EAPRIL Proposal

Title: Teacher-researcher collaboration on a diversity, equity and inclusion resource for primary school

General abstract

The proposal focuses on a year-long project, which aims to develop a pedagogical resource promoting diversity, equity and inclusion pedagogy for primary school teachers (4-12 years old). The primary classes are becoming more diverse (Blanchard et al., 2018), and researchers have urged schools and teachers to foster children's identities and attitudes to others, by embedding diversity, equity and inclusion into practice (Lang et al., 2014). Recognising this, as well as the increasingly growing classroom diversity within the national context, we developed a pedagogical resource in collaboration with in-service teachers.

We approach the project as a case and critically examine teacher-researcher collaboration during the project, reflecting on the ways the research and practice were intertwined across multiplicity of voices. Two university researchers and in-service primary school teachers collaborated together in a way that allows for teachers' expertise, lived experiences, and identities to be recognised and met with care (Potvin et al., 2024). We conclude that open dialogue, solidarity, and shared understanding and responsibility of the final goals are the keys to successful teacher-researcher collaboration. Hence we argue for the importance of including teachers' voices and present strategies for including these when developing resources targeting teachers' practice.

Extended summary

1. Describe the main goals, problems or questions that gave rise to the project or case in the beginning.

The project originated from two studies on diversity and gender representation in textbooks used in primary education and the lower cycle of secondary education within our national context (Kerger & Brasseur, 2021; Kerger et al., 2023). The studies revealed the prevalence of gender stereotypes, as well as marginalisation of people of colour, people with disabilities, and LGBTQ+ people. Hence, the follow-up project was developed as a part of awareness-raising strategy, aiming to create a pedagogical resource for primary school teachers on topics of diversity, equity and inclusion.

> 2. Which factors can you identify that made the process or the implementation of the project successful?

Originally, the project was supposed to be completed by two university researchers (proposal authors), however, we soon decided to collaborate with an in-service early childhood teacher with a background in citizenship education to connect research with practice and design a

resource that would be relevant to teachers and responsive to their needs. The collaboration unfolded via a series of in-person and online meetings, as well as phone calls and emails.

Following Milne (2007), we understand collaboration as both relational and task focus, meaning that it is simultaneously a social act, highlighting the emotional involvement, and goal oriented, signifying the importance of purposeful actions towards a specific aim. The collaboration was shaped by dialogue and defined by the feeling of solidarity. Dialogue is about bringing together different perspectives, reflecting and evaluating them, and, eventually, arriving at new ideas (Wegerif, 2010). Solidarity in turn makes the participants think in terms of "we", mediating common interests rather than the particular, fostering shared responsibility (Roth, 2006). Solidarity forged through dialogue resulted in a fruitful and emotionally positive collaboration, in which the agreed upon outcomes were achieved.

Dialogic collaboration is generative, as new ideas form and are reflected upon (Renshaw, 2004). This was reflected in the generation of a proposal for a professional development workshop for in-service primary school teachers, which ended up being co-taught by all the three collaborators. The workshop's aim was twofold: promoting diversity, equity and inclusion among the participants, while also getting their feedback, perspectives, and comments on the project and the future resource. Hence, the teacher-researcher collaboration was extended further with solidarity established beyond the three collaborators towards other teachers.

> 3. Which factors can you identify that made the process or the implementation of the project challenging?

The main challenge relates to the national context, as in summer 2024, when the project was in its early stages of development, the nation became engaged in polemics around LGBTQ+ topics within primary school education with one side arguing for their exclusion from the curriculum and other saying that they should remain there. The polemics made it necessary to adjust the project and the pedagogical resource to respond to the criticism and concerns raised by those arguing for the exclusion, while offering inspiration and motivation for those who opposed it. Eventually, the polemics reached the national parliament, where in January 2025 the parliamentarians debated on the topic, concluding that LGBTQ+ topics should not be excluded from the school curriculum. This decision showed that the project and its objectives have a place within the national school system.

> 4. What are the main conclusions from the case or project that could help improve educational practice and learning in general or in your context/discipline?

The case study proposal argues for teacher-researcher collaboration that bridges research and practice for promoting diversity, equity and inclusion within primary school education. It presents collaboration rooted in dialogue and defined by solidarity and shared responsibility. It shows that collaboration is a fluid process responsive to the generated ideas and broader contexts and highlights the value of being contextually-responsive. Finally, it contributes to the educational practice by presenting the pedagogical resource that is a result of the discussed collaboration.

5. How will you ensure interactivity in your presentation? Please consider any type of media and specify the method, tool, format… chosen.

We will present various chapters of the pedagogical resource, such as practical teaching activities, cooperation with parents and classroom design. We will also showcase and distribute free copies of the resource in English to the conference participants, as well as showcase a few fictional children's books that we use for the project.

List of references

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