact. Data were gathered through participant observation, interviews, questionnaires and several documents. The curriculum was organised around problems and issues that, through recurrent debate with the students, integrated their daily experiences and contributed to respond to various concerns. In this context, mathematics education assumed a vital role in bringing dynamism to many learning situations and in some cases it was actually the starting point for planning activities and defining strategies, in an integrated and collaborative teaching perspective.

The results show that 10 pupils finished the 6th grade and 8 of them went on to the 7th grade. In all of them several competencies were developed. Outcomes highlight that if we change our practices and teaching strategies during compulsory education many students attain both achievement and a better socialization. The data illuminate that to develop a curricular flexibility we need: a) Interdisciplinarity methodologies; b) Students' engagement in the educational process as legitimate participants; c) Teachers' critical perspective of the curriculum; d) Mathematics seen not as a selective subject but allowing for the interpretation of students' daily experiences; e) Inclusive schooling principals and practices as a way to prepare critical citizens.

References

Oliveira, I. & César, M. (submitted). The curriculum as a mediating tool for inclusive participation: A case study in a Portuguese multicultural school. *European Journal of Educational Psychology*. [Thematic number about *The social mediation of learning in multi-ethnic schools*, editors Guida de Abreu & Ed Elbers]