Inclusive classrooms: pedagogical practice of teachers who favor attention to diversity

Abstract

The objective of this research was to characterize the pedagogical practice of teachers that favors inclusive education and contributes to the attention to diversity. From a qualitative approach, an instrumental case study was carried out with the participation of teachers, students and parents of third and fourth grades of elementary school in four district educational institutions. Surveys, focus groups and observation were used to collect information. It was found that in spite of maintaining a homogenizing pedagogical practice, actions in favor of diversity were detected. It can be said, then, that the pedagogical practice of teachers is characterized by actions aimed at recognizing the particularities of the students; however, homogenizing practices are still present. Based on the findings, a new research work was started, led by the researcher Sandra Inés Calderón called "Didactics for human development in the pedagogical practice of education in diversity" (Calderón, 2019), whose objective was to found a didactics for human development, defining the concepts of pedagogical practice, including education, attention to diversity, didactics and human development

Keywords: pedagogical practice; including education; attention to diversity; didactics; flexibility
Introduction

Education as a social, cultural, political and economic phenomenon has had great changes over time. Over the years, this has been adapted according to its immediate environment with the aim of responding to the needs that arise from heterogeneity and that allow recognizing the diversity that is found within the educational setting. The concern to provide quality education for everyone has its origins in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, where governments sought to guarantee that education was not exclusive and that everyone had a part in it. Then, the concept of inclusion arises, understood as the possibility of education for all in the framework of the conference where the world declaration on education for all by UNESCO emerges in 1990 (Jomtien).

However, at the UNESCO conference in 1994 (Salamanca) inclusive education was conceived as an educational policy, agreeing on the commitment to make schools places where the principle of inclusive education is promoted, since: "Its objective is to inform policy and inspire action by governments, international and national aid organizations, non-governmental organizations and other bodies, in the application of the Salamanca Declaration of principles, policy and practice for educational needs" (UNESCO, 1994, p.5).

In 1996, an important value was given to the fact of avoiding actions that triggered exclusion, which is why it was cataloged as the international year against exclusion. Subsequently, at the World Forum on Education in 2000 (Dakar), the concept of inclusive education was consolidated within the framework of the International Forum on Education for All. At this meeting, an action framework was approved that committed the participating governments to the fulfillment of the objectives and goals of education for all (Dakar 2000).

Similarly, at the 2008 Geneva International Conference on Education, Inclusive Education: The Way Forward, emphasis was placed on the concept and practice of inclusive education. In addition, it was highlighted that, although locally the concept of inclusion is still seen as care for children with disabilities, globally the concept has been expanded to care for diversity; that is to say, an education for “everyone”. In order to meet the objective of: "Forging more inclusive education systems requires a strong commitment to work towards a more just, equitable and peaceful society.” (UN, 2008, p. 8)

In Colombia, efforts have been made in favor of inclusive education, supporting the need and compulsory nature of this in the country, where it is desired that all children and young people receive a quality education that enhances their abilities. The foregoing has been framed within the Political Constitution of Colombia of 1991 and General Education Law 115 of 1994. In the same way, laws and decrees have been created, which promote quality care for all people who are in a condition of disability, thus eliminating any type of discrimination.

Now, when taking a tour of the historical evolution of the teaching profession, it is found that it is one of the most beautiful and rewarding tasks that has impacted the social, cultural,
economic and political development of humanity. From its beginnings in the 5th century BC, with the first socially recognized teaching practices of the sophists in ancient Greece to the present day, the interaction between teacher-student and their roles within the teaching-learning process is one of the issues in education. more studied by contemporary theories (Piña, 2004), due to the great transformations it has undergone.

Due to the above, we cannot reduce the teaching practice to the use of: "Simple techniques to teach, but how the intentions of the teaching exercise that go from the possible to concrete actions that involve ethics, morality and politics" (Barragán, 2013, p.56). The foregoing challenges us to be more aware of our actions and even more, emphasizes the fact of being aware of the needs and interests of our students; Since, we are a changing and diverse culture, in which the need to recognize, understand and respect the other in their particular customs and beliefs is becoming evident. This is why, in the various interactions, we must have a vision aimed at recognizing diversity, not only in schools, but in the face of a society that is increasingly globalized and exclusive, where a gap is opening up for equitable and equal access to the education to which everyone is entitled. Therefore, it is necessary to generate changes not only in the school; changes that promote a culture of recognition of individual differences that allows managing dynamics that attend to diversity, strengthen pedagogical reflection and innovation in teacher practices, so that it is possible to speak of an education that recognizes the other, it is that is, of an inclusive education.

Therefore, it is necessary to identify and describe the actions that are within the pedagogical practice of teachers that favor inclusive education and contribute to attention to diversity, which promotes spaces for participation in their classrooms. Likewise, to be able to socialize these experiences so that other teachers, upon knowing them, transform their practice and therefore education.

Methodology

Because the objective of this research is focused on characterizing the practice of teachers, the fundamentals of qualitative research were taken as a basis, since as Sampieri et al (2010) explain: "It seeks to understand the perspective of the participants (individuals or small groups of people to be investigated) about the phenomena that surround them, deepen their experiences, perspectives, opinions and meanings" (p. 364). From these approaches, the instrumental type case study design is chosen, which bases its principles on: "The study of the particularity and complexity of a singular case, in order to understand its activity in important circumstances" (Stake, 1998, p.11). That is to say, that the case study becomes the instrument to understand the phenomenon that originates from the pedagogical practice in the classroom.

This study was carried out in the district educational institutions: Bosanova, Rodolfo Llinás, Juana Escobar and Germán Arceñiegas. Each one has particular characteristics such as the locality, the stratum, the inclusion project of the Ministry of Education, age, among others.
For this reason, each sample of the population of each institution is converted for this research into the four cases that will allow to identify and describe in a particular and natural way the actions that from the pedagogical practice are developed in favor of attention to diversity.

This process that: "is preceded by extensive field work, whose goal is to obtain prior knowledge of the characteristics of the population" Goetz & Lecomte (1988, p. 94). The parameters for the selection of the sample constitute, a priori and in the interest of the investigation, which are: being district institutions, being a group director teacher, parents and students of the third and fourth grades of primary school (II cycle), being the parents of the students participating in the research, all of which are necessary to triangulate the information provided by the participating population and thus strengthen the validity criteria such as credibility, transferability, reliability and confirmability (Simons, 2009).

**Instruments**

For this research, three instruments were applied where the objective of the research was taken into account, the pedagogical practical macro category and the a priori categories that arise from the review of the literature regarding inclusive education and attention to diversity. The selected instruments were the survey, applied to 17 teachers from the four institutions studied, a focus group for 52 students and 32 students and observation of a class from each participating institution. These three instruments are used in order to obtain pertinent information for the development of the case.

**Analysis of results**

According to the research objective, which sought to characterize the pedagogical practice of teachers, which favors inclusive education and contributes to attention to diversity in the classroom, it was intended to identify, describe and socialize the actions that teachers carry out, which promote respect and recognition of diversity. For this, the analysis of the information obtained in four schools of the district was developed, characterizing each case, according to the categories and subcategories established for this study. In this way, the information from the survey, the transcription of the focus groups and the analysis of the recordings of the classes were analyzed.

**Results**

*Analysis of the Teacher Survey*

In the Inclusive Education category in relation to participation, 100% care about motivating all their students, 76.47% report that the activities they carry out in class allow students to share their experiences, 64.71% maintain that they promote it in other educational spaces within or out of school. 100% allow their students to have equal opportunities in the development of classes and in their learning processes, 100% in their class activities provide various learning opportunities without any type of discrimination. Regarding interculturality,
76.47% promote in their classes the expression of the cultural aspects of the students and 100% support the activities that the school organizes related to this aspect.

Regarding the barriers to learning, it was found that 88.24% consider that with their actions they contribute to reducing them, 94.12% report that their actions are organized in a way that allows students to enrich their learning, 58.82% seek support in other professionals of the school to enrich their own practice and thus provide better opportunities for learning and participation to students.

On the other hand, it is evident that 88.24% encourage their students to practice actions that project them as people with a sense of belonging, 76.47% involve parents in the teaching-learning process of the students. 88.24% in their classes promote activities in which students develop and express their particularities and 100% propose activities in which students recognize themselves as human beings belonging to a society. Finally, 88.24% use strategies that seek for the student to recognize their progress and difficulties in their learning process, 64.71% carry out this process, taking into account the individual characteristics of the students and 100% apply feedback from the evaluations and tasks, as a strategy for students to overcome their difficulties and reinforce their learning.

Regarding the Attention to Diversity category, it was found that 88.24% have knowledge about the concept "learning rhythms", 64.71% carry out the planning of their classes. In learning styles, 76.47% have knowledge of the concept and 52.94% report taking them into account when planning. Regarding individual differences, 94.12% promote understanding of the differences between students and 52.94% express their participation in learning communities which strengthens their teaching practices. Regarding heterogeneity, 94.12% express that their academic training provides them with strategies to attend to diversity and 100% recognize their students as people who are part of a heterogeneous group. Regarding accessibility, 70.59% plan, review and adapt the study plan in collaboration with classmates, 94.12% seek to make the classroom accessible to all and 82.35% favor the recognition of spaces, products and services that are accessible at their institution and make use of them.

In the flexibilization, 64.71% carry out a control record on the progress or difficulties of the students, 94.12% express that in the planning of their classes they seek to support the learning of all students and 88.24% design improvement plans in accordance with the difficulties presented. Regarding the learning communities, 52.94% accompany the process of school adaptation and induction of students who enter the institution for the first time, 58.82% organize learning groups in their classes so that all students share experiences that enrich their learning, 47.06% report that teachers have spaces for reflection, dialogue and interaction to share experiences and develop actions that strengthen educational practice.

Regarding the welcoming environments, 94.12% generate a school environment where the interests of the students are taken into account, 100% promote environments based on respect and support in the classroom, as well as allowing the participation of all, regardless of their individual differences. In autonomy, 94.12% promote pedagogical spaces in which students actively participate, 88.24% generate spaces in which students build their knowledge from interaction with others and 82.35% generate teaching strategies where students carry out learning processes. autonomous.
It was found that in cooperation, 100% favor the exchange of ideas between students to solve a problem, 64.71% favor group learning, 82.35% say that the cooperative work developed in their classes favors individual learning and 58.82% consider that in their classes there is a balance between individual and group work of the students. In motivation, 64.71% carry out motivational activities for their students to start classes, 100% want their students to feel motivated by the activities that are carried out during class and 94.12% state that the activities they develop in class awaken the interest of their students to delve into the topics.

Regarding empathy, 100% relate respectfully to the entire educational community, 82.35% are able to put themselves in the student's place, in order to understand their needs and 94.12% express that their pedagogical practice helps the student feel valued by him and by his peers. Finally, in curricular adaptation, 88.24% develop various activities inside and outside the classroom aimed at enhancing the abilities of students, with the same percentage expressing that they adapt the study plan according to their academic needs and 82.35% participate in the construction of the study plan of the institution taking into account the particularities of the students.

**Focus Group Analysis**

Two focus groups were held in each educational institution, where the participation of 52 students and 35 parents was taken into account, resulting in:

When analyzing the inclusive education category, it can be found in the participation subcategory that 12 students and 9 parents refer to the fact that the teacher motivates students to share and interact within their classes. Regarding equal opportunities, it is found that 4 students and 7 parents express that they have the possibility of learning without any discrimination. Regarding the barriers to learning, it was found that 6 of the students and 5 parents express that teachers use strategies that allow access to learning for their students. As far as relevance is concerned, 9 students and 16 parents express that the teaching provided in the institutions is adequate and meaningful. On the other hand, in terms of quality, no comments were made by the students about it; while 5 parents argue that children are in an environment that provides optimal conditions for learning. Regarding equity, 2 students and 7 parents indicate that there are equal conditions to access and participate in learning in any physical space of the school. Regarding the evaluation, 6 students and 2 parents argue that teachers take into account the educational process of children, follow up on the academic processes achieved and detect their difficulties.

Based on the attention to diversity category, it was found: When referring to learning rhythms, 6 students and 11 parents relate them to the ability of students to learn. In individual differences, 12 students and 10 parents report that the teacher encourages respect for the personal traits of the children. In heterogeneity, 7 students and 6 parents recognize in the actions of teachers the motivation where the particularities are respected. In accessibility, 10 parents refer to the fact that the strategies and resources offered at school can be used appropriately by each and every one of the students. Faced with flexibility, 1 of the students and 2 parents refer to the way in which the teacher seeks strategies and applies various
resources for students to learn. Regarding the learning community, 3 students and one of the parents define it as the work that occurs in a group through cooperation and solidarity.

Faced with autonomy, 9 students and 13 parents refer to it as the way to decide and regulate the way of acquiring their knowledge in the classroom. Regarding cooperation, 15 students and 28 parents refer to it as the way they learn together with others. In motivation, 46 students and 29 parents recognize it as the activities carried out by the teacher on a daily basis that are aimed at attracting their attention. In empathy, 26 students and 27 parents refer to the way in which the teacher is able to put himself in the place of his students. In the curricular adaptation, one of the students relates it to the way in which the teacher modifies the activities to respond to the particularities of the students.

Finally, three subcategories emerge, the first of which is family support, where 17 children and 32 parents express the importance of the family in the academic process of their children. The second creativity, which is mentioned by 20 students and 19 parents, is related to the innovative actions that teachers develop within their classes. And finally, significant learning where 22 students and 8 parents relate it to the process where what they learn is put into play.

**Analysis of teacher actions observed in class**

The class observation was carried out on a teacher from each of the district educational institutions under study, from the third and fourth grades of primary school.

From the practice developed within the classroom in the four institutions for each one of the teachers, it was found that with respect to the inclusive education category, 28 promote student participation, 2 favor equal opportunities for access for all students to the proposed activities. In relation to relevance, it was found that 11 prioritize the fact that their students feel recognized as active subjects within the class.

Regarding equity, they recognize the diversity of their students, providing each one with what is necessary for them to participate equally in the different activities. Regarding the evaluation, 3 were found that allow the follow-up of the progress and difficulties of the students through feedback. In the attention to diversity category, 6 were found that respect the time that the student takes to develop an activity.

Likewise, in the institutions 4 were found where the individual differences of the students are respected. Regarding heterogeneity, it is evident that teachers take into account the diversity of their classroom so that students support each other. Regarding meaningful learning, 6 promote processes in which students learn in a significant way.

In relation to autonomy, 3 were found that promote processes for decision-making. Regarding cooperation, 5 are identified in which teachers promote exchanges in students that contribute ideas for the achievement of common goals. Regarding creativity, strategies are used that attract the attention of their students and bring them closer to learning. Regarding motivation,
26 show the way in which the work of their students is valued. Regarding empathy, 29 put themselves in the other's shoes (of their students) to understand their feelings, desires, expectations and achievements.

In relation to family support as an emerging subcategory, there are 3 where the importance of parental support in the academic process of children is evident. Finally, it is evident in the class observations that there is no quote that refers to the following subcategories: interculturality, barriers to learning, quality, accessibility, flexibility, learning community and curricular adaptation.

**Discussion**

According to the objective of this research: to characterize the pedagogical practice of teachers that favors inclusive education and contributes to attention to diversity in the classroom. It is evident that teachers in the classroom carry out actions that promote inclusive education, which is recognized by parents, participating boys and girls. The first of these actions is participation, in which it is evident that teachers plan activities that favor participation in the classroom, which agrees with what was mentioned by Echeita (2007) who sees participation as "enriching educational experiences for all" (p.95). In addition, parents and students highlight the variety of strategies used by the teacher in their classes, both group and individual, which allow the integration and recognition of students among themselves, as stated by Booth and Ainscow, (2002) "participation authentic is evident when all students learn together; collaborate in shared learning experiences; they are actively engaged in learning, and have a voice in their education" (p. 70).

In the teachers there is an awareness of the particularities of the students, which are detected in the interaction between them and in the actions where they allow them to access, participate and enrich their learning, in order to reduce the barriers to learning and the participation, that can be presented in the classroom, Paz (2014). On the other hand, teachers use their own strategies in class and do not seek the necessary support from other professionals who provide tools to reduce these barriers and thus enrich their own practice. In addition, parents and students associate these barriers with the rhythms and learning styles of the children and with the opportunities that teachers offer them when they present some difficulty in their academic process. Regarding the relevance, the teachers relate the concepts of their discipline with the daily experiences of the students, their particularities, needs and contexts; Parents and students agree on this when they affirm that they are provided with a meaningful and adequate education, as declared by UNESCO (2007):

The relevance of education refers us to the need for it to be significant for people from different social strata and cultures, and with different capacities and interests, so that they can appropriate the contents of world and local culture, and build themselves as subjects in society, developing their autonomy, self-government, their freedom and their own identity (p. 43).
Quality, within their classes, provides students with the conditions and elements that are within their reach and that are possible from the reality of schools; which is confirmed by the parents, in accordance with the MEN (2010) as "A quality education is one that forms better human beings, citizens with ethical values, respectful of the public, who exercise Human Rights and live in peace" (p. 4). Equity is evident that teachers recognize the importance of providing equal opportunities to students within their academic training process (UNESCO, 2007), however, given the physical conditions, the number of students per classroom, the time of class and resources, this task cannot be fully accomplished in the classroom.

The majority of the teachers declare regarding the evaluation that it is a process that allows the students to recognize their advances and difficulties. In reference to this aspect Duk and Blanco (2012) argue that this process allows the identification of the need and the type of help that must be implemented for the student to achieve success in their educational process, which is not adopted by parents who see the evaluation more as a grade and not like the cognitive process of children.

In the rhythms and styles of learning, teachers have knowledge about the concepts, taking into account the latter as the respect they have for the way their students learn; defined as a: "Cognitive process, where each individual perceives (absorbs) and processes (retains) information in a particular way" (James & Gardner 1994 cited in Zapata 2010, p. 33). Although there is some clarity in this aspect, they are not taken into account in the planning of their classes and in their actions as such within the classroom, which is evidenced in their pedagogical practice and in what the students refer to. In the same way, within the classroom they identify that there are some particularities with which they can promote respect for the personal traits of children and their differences, a factor that is important to make the school an inclusive place, in this regard Stainback & Stainback (2001) argue that in "host environments, educators make a conscious effort to guide students to understand and take advantage of their individual differences" (p. 28).

In accessibility, it must be taken into account that teachers plan, review and adapt the study plan in collaboration with other classmates seeking to make the classroom accessible to all, since: "The school must have a place for all its members: everyone has to feel welcome. There should be no conditions or policies that would exclude some members of the population from this school" (Stainback & Stainback, 2001, p. 75).

In curricular flexibility and adaptation, it is found that teachers try to make changes and adjustments in the construction and adaptation of the study plan, taking into account the particularities, needs, progress and difficulties of the students, as stated by Martín & Mauri (2011). "The purpose of this measure is to avoid the barriers that the curriculum sometimes generates in order to achieve the competencies and general objectives of the stage" (p. 39). In this sense, the teachers have an intention to identify the difficulties of their students, but when making the adaptations of their classes, the lack of resources and actions in favor of
heterogeneity becomes evident, in this case the students see it as the change of activity for classmates that they consider "who do not learn easily."

In learning communities, it is evident that teachers reduce it to the organization of learning groups so that students share experiences that enrich them; however, it is necessary for this to transcend because: "Working together, professionals and researchers can use their different skills and perspectives to collect and interpret testimonials in a way that can have an immediate impact on thinking and practice in this field" (Ainscow, 2002, p.81). This leads us to think that it is necessary to provide teachers with spaces to share and reflect on their experiences in the classroom.

In welcoming environments, teachers create a school environment where respect and support among students is promoted, which favors the inclusion and participation of all, fostering an environment in which difference is privileged. In this regard, Echeita (2007) maintains that these are "Places where all people should feel welcomed, valued and important to their community" (p. 36). Regarding meaningful learning, teachers through recreational activities relate the concepts seen in class with the daily life of students, which is consistent when it is sustained that: "The essence of meaningful learning is the connection, in a non-arbitrary way, between the new ideas that are presented to the student and their cognitive structure" (Arroyo, & Pueyo, 1994, p. 13). In addition, they encourage actions that promote autonomy within the classroom, where they establish guidelines that guide students to strengthen their own learning (Anijovich, et al, 2004). Likewise, parents and students relate it to the way of deciding and regulating the way of acquiring their knowledge in the classroom.

Regarding cooperation, through their activities they favor group learning because they consider that this in turn promotes individual learning and the exchange of ideas among peers, as Pujolás (2012) says when talking about cooperative work, indicates that "The students are distributed in small, heterogeneous work teams, to help and encourage each other when carrying out the exercises and learning activities in general" (p. 125).

In motivation, teachers carry out activities at the beginning and during their classes that arouse the interest of their students Echeita (2006), are related to: "the sense and meaning that students give to the activities carried out by the teacher in the classroom" (p. 115), aimed at valuing their achievements and the efforts made. For parents and students, these activities have to do with games, congratulatory notes, the use of stamps, and the expressions they use in class to motivate them to learn. In empathy, teachers establish respectful relationships with the entire educational community, they are able to put themselves in the student's place, in
order to understand their needs and make them feel valued and respected by them and their peers; attitudes that can be related to interpersonal intelligence, since its main characteristic according to (Echeita, 2007) is: "the sensitivity to the moods and thoughts of others and is usually manifested through symbolic systems typical of other intelligences such as body, gestural or verbal language” (p. 120).

Finally, the subcategory of family support emerges within this study since parents and students recognize that their support in the academic process is of great importance. In addition, parents consider that children seek their support at times when they do not understand some topics, creating a triad (teacher, student, parent) that complement and favor the learning process of students; and which must continue to be strengthened so that success in the educational process of all students can be guaranteed, starting from family formation schools; (Martin et al., 2011).

**Conclusion**

The instrumental case study design made it possible to identify and describe with greater precision and breadth the phenomenon that is brewing inside the classroom from the pedagogical practice of teachers, in favor of attention to diversity. Which provided pertinent information about the reality of four educational institutions, thus allowing the design of training proposals that allow a more precise characterization of the pedagogical practice of teachers from educational institutions in Bogotá.

Likewise, this research allowed an acknowledgment of the topic of inclusive education, giving clarity to it, reflecting on and transforming the pedagogical practice itself, which can be evidenced in the results of the students and in the way of socializing with the other teachers of the different institutions.

It is evident that teachers recognize the need to implement a pedagogical practice that addresses diversity in the classroom; however, there are still homogenizing actions that occur due to factors such as space, number of students, resources and time, which does not allow the teaching action to materialize in an inclusive pedagogical practice. This shows that there are district policies that are aimed at inclusive education, but these are focused on the population with disabilities, for which it is necessary to broaden the concept towards attention to diversity, recognizing the particularities of each human being.

For this reason, it is important to highlight that continuity must be given to the topic, for this reason a new research work arises, called "Didactics for human development, in the pedagogical practice of diversity education" (Calderón, 2019), where the The general objective was to base a didactics for human development, in which the concepts of pedagogical practice, inclusive education, attention to diversity, didactics and human development were defined. In addition, aspects and components of didactics and successful pedagogical practices used most frequently to attend to diversity in the classroom that provide
students with significant processes for their development and increase opportunities were identified. It was also evidenced that guaranteeing an inclusive, equitable and quality education are pedagogical strategies that promote meaningful learning opportunities, and therefore, human development that improves the quality of life of students. Finally, it was concluded that it is important to provide new teachers with tools and elements through their training that allows them to know and address diversity during their professional work, as well as the need for a support teacher in the classroom and the functions that it develops, in addition to the successes, failures and opportunities that exist in relation to inclusive education or for diversity.

References


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