

ACTION RESEARCH AND SOCIOCULTURAL INCLUSION: A DOCUMENT ANALYSIS STUDY

INVESTIGAÇÃO-AÇÃO E INCLUSÃO SOCIOCULTURAL: UM ESTUDO DE ANÁLISE DOCUMENTAL

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Abstract

The constant and rapid change of today's world, namely as a consequence of recent migration waves, implies the need to take intentional action to promote sociocultural inclusion, namely in the educational field, since schooling plays a determining role in the development of the necessary competences, of teachers and learners alike, to face the demands of a multicultural environment. This paper focuses on data collected from two PhD theses and three master's dissertations available in the Open Access Scientific Repositories in Portugal (RCAAP) that report studies combining action research and intercultural inclusion practices. Thus, the aim is to identify teaching-learning strategies aimed at promoting sociocultural inclusion in school contexts and understand the extent to which adopting action-research as a teacher development methodology contributed to achieve that goal. The findings reveal that, despite some contextual difficulties, such as resistance to change, lack of time to get engaged in new projects, organizational obstacles to teacher collaboration, and teachers' and learners' low levels of intercultural awareness, all the participants benefited from the teacher development/ teaching-learning strategies adopted, which resulted in higher motivation and engagement levels, improvement of learners' intercultural competence, and teachers' stronger awareness of the importance of intercultural education.

Keywords: document analysis, action research, sociocultural inclusion, schooling.

Resumo

A constante e rápida mudança do mundo atual, nomeadamente como consequência das recentes vagas migratórias, implica a necessidade de agir intencionalmente no sentido de promover a inclusão sociocultural, nomeadamente no campo educativo, uma vez que a escolaridade desempenha um papel determinante no desenvolvimento das competências necessárias, tanto dos professores como de alunos, para enfrentar as exigências de um ambiente multicultural. Este artigo foca-se nos dados recolhidos de duas teses de doutoramento e três dissertações de mestrado disponíveis no Repositório Científico de Acesso Aberto de Portugal (RCAAP) que reportam estudos que combinam investigação-ação e práticas de inclusão intercultural. Assim, o objetivo é identificar estratégias de ensino-aprendizagem destinadas a promover a inclusão sociocultural em contextos escolares e compreender até que ponto a adoção da investigação-ação como estratégia de desenvolvimento docente contribuiu para alcançar esse objetivo. Os resultados revelam que, apesar de algumas dificuldades contextuais, como resistência à mudança, falta de tempo para se envolver em novos projetos, obstáculos institucionais à colaboração entre professores e baixos níveis de consciência intercultural dos professores e alunos, todos os participantes beneficiaram das estratégias de desenvolvimento docente/ ensino-aprendizagem adotadas, as quais resultaram em níveis mais elevados de motivação e envolvimento, melhoria da competência intercultural dos alunos, e uma maior consciência dos professores sobre a importância da educação intercultural.

Palavras-chave: análise documental, investigação ação, inclusão sociocultural, escolarização.

INTRODUCTION

The present article reports on a document-analysis-based study¹. The documents under analysis were selected according to predefined criteria – they should report on studies that combined action research with the promotion of intercultural inclusion practices in the school context.

The choice of the ‘grey’ literature stems from the symposium team’s longstanding professional experience as teacher educators and their perception that (student) teachers in kindergarten, primary and lower secondary schools tend not to choose the immigrant population as action research interests.

The focus on intercultural inclusion derives from the need to understand to what extent the Portuguese educational system is responding to the needs of an increasingly multicultural school, because of the recent arrival in our country of immigrants from diverse nationalities, as has been happening in many parts of the globe. The World Migration Report (IOM, 2024) states the number of displaced people has reached 281 million migrants worldwide. The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR, 2024) indicates that half of the 14.8 million refugee children around the globe do not have their right to education guaranteed and are not in school. In this regard, the UNHCR emphasizes the need for public inclusion policies, seeking a promising future for those who face various barriers and are exposed to vulnerability from a very early age.

Regarding Portugal, Immigrant children represent nowadays 11,1% of the schooling population in Portugal, a trend that is expected to rise. In 2023, there were 118 594 foreign students in public schools (CNE, 2024), an increase of 32,7% in primary and secondary schools compared to the previous year. In what comes to higher education, between 2013 and 2022, the proportion of mobile students (international or foreign) increased from 4% to 12% (OECD, 2024)

Portugal’s education policies for welcoming these students have remained stable since 2018 and rank third among EU countries after Finland and Sweden (MIPEX, 2023). The country has implemented various measures to facilitate access to education that include promoting the skills of migrants and simplifying access to higher education and research, including intercultural education in the national curricula, multidisciplinary teams to support learning, or classes on Portuguese as a Non-Native Language (Comissão Europeia/EACEA/Eurydice, 2019).

This heterogeneity certainly represents an additional challenge to educational institutions, in general, and to teachers, in particular, namely as regards their preparation to deal with the learning needs of all their learners, regardless of their cultural background. To handle this educational issue, special attention should be paid to teacher development programmes, of which the analysed documents are concrete examples.

1 THE STUDY

1.1 Object, analysis dimensions and objectives

The research method consisted in locating in the Open Access Scientific Repositories in Portugal (RCAAP) master’s dissertations and PhD theses that satisfied the criteria used in our search procedure – being written between 2015 and 2024 and combining action research with intercultural inclusion practices.

The method of analysis consisted in a systematic review of the documents, with a particular focus on three main dimensions: 1) sociocultural inclusion processes and practices, 2) benefits/gains, and 3) limitations/difficulties. As part of the first dimension, the following subdimensions are considered: 1) main focus, 2) conceptual framework, and 3) action research

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aims. The other two dimensions apply to 1) learner/trainee development, 2) teacher/trainer development, and 3) educational context.

Despite the scarce number of studies found (Table 1²), it was possible to reach the predefined research objectives – a) identify examples of teaching and learning strategies aimed at promoting sociocultural inclusion, and b) understand the extent to which the adoption of action-research as a teacher development tool contributed to achieve that goal.

Table 1

Study corpus

Doc.	Title	Type	Author
1	Extending interculturality: Citizenship promotion through arts education	Master's Dissertation	Barbosa (2022)
2	Intercultural education in 1st-cycle Basic Schooling: School-community partnerships	PhD Thesis	Santos (2015)
3	Enchanting stories: The importance of reading in pre-school education	Master's Dissertation	Andrade (2020)
4	Teacher development for cultural diversity and school inclusion: An action research case study	PhD Thesis	Pacheco (2015)
5	Intercultural mediation and inclusion, development and acknowledgment of immigrants in the Braga municipality	Master's Dissertation	Ramos (2018)

1.2 The object – different paths, one destination

As stated above, this study is based on five documents corresponding to five teacher development experiences conducted in distinct geographical and educational contexts in mainland Portugal. In spite of this diversity, they all illustrate attempts at contributing to a more inclusive intercultural education.

To achieve this goal, the teachers/researchers involved implemented (collaboratively) designed teaching and learning strategies finding support in topic-specific conceptual frameworks, in accordance with their research plans and intervention contexts (Table 2).

Table 2

Inclusion processes and practices

Main Focus	Context	Strategies	Conceptual framework
Intercultural education (Docs 1,2,5)	Primary education - 2nd cycle (Doc. 1)	cinema and theatre	Arts education (Cachadinha & Moura, 2017) The intercultural school

² Titles and content were translated from the Portuguese language.

Promotion of (meta)linguistic and communication competences (Docs. 3, 4)	Primary education - 1st cycle (Doc. 2)	partnerships between schools and other community institutions	(Angelides, Stylianou & Leigh, 2007).
	Kindergarten (Doc. 3)	storytelling	Child development stages; literacy skills (Goodall, 2013; Marques, 2016).
Teacher development for cultural diversity and learner inclusion (Doc. 4)	Lower secondary education - 3rd cycle (Doc. 4)	roleplay; games; project work	Inclusive education; critical pedagogy (Allemann-Ghionda, 2009; Carr & Kemmis, 1986).
	Municipality of Braga/ Secondary School (Doc. 5)	Human Library	Intercultural mediation (Little, Nemutlu, Magic & Molnár, 2011; Soares, 2016).
			Action research /Reflective practice (Docs 1,2,3,4,5)

1.2.1 Defining the routes

Although intercultural education is present in national curricula, it is widely felt that bringing policies into practice is not a straightforward process. Thus the need for teacher development programmes that instead of providing ready-to-use strategies stimulate teachers and learners to develop an inquiring stance towards their practices, namely through the adoption of collaborative action research, as is the case of the five studies under analysis.

Departing from their educational realities and respective needs/ problems, the authors started their action research projects by trying to find ways to promote intercultural inclusion in schools. Their studies reveal that independently of learners' age group, schools need to find adequate responses to the sociocultural challenges of an increasingly multicultural society.

To find such responses, each researcher followed the route indicated by their research objectives, knowing that these might be adjusted according to what happened on the way. The following research objectives (Table 3) provide a clear idea of the diversity of paths followed, as required by the nature of the context in which the studies were carried out.

Table 3

Action research aims

Action research aims	
Doc. 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. investigate theories and practices that articulate arts and citizenship 2. implement and test activities based on artistic expressions as a pedagogical strategy to promote citizenship 3. evaluate the impact of the articulation between cinema and citizenship on the design of interculturality-aimed pedagogical materials
Doc. 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. study and try to understand the group partners' practices 2. dynamize a teacher development programme in primary education 3. monitor the implementation of the intervention project 4. promote the improvement of educational practices

- Doc. 3 1. get to know kindergarten teachers' and parents' perceptions of the importance of storytelling in the classroom
2. identify the importance of reading to children in kindergarten
3. verify if storytelling improves children's communicative competence
4. verify if the Project "Histórias que Encantam" (Enchanting Stories) contributed to children's linguistic/speaking skills
- Doc. 4 1. consider how action research can contribute to teacher professional development by helping them diagnose and overcome difficulties and shortcomings they encounter in their practices with cultural and linguistically diverse learners
2. consider how action research contributes to operate changes regarding perceptions about teaching, and multi/intercultural /inclusive education, and how these are reflected in their practices
- Doc. 5 1. understand the potential of mediation for the promotion of interculturality
2. experiment new ways of promoting immigrants' inclusion in the city of Braga
3. understand the necessary means to develop an intercultural society
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1.2.2 Following the tracks – focus on adopted strategies

Knowing that each "crew" departed from different places to reach a common destination, it is important to understand how they got there. There is a glimpse of the main strategies adopted in each case (Table 2), but to have a clearer notion of the kind of work the projects entailed, let's now take a closer look at some of the teacher development and teaching/learning strategies implemented in each case:

1. The first document, about a study carried out in a school in the area of Viana do Castelo, describes the steps the researcher/ trainer took with ten student teachers of the curriculum area Citizenship and Development towards the promotion of intercultural education of young school learners of (primary education - 2nd cycle school level) through the intersection of Art and Citizenship.

The privileged form of art was the cinema, not only as an art object but as the starting point to approach the topic of interculturality. The author of the study defends the use of films as a valuable educational tool to promote awareness of problems in today's world, thus creating conditions to face them. Besides the cinema, the author advocates the introduction of theatre in child education because it may contribute to the development of a sense of group cohesion and creates conditions for collective competence training.

Based on these assumptions, the teacher development project involved designing collaborative performative activities based on films to provide teachers with the knowledge, attitudes and values they need to teach interculturality, understood as "dialogue of each culture with itself (an intra-cultural dialogue) and with others (a dialogue between cultures), and which therefore resort to the development of the capacity for interpersonal communication and between people of different cultures and origins (Leite, 2002, p. 151, quoted by Barbosa, 2022, p. 29, translated).

One of the activities implemented with the future teachers was based on viewing the short film "Une Girafe Sous la Pluie", by Belgian director Pascale Hequet, which shows the loneliness of a giraffe in a land of dogs. The content of the film was then compared with newspaper reports of immigrants or refugees' real situations.

2. The second one reports on a research project developed in two phases. Firstly (school year 2008/2009) an exploratory study was developed aiming at knowing the practices concerning intercultural education and partnership work of primary school teachers in the area of Aveiro.

The objective was to gather suggestions concerning activities and institutions to be contacted in order to constitute a group of partners aiming at the development of a project on intercultural education. Afterwards, the group of educational partners was constituted by thirteen participants: the researcher, representing the University of Aveiro, six primary school teachers, two teachers of Music in the Curriculum Enrichment Activities, a representative of an immigrants' association, a representative of a cultural association, a representative of a Cooperative for Education, Rehabilitation, and Capacity building for Inclusion (CERCI) and a representative of both the City Hall and the Municipal Library.

Throughout the school year 2010/2011 the group of participants collaboratively developed an intervention project on intercultural education to learners attending primary school. This project provided training moments on intercultural education and collaborative games, allowed participants to share their doubts and experiences concerning the theme and to propose strategies and methodologies as well as resources to design and implement the activities.

The work was organised in different types of sessions – thirteen work sessions among partners (26 hours), thirteen work sessions with learners (42 hours), and two final sessions to present the work done to the community (4 hours), adding up to 72 hours in total.

The sessions with the learners consisted in the practical implementation of the activities planned by the partners, of which the following are representative examples: 1) Reading sessions of childrens' books related to the topic of intercultural education; 2) Collaborative games between heterogeneous groups (students of different ages, genders and nationalities) to provide students with experiences of inclusion and exclusion in groups and reflect on the feelings related to these situations; 3) Awareness session on the Ukrainian language and its writing system through a story presented in the Ukrainian language; 4) Based on the work carried out previously in this area (knowledge of the languages and cultures of other peoples, development of respect and appreciation of diversity) the students carried out the invention of an imaginary people with their language, writing system, clothing, anthem, flag, games, and traditional dances.

3. Assuming that communication is the basis of human interaction, the study reported in the third document was carried out in a school in Gondomar, focusing on the development of children communicative competence through storytelling. The researcher and the kindergarten teachers involved in the study followed their route with 25 children aged between 4 and 6 years, hoping to improve their language proficiency and increase their participation level in the learning activities.

On the way, they told these children ten “enchanted stories”, using different approaches such as theater/dramatization, puppet theater, shadow theater, videos of well-known stories, and also stories produced by the school itself, in addition to the traditional way of telling stories using the book in paper format.

The stories and the activities based on them aimed not only at developing the children's curriculum-determined skills but also conveyed a message of respect and appreciation of difference, thus creating the foundation of an inclusive intercultural dialogue.

One of those stories was about a hen that had a dream of being a mother, but every time it laid an egg humans took it eat. So, she fled to a forest, where she made her nest and laid an egg. When she felt hungry, she went out to look for food, but when she returned she was surprised to find her nest with many eggs of different sizes and colours, but even so she decided to hatch them. Time passed and the most diverse animals were born, as well as her own chick. However, despite being different, the hen welcomed them as if they were all her babies. One day a boy appeared in the forest and tried to steal the chick to eat. The hen tried to defend him, but couldn't. His brothers then united and did not allow their little brother to be eaten by the boy. In the end the hen made a crazy cake, with several layers. Each one of them had the favourite food of each animal, and everyone celebrated.

This story was told in the library, through shadow theater. It shows the importance of accepting and respecting each other with their differences and that we can all be friends and generate empathy for each other, no matter where we come from.

4. The fourth document presents a study carried out in a comprehensive and secondary school, in a peripheral area of a city on the south bank of the Tagus River, serving a cultural and linguistically diverse student population from lower socioeconomic strata.

This study was developed during three school years (2008/11). At a first moment, it was intended to map the perspectives of teachers and school responses to the challenges posed by the cultural diversity of the students and the community and their underlying conceptions. At a second moment, from that diagnosis a collaborative action research project was drawn in which it was intended to contribute to the development of new pedagogical practices and reflective attitudes of teachers towards cultural diversity.

The ultimate goal of this teacher development programme, which focused on a group of fourteen participant teachers of various subject matters, was to promote the improvement of pedagogical practices in order to achieve better school results and the integration of foreign students and students from other cultural backgrounds. In this context, a central issue was the need to create conditions for those learners to develop their communicative competence in the Portuguese language.

The programme included 6 theoretical-practical sessions (12 hours), 9 practical sessions (18 hours) and autonomous work (60 hours). The practical sessions started with diagnosis activities, such as "I am..." and /or "We all have a problem", aiming at self and mutual knowledge and recognition, working as the basis for the design of the collaborative or individual action research projects to be developed with the learners.

To give one example, the activity "We all have a problem" is planned for a Civic Education class and is mainly aimed at students in lower secondary school. Its main purpose is to solve problems related to discrimination, collaboration, decentralization and otherness. In this context, learners are led to reflect on common problems and different ways of solving them, realize that they can generate constructive ideas to solve their problems and those of their peers, learn to solve problems collaboratively and practice "putting themselves in the others' shoes".

5. The work described in the fifth document aims to promote interculturality in the municipality of Braga, mobilizing the resources available through intercultural mediation. This project aims to understand the potential of mediation for the promotion of interculturality and to analyze new ways of promoting the inclusion of migrants in the municipality.

In order to achieve these goals, the main strategy was to dinamize a Human Library in different contexts – at Lúcio Craveiro da Silva Library (open to young people and adults), a Secondary School in the city (aimed at 9th and 12th grade learners), and the Book Fair in Braga (for the public in general) – based on the assumption that this is a way of bringing storytellers and their readers-listeners together with the intention of creating dialogue and interaction between them. Human Books tell their stories and life experiences, enhancing respect for human rights and stimulating understanding and mutual recognition.

After an initial diagnosis of the immigrant community needs, the idea of a Human Library appeared as an innovative strategy to promote intercultural dialogue through a process of deconstruction of possibly existing prejudices of the native community members.

As the name implies, the books in this library are people and the stories are authentic and meaningful life experiences. Each "book" tells their cultural and personal story by highlighting the aspects of their life that they consider important to share with readers-listeners. It also provides information about their culture and their immigration experience in other countries and in Braga/Portugal.

The intervention process started with the selection of the “books” and the preparation for their stories. The storytelling sessions were advertised in catalogue form, from which the readers-listeners could choose.

As mentioned above, one of the sessions took place in a local school, having been attended by 37 learners who, like the participants in the sessions at the Lúcio Craveiro da Silva Library and at the Book Fair, were asked to evaluate the experience by answering a questionnaire.

1.3 Main research findings

The findings reveal that, despite some contextual difficulties, such as resistance to change, lack of time to get engaged in new projects, organizational obstacles to teacher collaboration, and teachers’ and learners’ low levels of intercultural awareness, all the participants benefited from the teacher development/ teaching-learning strategies adopted, which resulted in higher motivation and engagement levels, improvement of learners’ (intercultural) communication skills, and teachers’ stronger awareness of the importance of intercultural education.

1.3.1 Limitations/ difficulties

Every research study entails challenges, and these are no exception. But challenges are important because they can trigger creative forms of reaching the desired objectives. Besides, these challenges are most likely not exclusive of the realities being studied, and bringing them to light may encourage others to introduce changes in their practices. A synthesis of the most significant limitations/ difficulties is presented below (Table 4).

Table 4

Limitations/ difficulties

	Learner/ trainee development	Teacher/ trainer development	Educational contexts
Doc. 1	1. Learners’ lack of motivation and inadequate behaviour 2. Lack of pedagogical dialogue 3. Trainees’ difficulty in reflecting on the activities	1. Teachers’ lack of preparation to teach the subject area “Citizenship and Development” and to develop learners’ artistic expressions 3. Teachers’ initial lack of interest in development programmes in this area	1. Underprivileged role of arts education 2. Scarce resources
Doc. 2	Not mentioned	1. Lack of time to develop all the planned activities 2. Some partners’ increasing loss of interest	Distance between institutions and meeting place
Doc. 3	1. Children’s initial poor communication skills 2. Limited number of participants involved (children and teachers)	Not mentioned	Parents’ detachment from school

Doc. 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learners' lack of communication skills in Portuguese 2. Mismatch between learners' school level and knowledge background 3. Learners' progression without required essential competences 4. Discrepancy between teaching practices and learners' real needs 5. Big number of learners per class 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers' work overload 2. Teachers' resistance to compulsory after-work development programmes 3. Teachers' lack of teamwork opportunities 4. Teacher's unpreparedness to teach Portuguese to foreign learners 5. Teachers' difficulty /unwillingness to implement pedagogical differentiation strategies 6. Lack of time for intellectual work and reflection 7. Affected emotional balance 8. Time constraints in the research process 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No relevance attached by the school to teacher development 2. No school activities to celebrate diversity 3. Very scarce information about strategies directed toward cultural and linguistically diverse learners 5. Lack of educational responses to learners' communication difficulties in Portuguese 6. Discrepancy between practices and some legal regulations 7. Top/down educational policies
Doc. 5	Not mentioned	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Bureaucracy obstacles 2. Time and communication difficulties 3. Initial low motivation to face the challenge 4. Lack of written reflection experience 5. Some methodological obstacles 6. Relatively low number of participants 	Low participation of schools

In participants' words...

The following selection of participants' reflective statements (translated) illustrate some of the above-listed limitations:

- Again, we realize that [trainees] feel more comfortable taking part in the game than reflecting on it. Although hesitant, they accept the challenge proposed." (Researcher/trainer, Doc. 1)
- (...) It is necessary to bear in mind that the lack of time to develop all the planned activities, the progressive loss of interest of some partners, the distance between institutions and the meeting place, or the difficulty in finding a common working schedule for all participants can act as constraints to the work developed." (Researcher, Doc. 2)
- The difficulty in combining schedules (...) is a factor that inhibits collaborative work. (Teacher 6, Doc. 4)
- "Regarding the limitations that arose throughout the process, we highlight the high bureaucracy of the workplace, which sometimes made it difficult or delayed the completion of some activity. " (Mediator/Researcher, Doc.5)

These examples reveal the importance of action-research-based teacher development programmes as a means to foster a critical stance towards educational contexts and practices.

In fact, becoming aware of the obstacles is the first step to overcoming them, thus opening up a road of possibility and hope.

1.3.2 Benefits/ gains

The benefits identified by the participants in all the studied projects (Table 5) show that all the participants took the road of possibility that led them to a better situation not only for themselves as individuals and/or professionals, but also for other members of the community, such as learners' families, immigrants, and educational institutions.

Table 5

Benefits/ gains

	Learner/ trainee development	Teacher/ trainer development	Educational contexts
Doc. 1	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Trainees' recognition of the relevance of using films to develop intercultural competence 2. Trainees' active involvement in the activities (performative games) 3. Trainees' understanding of the connection of awareness-raising games with the concept of interculturality 4. Trainees' awareness of the need to choose the materials and activities in accordance with the teaching context 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Motivating effect of the trainer's mediation 2. Trainer's (personal) development 	Not mentioned
Doc. 2	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Development of learners' intercultural competence 2. Learners' higher motivation 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Partners' stronger awareness of the importance of intercultural education 2. Partners' and trainer's personal and professional development 3. Partners' motivation to give continuity to the work 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaborative work and shared experiences and knowledge among partners
Doc. 3	Development of children's communication skills	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Collaboration between the researcher and the teachers 2. Teachers' validation of the action research project 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Parents' stronger engagement with the school
Doc. 4	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Cultural and intercultural awareness 2. Better communication with others 3. More responsible attitudes 4. More active participation in the activities 5. High quality of learning products 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Teachers' recognition of their need for development programmes 2. Increasing reflective level 3. Access to new methodological approaches 5. Recognition of cultural diversity as an asset 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Integration, in the Annual Plan of Activities, of cultural diversity celebration activities and initiatives to promote intercultural dialogue 2. Integration of a common time (80 minutes per month) in

	6. Better evaluation results	6. Awareness of the importance of theoretically informed practice and collaborative work 7. Ability to adapt the curriculum, strategies and teaching materials to learners' cultural diversity 8. Improvement of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge 11. Sense of preparedness to face cultural diversity in the future	teachers' schedules for teacher collaborative work 3. Improvement of the School Educational Project – the school as a learning, multi/intercultural and inclusive community
Doc. 5	1. Learners' creative work 2. Learners' high receptivity to Human Library stories 3. Learners' personal growth	1. Improvement of reflective level 2. Institutional collaboration 3. Mediator/researcher's personal and professional development 4. All participants' positive evaluation of the activity (Human Library)	1. Involvement of school learners in a contest on the topic of interculturality 2. High level of community involvement in the Human Library sessions

In participants' words...

The following statements are just a few examples of participants' appreciation of the impact of the different projects:

- "Finally, with regard to the impact of the project on the continuity they intend to give to the work developed, the partners stated that they would like to continue addressing this theme – intercultural education – and to work in collaboration with these or other community partners, which may be an indicator that the work developed here has achieved the objectives outlined and led the partners to recognize the potential of working in partnership for the implementation of intercultural education." (Researcher, Doc. 2)
- "This project was fundamental to help children enjoy reading" (teacher 1, Doc. 3)
- "[The project] helped me to rethink the strategies used" (Teacher Ana, Doc. 4).
- "I consider that the training was very effective (...) with clear implications for my future practice" (Teacher Maria, Doc.4)
- "This work has improved students' awareness of their own culture and the various cultures that surround them, none of which can be overvalued in relation to the other. They are just different" (Teacher Clara, Doc.4)
- "I felt like I was living the story being told. I felt that I can learn to think more about others and to be even more open-minded." (Learner, Doc.5)
- "Although we are finishing a journey that has enabled the construction of a professional profile and growth as a human being, we are starting a new path, much more prepared for whatever may come." (Mediator/researcher, Doc. 5)

These testimonials reinforce the conviction that it is worth resisting the temptation of accepting the dominant state of affairs, because it is very rewarding to be an empowering agent of change, however tortuous the path may be to reach that goal.

FINAL REMARKS

Reviewing these five documents was a demanding task, but it was also very rewarding, because it was almost like being there as a ‘walking companion’, witnessing what was done on the way and how the ‘walkers’ felt as they progressed, or not, as expected. It not only inspired sympathy with them when faced with what appeared to be unsurmountable obstacles like deep-rooted resistance to change, adverse working conditions and a certain ‘blindness’ to new educational demands, but also appreciation of the creative ideas that lit up the way to the chosen destination.

The limited number of studies that formed the corpus of this document-based research could be seen as a research limitation, but the diversity of departure points and approaches to the more or less complex situations ended up providing an overall view of what may be the difficulties experienced in different educational contexts throughout the country. Therefore, this scarcity adds value to these pioneering studies, which need disseminating in order to inspire other teachers/researchers to engage in similar projects.

In fact, the growing need to promote intercultural inclusion in our society demands more generalized attention to the way the issue is being dealt with at present. In this respect, Santos (2015) points out the importance of teacher education programmes:

(...) several studies suggest the need to develop continuing education programmes for teachers on multiculturalism and interculturality, since such programs can provide them with a more adequate preparation for teaching in diversity. Such training may, as in the case of our study, come in the form of educational projects, leading to the establishment of partnerships and collaborative work networks (Angelides et al., 2007). These networks not only have great potential for the dissemination of good practices, but also help in the generalization of innovation and in the creation of action-oriented knowledge, resulting from effective educational practices. In addition, collaborative projects tend to reduce teachers' insecurity in the planning of activities, in the definition of objectives, and in the choice of resources to be used (Bastos & Araújo and Sá, 2008). (p. 60, translated)

To better address the demands of learners' cultural diversity, all the analysed studies promoted teachers' development of an inquiry-based and learner/learning-centred approach to teaching through the use of collaborative action research, the value of which is stressed by Moreira (2005):

Collaborative action research emerges as a link (as a concept and methodology) between a learner-centred pedagogy and a reflective teacher education that allows the operationalisation of the underlying philosophy and gives it visibility, as it facilitates a progressive critical awareness of theories and practices, paving the way for the acquisition of skills and transformation of action. (p. 269)

So, I hope this article contributes to give some more visibility to these examples of action-research-based projects which, by fostering a critical professional stance towards practices, brought about significantly positive changes in their respective intervention contexts.

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