



Universidad de Deusto
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Facultad de Psicología y Educación

**CLAVES PARA LA CONVIVENCIA
INTERCULTURAL EN EDUCACIÓN INFANTIL.
UN ESTUDIO DE CASO.**

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A quienes hacen de este mundo un lugar más bonito, más justo y más verdadero.

A quienes ya se fueron, a quienes están, y a quienes están por llegar.

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Con todos vosotros, cada día siento que vivo un sueño. Esta tesis es un sueño hecho realidad, construido a partir de utopías y ciencia. Que esta contribución avance hacia el horizonte de que todos los niños y niñas del mundo disfruten de las mejores condiciones de aprendizaje desde los primeros años de vida.

Resumen

La investigación ha demostrado que una educación infantil de calidad reporta beneficios en los niños y las niñas, permitiéndoles la adquisición de una base sólida para un desarrollo óptimo y un aprendizaje de máximos. Una convivencia positiva favorece un contexto de aprendizaje seguro y libre de conflictos, en los que todos y todas (alumnado, profesorado y las familias) aprenden y se relacionan positivamente. Esto es especialmente importante para la infancia más vulnerable, como los niños y niñas inmigrantes o de minorías étnicas, quienes a menudo están sobrerrepresentados en escuelas que reportan altos índices de conflicto y una convivencia negativa, y respecto a quienes se mantiene unas bajas expectativas de aprendizaje que limitan su rendimiento. Por tanto, un elemento importante para prevenir las dificultades que a menudo afectan al alumnado de grupos vulnerables es garantizar que la es un entorno seguro que ofrece al alumnado apoyo cognitivo y social. El clima de aula es un elemento clave en la convivencia escolar.

Décadas de investigación comprometida con la mejora educativa y social evidencian que los entornos interactivos de aprendizaje, basados en evidencias científicas, logra promover mejoras académicas al tiempo que promueven una buena convivencia en contextos muy diversos. A través de una revisión sistemática y de un estudio de caso, esta tesis ha analizado las claves de una convivencia positiva en educación infantil. Para ello, se ha estudiado en profundidad una Comunidad de Aprendizaje situada en un contexto multicultural, de nivel socioeconómico bajo y que representa un caso de éxito tanto por la buena convivencia como por los logros académicos que reporta. Los resultados revelan, por un lado, que las aulas de educación infantil de esta escuela presentan las claves pedagógicas y estructurales que la literatura científica destaca como factores que contribuyen al clima de aula positivo en contextos multiculturales. Por otro lado, a través de observaciones en el aula y de entrevistas, se evidencia que los niños y niñas inmigrantes y de etnia gitana interactúan positivamente durante los Grupos Interactivos, una forma de organización de aula en grupos pequeños y heterogéneos. Además, las entrevistas revelan que las relaciones entre la familia y la escuela basadas en la confianza, construidas a través del diálogo igualitario facilitan una colaboración estrecha orientada a ofrecer la mejor educación posible a todos los niños y niñas. Así, la participación de las familias más vulnerables favorece la buena convivencia en la escuela, lo que revierte positivamente en el rendimiento académico y social del alumnado desde los primeros años.

Palabras clave: Educación Infantil, Convivencia escolar en Contextos Multiculturales, Entornos Interactivos de Aprendizaje, Colaboración Familia-Escuela, Clima Positivo de Aula, Interacciones entre Iguales.

Índice de contenido

1.	Introducción.....	1
1.1	Objetivos.....	5
1.2	Metodología.....	5
1.3	Consideraciones éticas	7
1.4	Modalidad y estructura de la tesis	7
2.	Publicaciones.....	9
2.1	Artículo 1. A Systematic Review of the Literature on Aspects Affecting Positive Classroom Climate in Multicultural Early Childhood Education	9
2.2	Artículo 2. Help and Solidarity Interactions in Interactive Groups: A Case Study with Roma and Immigrant Preschoolers	31
2.3	Artículo 3. Bridging the Gap: Engaging Roma and Migrant Families in Early Childhood Education through Trust-Based Relationships.....	55
3.	Discusión.....	71
3.1	Aspectos que afectan al clima de aula positivo en educación infantil multicultural.....	71
3.2	Interacciones positivas entre iguales en los Grupos Interactivos.....	72
3.3	Escuela-familia: claves de participación con grupos vulnerables para una convivencia positiva	74
3.4	Limitaciones y prospectiva de futuro.....	75
4.	Conclusiones e implicaciones.....	77
5.	Referencias.....	79

Índice de tablas

1.	Introducción	
	Tabla 1. <i>Relación de objetivos, publicaciones e indexación de las revistas</i>	7
2.	Tablas Publicaciones	
	Publicación 1. Tabla 1. <i>Screening of the articles selected</i>	15
	Publicación 2. Tabla 1. <i>Group Organization and Gender of Children</i>	37
	Publicación 2. Tabla 2. <i>Adaptation of the Coding Scheme of Positive Peer Interactions of</i> <i>Acar, Hong and Wu 2017; 25</i>	38
	Publicación 3. Tabla 1. <i>Origin/ethnic background of the students</i>	59
	Publicación 3. Tabla 2. <i>Participant families</i>	60
	Publicación 3. Tabla 3. <i>Participant School-staff</i>	60

Índice de figuras

Figuras Publicaciones

Publicación 1. Figura 1. <i>Flow diagram</i>	13
Publicación 1. Figura 2. <i>Categorization of the main aspects fostering a positive classroom</i> <i>climate</i>	17
Publicación 2. Figura 1. <i>Positive Peer Interactions in IGs</i>	39
Publicación 2. Figura 2. <i>Categories and their frequencies within 'acknowledgment</i> <i>interactions and interest in peers'</i>	40
Publicación 2. Figura 3. <i>Categories and their frequencies within 'help and guidance</i> <i>interactions'</i>	42

1. Introducción

La infancia del presente constituye la esperanza de las sociedades futuras (Aboud & Yousafzai, 2016). Por ello, garantizar el bienestar y el desarrollo desde los primeros años de vida es fundamental para asegurar un futuro sostenible (Black et al., 2017). La inversión en programas y recursos para una educación de calidad es más eficaz y eficiente que paliar las consecuencias de descuidar el desarrollo y el aprendizaje óptimos de los niños y las niñas (Heckman, 2006). Durante los primeros años se construyen los cimientos de habilidades fundamentales para el desarrollo y el aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida. Por ejemplo, la adquisición del lenguaje tiene sus raíces en la primera infancia, junto con las bases matemáticas sobre las que construir aprendizajes cada vez más complejos. Así mismo, la atención, la empatía, el comportamiento prosocial, la persistencia y las funciones ejecutivas comienzan a establecerse desde la primera infancia (Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). Décadas de investigación confirman que estas importantes destrezas, que comienzan a adquirirse en los primeros años de vida, juegan un papel determinante en el rendimiento académico en las etapas educativas posteriores y en el bienestar y salud de las personas a lo largo de la vida (Mccoy et al., 2017).

En efecto, la investigación ha demostrado que una educación infantil de calidad reporta beneficios en los niños y las niñas, permitiéndoles la adquisición de una base sólida para un desarrollo óptimo y un aprendizaje de máximos (Mccoy et al., 2017; Sylva et al., 2004; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). Estudios longitudinales revelan que quienes han asistido a una educación infantil de calidad muestran un mejor rendimiento en matemáticas y en competencia lingüística en comparación con otros estudiantes que han pasado sus primeros años en aulas de infantil poco estimulantes (Melhuish et al., 2013; Weiland & Yoshikawa, 2013). Así, una educación infantil de calidad es aquella que ofrece múltiples oportunidades de interacción entre iguales, en la que el profesorado se dirige a los niños y niñas de forma cercana y en estrecha colaboración entre las familias y la escuela (Mathers et al., 2014). Ciertamente, el desarrollo y el aprendizaje son dependientes de la interacción social (Vygotsky, 1978) y, por tanto, las acciones educativas que promueven interacciones de calidad son más eficaces en la promoción de aprendizajes desde los primeros años (Aubert et al., 2017). De hecho, las interacciones en el aula contribuyen al desarrollo intelectual de los estudiantes y por ello el diálogo es una herramienta fundamental de aprendizaje (Mercer & Littleton, 2007).

Se puede entender como interacción en las primeras etapas de la interacción, la mutualidad o reciprocidad aquellos procesos de “ida y vuelta” (definido en inglés como “serve and return”), que se producen cuando los niños y niñas buscan de manera natural la comunicación y las personas adultas del entorno responden a esa demanda de forma sincronizada, devolviéndoles el mismo tipo de gestos y vocalizaciones (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2007). En concreto, las primeras

interacciones entre los niños y niñas y las personas de su entorno asientan las bases de su arquitectura cerebral, clave en el desarrollo y aprendizajes futuros (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2011). En la medida en que las interacciones van incluyendo más palabras y frases más amplias y complejas, los niños y las niñas van integrando esas estructuras y utilizándolas de manera espontánea (Hirsh-Pasek et al., 2015). Por ello, los espacios de educación infantil basados en el diálogo y la interacción tienen un impacto positivo en el desarrollo de la competencia lingüística (Papadopoulou & Gregoriadis, 2017). Además, el interés innato por interactuar con el contexto y las personas que lo componen y la creación de espacios seguros y libres de violencia (Rios-Gonzalez et al., 2019) parecen clave en el desarrollo de actitudes altruistas desde la primera infancia (Dahl & Paulus, 2019).

Sin embargo, a pesar de la importancia de una educación de calidad basada en interacciones positivas, en 2017, 262 millones de niños y niñas en todo el mundo vivían privadas del derecho humano a la educación. En la actualidad, la infancia constituye uno de los grupos más vulnerables a nivel mundial; se estima que cada año 7 millones de niños y niñas no alcanzan la edad de 5 años, y entre quienes sí lo hacen, aproximadamente 200 millones están expuestos a entornos de máximo estrés y pobreza (Grantham-McGregor et al., 2007). La ausencia de un desarrollo óptimo durante los primeros años puede tener consecuencias devastadoras en la salud de las personas, lo que impacta en diversas esferas de la sociedad en general (Aboud & Yousafzai, 2016). En este sentido, se estima que, para la edad de tres años, los niños y las niñas que han crecido en entornos de bajo nivel socioeconómico han estado expuestos a 30 millones de palabras menos que aquellos en situaciones más acomodadas, lo que resulta en que la infancia más vulnerable emplea menos palabras y menos sofisticadas (Romeo et al., 2018). Esto sitúa a los niños y niñas de entornos socioeconómicos bajos en situación de desventaja en la escuela.

Sin embargo, en contextos que ofrecen interacciones de calidad, sensibles y ricas que amortiguan su impacto negativo, es posible revertir los devastadores efectos que la exposición a entornos hostiles o poco estimulantes tiene en la primera infancia (Shonkoff & Garner, 2017). Así, las escuelas que se basan en actuaciones que se han demostrado eficaces, como por ejemplo, las Actuaciones Educativas de Éxito (AEE), contribuyen a que personas que han tenido vivencias desfavorables, como los menores tutelados, mejoren su percepción personal, el sentido vital y las expectativas educativas (Yeste et al., 2017). El estudio longitudinal de Flecha y Soler (2013) demostró que la implementación de las Actuaciones Educativas de Éxito con alumnado y familias gitanas produjo cohesión social y una mejora académica en el alumnado. En este sentido, un elemento importante para prevenir las dificultades que afectan al alumnado de grupos vulnerables es garantizar una buena convivencia en la escuela ofreciendo un entorno seguro y que ofrezca al alumnado apoyo cognitivo y social. Entre los elementos que juegan un papel clave para lograr esa buena convivencia encontramos el clima de aula. Ciertamente, en sociedades cada vez más diversas donde las escuelas constituyen espacios de aprendizaje y socialización

en los que niños y niñas de diferentes grupos culturales interactúan, aprenden y se socializan, el clima de aula es un factor que incide en el rendimiento académico y en las relaciones sociales del alumnado en todas las etapas educativas (Reyes et al., 2012).

La investigación indica que un clima de aula positivo favorece que los estudiantes se comprometan más con la tarea académica, reduce los conflictos y promueve relaciones de confianza entre el profesorado y el alumnado. El hecho de contar con un clima de aula positivo resulta beneficioso especialmente cuando las aulas de educación infantil están formadas por alumnado de procedencia diversa que vive en situaciones adversas (Reid et al., 2015). Por tanto, esto es especialmente importante en escuelas que cuentan con una sobrerrepresentación de alumnado inmigrante y perteneciente a minorías étnicas que pueden tener un mayor riesgo de afrontar una convivencia negativa en la escuela (Mallett, 2017).

En cambio, en aulas donde la convivencia es negativa, el profesorado y el alumnado apenas tienen conexión emocional y habitualmente se ignoran, donde se faltan al respeto y abundan las burlas y las humillaciones o incluso existe violencia física se obstaculiza el aprendizaje. Esto pone en especial riesgo al alumnado de grupos vulnerables porque se rebajan los aprendizajes y, con ello, se impide el logro de su máximo potencial (Reyes et al., 2012; Langeloo et al., 2019). Estos contextos frecuentemente inciden más en los déficits que en las capacidades del alumnado, mostrando así bajas expectativas, y limitando, con ello, los resultados académicos y la calidad de las relaciones sociales. Si bien estas condiciones son perjudiciales para cualquier niño o niña, son especialmente nocivas para el alumnado perteneciente a minorías que, en muchas ocasiones, vive además otras situaciones de vulnerabilidad social.

Por todo ello, lograr un clima positivo en las aulas de escuelas situadas en contextos adversos es prioritario por el potencial de revertir los efectos de experiencias desfavorecedoras de la infancia (Nurius, LaValley & Kim, 2020) favoreciendo el bienestar del alumnado y contribuyendo a una buena convivencia. Para que esto sea así, es necesario conocer qué aspectos pedagógicos y estructurales favorecen el clima de aula en espacios multiculturales. Este es el primer objetivo de la tesis, a través del que se pretende contribuir a potenciar un entorno escolar que favorezca el aprendizaje y las relaciones sociales de más niños y niñas.

Un modelo de escuela que está demostrando ser eficaz superando con éxito los retos que los contextos culturalmente diversos pueden suponer para la buena convivencia es el de las Comunidades de Aprendizaje. Estas escuelas demuestran que incluso en zonas desfavorecidas (con alto índice de inmigración, o con bajos recursos económicos), se puede alcanzar una convivencia excelente. Sus pilares fundamentales son, la base interactiva del desarrollo y el aprendizaje y la importancia de la participación de la comunidad en la escuela (Gatt, Ojala & Soler, 2011). Desde una mirada dialógica del aprendizaje (Flecha, 1997), estas escuelas se basan en la solidaridad, la igualdad de diferencias y el

diálogo igualitario, entre otros. Las Comunidades de Aprendizaje se caracterizan por una implementación rigurosa de las AEE (Flecha, 2015). Éstas son acciones concretas, transferibles y sostenibles, que han demostrado contribuir a la mejora académica y social en contextos tan diversos como zonas rurales pobres de Colombia (Soler et al., 2019), centros específicos de educación especial en España (García-Carrión, Molina & Roca, 2018) o escuelas en contextos con un nivel socioeconómico medio-alto en Inglaterra (García-Carrión, 2015), entre otros. Una de las AEE que se lleva a cabo dentro del aula son los Grupos Interactivos (GI), que constituyen una forma de organización de aula en grupos pequeños y heterogéneos dinamizados por una persona adulta voluntaria que dinamiza las interacciones entre el alumnado y promueve su participación igualitaria (Valls & Kyriakides, 2013).

Las aulas organizadas en GI han demostrado favorecer las actitudes prosociales con alumnado de educación primaria (Villardón-Gallego et al., 2018), y el rendimiento académico y la solidaridad con alumnado inmigrante (Valero et al., 2018; García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015). Sin embargo, el potencial de esta forma de organizar el aula para favorecer un clima positivo en educación infantil está menos explorado. Dada la importancia de las interacciones entre iguales en los primeros años de vida y la naturaleza interactiva de los GI, el segundo objetivo de esta tesis es explorar en profundidad qué tipo de interacciones positivas tienen lugar entre el alumnado de etnia gitana e inmigrante de educación infantil durante esta actividad.

Un elemento característico de los GI es la participación de personas adultas voluntarias en la dinamización de los pequeños grupos. Así, esta forma de organización de aula abre un espacio de participación real y efectiva a las familias, incluso a las más vulnerables. En GI, el nivel académico o de alfabetización no son requisitos para participar como voluntarios ya que la función de la persona voluntaria consiste en garantizar la participación igualitaria entre el alumnado durante la actividad. Así, la diversidad que las personas voluntarias aportan enriquece las relaciones y la experiencia de aprendizaje. Especialmente en la etapa infantil, la relación entre la escuela y la familia incide en el clima de aula y en último término, en la convivencia. Una relación estrecha entre el profesorado y las familias se relaciona con una convivencia positiva (McNally & Slutsky, 2018). En general, la participación de las familias en la escuela es clave para la mejora del rendimiento académico del alumnado, especialmente en el caso de familias de grupos vulnerables (Díez, Gatt & Racionero, 2011).

Si bien en las Comunidades de Aprendizaje toda la comunidad participa activamente en la escuela y en diversos procesos formativos, se desconocen las características concretas de las relaciones entre el profesorado y las familias inmigrantes y gitanas que favorecen la colaboración familia-escuela en un contexto de buena convivencia. Responder a este vacío, concretándolo en la etapa infantil, conforma el tercer y último objetivo de la presente tesis.

1.1 Objetivos

El objetivo general de esta tesis doctoral es identificar aspectos que favorecen una convivencia positiva en educación infantil con población inmigrante y de etnia gitana. El fin último es contribuir a la mejora de la calidad de la educación infantil aportando evidencias sobre los aspectos que hacen posible una convivencia intercultural que facilite el aprendizaje y el desarrollo. Se busca cubrir los siguientes objetivos mencionados respondiendo a las correspondientes preguntas de investigación:

O1. Identificar los aspectos (pedagógicos y estructurales) que contribuyen a un clima positivo en el aula de educación infantil en contextos multiculturales.

P1. ¿Qué aspectos pedagógicos y estructurales están relacionados con un clima de aula positivo en educación infantil en contextos multiculturales?

O2. Explorar en profundidad qué tipo de interacciones positivas tienen lugar en los Grupos Interactivos entre el alumnado de etnia gitana e inmigrante de educación infantil.

P2. ¿Qué tipo de interacciones positivas se dan en los Grupos Interactivos entre alumnado de etnia gitana e inmigrante de educación infantil?

O3. Identificar las características de las relaciones entre la escuela y las familias gitanas e inmigrantes que facilitan la participación de las familias en esta escuela.

P3. ¿Qué características de las relaciones entre la escuela y las familias gitanas e inmigrantes favorecen la participación de éstas en la educación de sus hijos e hijas?

1.2 Metodología

Para cubrir el primer objetivo se realizó una revisión sistemática de la literatura científica sobre aspectos que favorecen el clima en las aulas de infantil en las que existe diversidad cultural. Para ello, tal como se recoge en el primer artículo, se siguieron las pautas concretadas por PRISMA (Liberati et al., 2009). Una vez identificadas las palabras clave que orientarían la búsqueda en Web of Science, los resúmenes de los artículos encontrados se revisaron a la luz de los criterios de inclusión y exclusión. En total, 14 artículos fueron seleccionados para su análisis en profundidad. Este análisis permitió identificar los aspectos que han demostrado favorecer un clima positivo de aula en la etapa infantil con alumnado culturalmente diverso.

Con el estudio de caso (Stake, 1995) se recogió y analizó información para cubrir los objetivos segundo y tercero. El caso seleccionado es una escuela que representa un caso de éxito por reportar una mejora académica y una disminución de los conflictos desde que se transformara en Comunidad de Aprendizaje en el año 2009. La escuela está situada en un barrio periférico del País Vasco, al norte de España, con alto índice de inmigración, familias de nivel socioeconómico medio-bajo, y familias en situaciones laborales precarias. La oferta educativa abarca desde los 2 hasta los 16 años, con una línea en cada curso escolar. En el momento del estudio, la escuela contaba con 304 estudiantes, de los que el 56% son de etnia gitana, el 29% inmigrantes procedentes de algún país africano (Nigeria, Algeria, Marruecos, Mauritania, Ghana, Angola), y el 15% del Este de Europa, Asia y América Latina. Todo el alumnado recibió becas de comedor y material escolar. A pesar de las condiciones sociales desfavorecidas de la población en esta área, la escuela ha alcanzado altos estándares desde 2010. Desde entonces, según los datos de la escuela, la tasa de abandono escolar y de absentismo han disminuido del 20% a casi cero, y los conflictos se han reducido en un 80%. En 2013 la escuela recibió un premio nacional por el proyecto orientado a proporcionar interacciones de alta calidad entre estudiantes y la comunidad para mejorar el aprendizaje y las relaciones sociales.

Para responder a la segunda pregunta de investigación, se observaron las sesiones de Grupos Interactivos en el aula de 5 años, por ser un espacio rico en diálogos e interacciones. A través de la observación participante, se recogieron las interacciones del alumnado durante las sesiones de Grupos Interactivos entre noviembre de 2018 y mayo de 2019. También se recogieron notas de campo, que, al término de cada sesión, se comentaron con el profesorado manteniendo un clima igualitario y comunicativo en línea con el marco metodológico de la tesis. En mayo de 2019, al finalizar las grabaciones de los GI, se propuso un grupo de discusión con el alumnado a fin de comentar los resultados preliminares. Este grupo de discusión ayudó a confirmar los resultados acerca de cómo son las interacciones entre el alumnado durante los GI.

Para dar respuesta a la tercera pregunta de investigación, se llevaron a cabo doce entrevistas semi-estructuradas con el profesorado de la etapa infantil, miembros del equipo directivo de la escuela y seis padres y madres que participaban tanto como voluntarios y voluntarias en actividades dentro del aula como en procesos de formación en la escuela. Las entrevistas se realizaron de forma individual, en la escuela, y priorizando siempre la disponibilidad y preferencias de las personas participantes. Estas entrevistas fueron grabadas en audio, previo consentimiento. Los resultados preliminares fueron puestos en diálogo con las personas participantes a fin de asegurar la correcta interpretación de la información.

En coherencia con las recomendaciones europeas para llevar a cabo investigación en ciencias sociales orientadas al impacto social (Gómez González, 2019), este trabajo doctoral ha priorizado un diálogo estrecho e igualitario con los participantes de la escuela seleccionada como caso de estudio. Por tanto,

el marco metodológico de este trabajo se sitúa en la metodología comunicativa, que pone en el centro el diálogo entre las personas participantes y las personas investigadoras para la co-creación de conocimiento científico con impacto social (Gómez et al., 2019). Por ello, en todas las fases de la investigación se mantuvo una estrecha colaboración con la escuela.

1.3 Consideraciones éticas

Desde el inicio de la investigación, se han asegurado los requerimientos éticos para una investigación en ciencias sociales rigurosa y respetuosa. Para ello, se han seguido las recomendaciones del código ético de la European Early Childhood Education Research Association (2015). En coherencia, se ha cuidado el anonimato de todas las personas que libremente han dado su consentimiento para participar en la presente investigación, y se ha reiterado la posibilidad de dejar de participar en cualquier momento del estudio sin que ello tuviera ningún tipo de consecuencia negativa. También se ha garantizado el trato justo, sensible, digno, libre de prejuicios hacia todos y todas, asegurando el máximo respeto hacia todas las personas que decidieron participar con independencia de la orientación religiosa, el idioma, el origen étnico, la nacionalidad o la cultura de las personas participantes.

Para la participación de los niños y las niñas, en primer lugar, se aseguró el consentimiento de las familias y, en segundo lugar, de los propios menores. Los requerimientos éticos en investigación con niños y niñas exigen explicar los objetivos del estudio de una manera cercana, tantas veces como haga falta y sin generar ningún tipo de coacción o presión. Es indispensable recordar frecuentemente que en cualquier momento pueden decidir no participar en el estudio, y que su decisión será siempre respetada (Morrow, 2008; Truscott, Graham & Powell, 2019). Así, en este estudio se consultó a cada grupo de niños y niñas en Grupos Interactivos si asentían que se recogiesen sus aportaciones en audio.

1.4 Modalidad y estructura de la tesis

Esta investigación doctoral se ha realizado por compendio de artículos. Cada uno de ellos responde a uno de los objetivos de la tesis tal y como se refleja en la Tabla 1. Los artículos han sido publicados/aceptados para su publicación en revistas indexadas, y en la opción de acceso abierto a fin de democratizar las evidencias obtenidas y contribuir así a visibilizar unos resultados que pueden promover mejoras en la educación.

Tabla 1. *Relación de objetivos, publicaciones e indexación de las revistas.*

O	REFERENCIA DE LA PUBLICACIÓN	INDEXACIÓN E IMPACTO
1	Khalfaoui, A., García-Carrión, R., & Villardón-Gallego, L. (2020). A Systematic Review of the Literature on Aspects Affecting Positive Classroom Climate in Multicultural Early Childhood Education. <i>Early Childhood Education Journal</i> , https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01054-4	Q2 en SCOPUS (Education) Factor de impacto: 1.135 (2019) Q3 en JCR (Education & Educational Research- SSCI)
2	Khalfaoui, A., García-Carrión, R., & Villardón-Gallego, L., Duque, E. (2020). Help and Solidarity Interactions in Interactive Groups: A Case Study with Roma and Immigrant Preschoolers. <i>Social Sciences</i> , 9, 116. https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9070116	Q2 en SCOPUS (General Social Sciences) Factor de impacto: 1.3 (2019)
3	Khalfaoui, A., García-Carrión, R., & Villardón-Gallego, L. (2020). Bridging the Gap: Engaging Roma and Migrant Families in Early Childhood Education through Trust-Based Relationships. <i>European Early Childhood Education Research Journal</i> , 28 (5)	Q1 en SCOPUS (Education) Factor de impacto: 1.075 (2019) Q3 en JCR (Education & Educational Research- SSCI)

A continuación, se presentan los artículos en el orden indicado en la Tabla 1. La tesis se cierra con una discusión y unas conclusiones, donde se interpretan los resultados considerando el conocimiento existente y enfatizando la contribución de este trabajo de investigación a la ciencia y a la práctica educativa en la etapa infantil.

2. Publicaciones

2.1 Artículo 1. A Systematic Review of the Literature on Aspects Affecting Positive Classroom Climate in Multicultural Early Childhood Education

Khalifaoui, A., García-Carrión, R., & Villardón-Gallego, L. (2020). A Systematic Review of the Literature on Aspects Affecting Positive Classroom Climate in Multicultural Early Childhood Education. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-020-01054-4>

Abstract

The risk for many young children from minority backgrounds of being excluded from a quality education might be reduced through the creation of a positive classroom climate. A systematic review was conducted to gain a better understanding of the pedagogical and structural aspects that foster a positive classroom climate in multicultural early childhood education settings. Following a systematic review procedure, 14 articles were selected and included in the analysis. The findings indicate that eight aspects contribute to a positive climate in these settings: on the one hand, pedagogical practices, including increased instructional time, teacher-student supportive interactions, peer interactions and friendship, child engagement, teacher training on emotionally supportive environments and teacher-family trust-based relationships, and on the other hand, structural aspects, including small peer groups and materials shared among children. This evidence may be used to foster a classroom climate that enhances learning processes and social development in multicultural preschool groups. However, more research is needed to better understand the particular role that cultural diversity plays in the classroom climate.

Keywords Classroom climate · Cultural diversity · Minority background · Early childhood education · Systematic review

Introduction

As the United Nations stated in the fourth Sustainable Development Goal, obtaining a quality education is the foundation for creating sustainable development aimed at achieving fairer and more supportive societies. Early childhood education plays a key role in establishing the foundations for human development and lifelong learning opportunities. Consequently, ensuring equitable, quality education for all children in their early years, especially for those living in most disadvantaged conditions, has become essential in the current society (Aboud and Yousafzai 2016; Black et al. 2017). The quality of early childhood education is usually defined according to two main dimensions that have consistently been identified in the literature as crucial to fostering children's learning and development. On the one hand, the quality of pedagogical practices (such as planning and implementing learning activities and supporting children's emotional development through positive relationships) seem crucial for cognitive and social development. On the other hand, structural aspects (such as adult-child ratios, staff qualifications, group sizes and characteristics of the physical space) also play a role in ensuring quality in early childhood education and care (ECEC) (Mathers et al. 2014).

Both dimensions also shape the classroom climate based on how social interactions between children and between children and the teacher occur through pedagogical practices in the classroom. Indeed, from an ecological lens, the classroom is understood as a primary micro-context in which students and the teacher interact and where the quality of interactions between the child and elements of the child's proximal environments influence developmental outcomes (Melhuish et al. 2013). Specifically, the classroom climate refers to the global classroom atmosphere that is shaped by the interactions that take place in the classroom as a whole, including the teacher's behaviour, students' responses to the teacher, the teacher's response to students, and interactions among students (Gazelle 2006). The classroom climate is reported to be a "positive climate" when a sense of connectedness and belongingness, enjoyment and enthusiasm, and respect are observed among the students and in the teacher-student relationship. Conversely, a "negative climate" is reported when a sense of frequent disruption, conflict, and disorganization is observed (Gazelle 2006; Reyes et al. 2012).

According to the "Teaching Through Interactions" framework (Hamre et al. 2013), a teacher being warm and supportive and providing behavioural and instructional support contributes to a positive classroom climate. In this context, children show not only better language development (Cameron et al. 2008; Pianta et al. 2008) but also better mathematical skills (Curby et al. 2009; Horan and Carr 2018) and behavioural development (Luckner and Pianta 2011; Mashburn et al. 2008). Previous research has shown that students who report having better quality relationships with their teachers also report being approximately three times more engaged in academic tasks and tend to choose more complex cognitive activities (Klem and Connell 2004). Similarly, Hamre and Pianta (2007) found that students who have a greater emotional bond with their teacher are more engaged in learning. In classrooms with a positive

climate, teachers spend a minimal amount of time on basic management activities and transitions, and they actively engage children in instructional activities through interesting activities and materials.

Thus, the classroom climate may favour or hinder academic performance and social relationships in the classroom (Howes et al. 2011) since it has the potential to enhance learning and development among preschoolers while fostering social cohesion among school communities (Brophy-Herb et al. 2007). However, some communities are less likely to have positive classroom climates. In particular, many students who belong to ethnic minorities are more likely to be placed in classrooms where quality interactions do not usually occur. As a result, these children are often at greater risk of underachieving and not fulfilling their potential (Langeloo et al. 2019). Hence, given the benefits of a positive classroom climate for children's learning and development, the fact that ethnic minority students often receive less benefit from school settings than non-minority students raises important questions related to how educators and educational researchers can ensure a positive classroom climate for children from minority backgrounds.

Since societies are becoming more diverse as a result of migration and displacement, school settings are also becoming more culturally and linguistically diverse worldwide and are serving a high number of students who belong to cultural and ethnic minorities, such as immigrants, refugees, and Roma children. Schools serving these students are mostly located in high-poverty areas in which educational inequalities for historically marginalized students still prevail in many countries (Lampert et al. 2019). Consequently, many children from minority backgrounds experience fewer opportunities to engage in rich interactions that contribute to their development of cognitive and social competences (Mathers et al. 2014; Ball 2012; Heller et al. 2012). Moreover, most of them are often less exposed to the school culture or the language of instruction at home prior to entering early education (Souto-Manning and Mitchell 2010). Hence, many of those children tend to score below their less-disadvantaged peers and to have higher rates of conflicts (Weinstein et al. 2004).

Given this reality, it is particularly important that optimal conditions for a positive classroom climate are created in classrooms serving young children from minority backgrounds due to the relevance of such conditions for fostering educational and social success (Justice et al. 2018; Rios-Gonzalez et al. 2019). Recent research in the field has pointed out the importance of encouraging an ongoing dialogue between families and teachers, to agree on the messages and responses to provide children, in order to build a positive classroom climate free of violence (Rios-Gonzalez et al. 2019). To obtain deeper insight into how to promote a positive classroom climate that advances quality education for all students from their early years, this systematic review aimed to develop a better understanding of the pedagogical and structural aspects that foster a positive classroom climate in preschools that serve children from minority backgrounds. In the following sections, the methods used in this systematic

review, including the search procedure, inclusion and exclusion criteria and data analysis, will be presented, followed by the results obtained and finally a discussion of the results and some conclusions.

Method

This systematic review was based on the detailed procedure described by Moher et al. (2009) for synthesizing evidence in a specific field in an exhaustive and accurate manner. The search, selection and extraction pathways were conducted according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) statement to guarantee the transparency, validity, replicability, and updateability of the study (Moher et al. 2009). The PRISMA statement provides a series of clearly defined stages that ensure the accuracy of the research process and the utility of the results. The formulation of the research question was based on the Population, Intervention or Indicator, and Context of the study (PICo) approach (Boland et al. 2017). Following this approach, this systematic review aims to respond to the following question: Which pedagogical or structural aspects are related to a positive classroom climate in early childhood education in culturally diverse contexts?

The search plan and analysis stage, specifically the identification of an answerable question and the development of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, were based on Gough and Thomas's (2016) contributions to the field of systematic reviews in educational research. The data synthesis procedure was based on the work of Lockwood et al. (2015) with the goal of gathering, rather than interpreting, the findings of the studies included.

Search Procedure

An extensive search was initially conducted using the Web of Science (WoS) database with 40 combinations of the following words and phrases: *preschool, early childhood, kindergarten, early years, classroom climate, peer relations, school harmony, school climate, classroom environment, cultural diversity, multicult**. These keywords were compared against the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) thesaurus to ensure their reliability (Gough and Thomas 2016). Before executing the searches, we applied three filters in the search engine: (a) the area filter, which was specified as "education and educational research" to ensure the suitability of the studies found; (b) the date filter, which was set to limit the search to publications from 2008 to 2018 to ensure the timeliness of the studies; and (c) the type of document, as only articles published in scientific journals, and no book chapters, reports or proceedings of conferences, were considered.

Study Selection: Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The aim was to explore aspects that contribute to a positive classroom climate in culturally diverse early childhood education. Accordingly, studies were first selected if they were published between 2008 and 2018 and were focused on early childhood and if at least 15% of the included students had minority backgrounds. Second, articles needed to provide evidence of aspects related to a positive classroom

climate (e.g., children’s social skills, prosocial behaviour, teacher–child interactions, and conflict resolution). Third, studies were excluded if they were conducted outside of naturalistic school settings (such as the laboratory, the playground, or home). More specifically, the studies needed to include research carried out in the regular classroom. In summary, articles were not considered for final analysis if the research (a) was not focused on a positive classroom climate, (b) was conducted in a monocultural school setting, or (c) was focused on any educational stage subsequent to early childhood education.

A total of 298 articles were found and recorded in an analysis chart that was shared among three researchers. In this table, key information was recorded for all articles (references in the APA 6th edition format, the combination of keywords through which each article was identified, and the abstracts), and a column was added for each inclusion and exclusion criterion. The exclusion criteria were also recorded in detail for each case. This procedure is summarized in the following flowchart (Fig. 1).

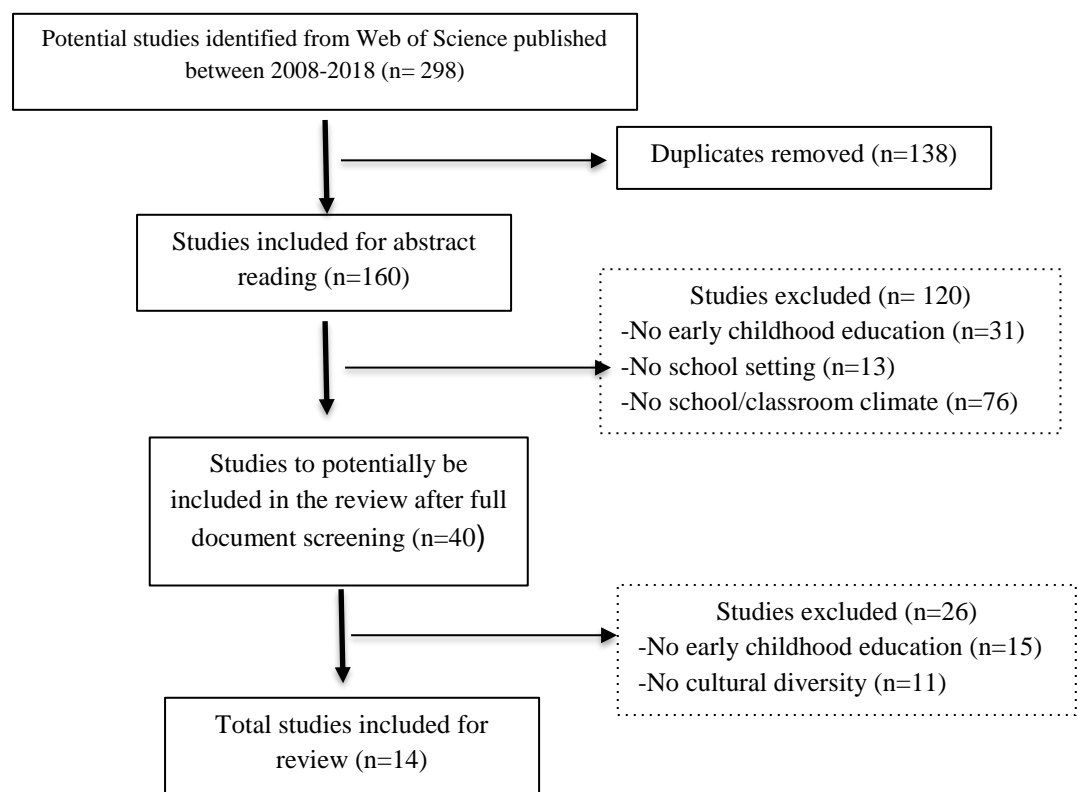


Figure 1. *Flow diagram*

Analysis

Fourteen articles were scrutinized and analysed in depth. For each of the studies, general information about the study (country, participants, and methods) was obtained and included in Table 1 (see Table 1). Brief information regarding participants' ethnic backgrounds was included to provide an overview of the cultural diversity present in the studies. The analysis focused on the identification of aspects related to a positive classroom climate in the studies selected; therefore, the main aspects identified in each study were included in the table. To provide a clear picture of the studies analysed, the articles were organized in the table according to the focus of the research. Consequently, we grouped the articles into three main topics: first, eight studies focused on teacher education/behaviours; second, four articles focused on peer interactions; and finally, two articles focused on child engagement.

Table 1. *Screening of the articles selected*

Focus	Article and method	Country	Participants	Cultural diversity	Main aspects
Teacher interactions	Howes, Fuligni, Hong, Huang & Lara-Cinisomo, 2013 QUAN, observational study	USA	118 children Ages 3-4	Latino (56%), other (44%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Emotional and instructional support Instructional strategies with specific learning goals Supportive feedback
	Morris, Millenky, Raver & Jones, 2013 QUAN, quasi-experimental study	USA	623 children Age 4 51 teachers	Black (more than 40%), White (nearly 10%), Latino (35%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers' ability to address children's behaviour Less sarcasm and anger More instructions
	Thomason & La Paro, 2013 QUAN, descriptive study	USA	740 teachers	White (81.6%), Hispanic (4.1%), African American (13.2%), Asian (2%), American Indian (0.3%), biracial (0.7%), other (1.9%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education level and years of experience Cognitive support
	Hartman & Manfra, 2016 QUAN, descriptive study	Miami, USA	44 low-income children Age 4	Latino (61%), African American (33%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Warm interactions Direct instruction
	Spivak & Farran, 2016 QUAN, RCT	USA	769 children Age 4- 5	White (40%), African American (26%), Latino (24.2%), Asian (6.1%), other (3.7%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More approving behaviour More positive emotional tone
	Curby, Brock & Hamre, 2013 QUAL, descriptive study	USA	2,439 children <i>M</i> age 4.62	White (64%), Latin (15%), African American (13%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Relational closeness, enthusiasm, and respect Emotionally consistent classroom
	Myers & Shedfield, 2009 QUAN, hierarchical linear modelling	USA	140 children Ages 4-5; 140 families and 9 teachers	European American (46%), African American (48%), Latin American (2%), ethnicity not reported (4%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teacher-child closeness Regulation of emotions and behaviours

	McNally & Slutsky, 2018 QUAL, descriptive study	USA	4 preschool teachers Ages 3-5	Caucasian, African American, Hispanic American, biracial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer discipline-related interactions
Peer interactions	Smith, Joan & Bramlett, 2009 QUAN, experimental design.	USA	3 children Age 3-5	Caucasian, African American	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Peer acceptance ratings
	Howes et al., 2011 QUAL, longitudinal study	USA	801 children Age 5	White, African American, Latino	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher teacher–child closeness
	Kim, Wee & Lee, 2016 QUAL, case study	USA	6 children Age 4-5	Korean, Korean American	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comfortable atmosphere
	Johnson, Seidenfeld, Izard & Kobak, 2013 QUAN, hierarchical linear modelling	USA	198 children Ages 3.03-5.18	Latino (36%), African American (60%), unreported (4%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prosocial behaviour
Child engagement	Kim, 2014 QUAL, ethnographic study	USA	11 children, Ages 3-4 7 mothers, 2 grandmothers, 2 teachers, 2 staff members	Korean American	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Values of sharing and interdependence • Friendship
	Williford, Whittaker, Vitiello & Downer, 2014 QUAN, observational study	USA	341 children <i>M</i> age 3.9	Latino (67%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Positive interactions with teachers • Active engagement in classroom tasks

Results

The analysis of the 14 articles selected for this review sheds light on aspects related to a positive classroom climate that can be categorized as "static" aspects, such as grouping, materials or decorative elements, or "dynamic" aspects, such as time or the quality of instruction, teacher-children interactions, and relationships with family members. These aspects can be grouped under the two dimensions that have been agreed upon in the literature to define quality in early childhood education: "structural aspects" and "pedagogical practices" (Andrews et al. 2014; Barros et al. 2016; Løkken et al. 2018; Mathers et al. 2014). In Fig. 2, we classify the aspects that emerged in the studies as fostering a positive classroom climate for preschoolers with minority backgrounds according to these two dimensions.

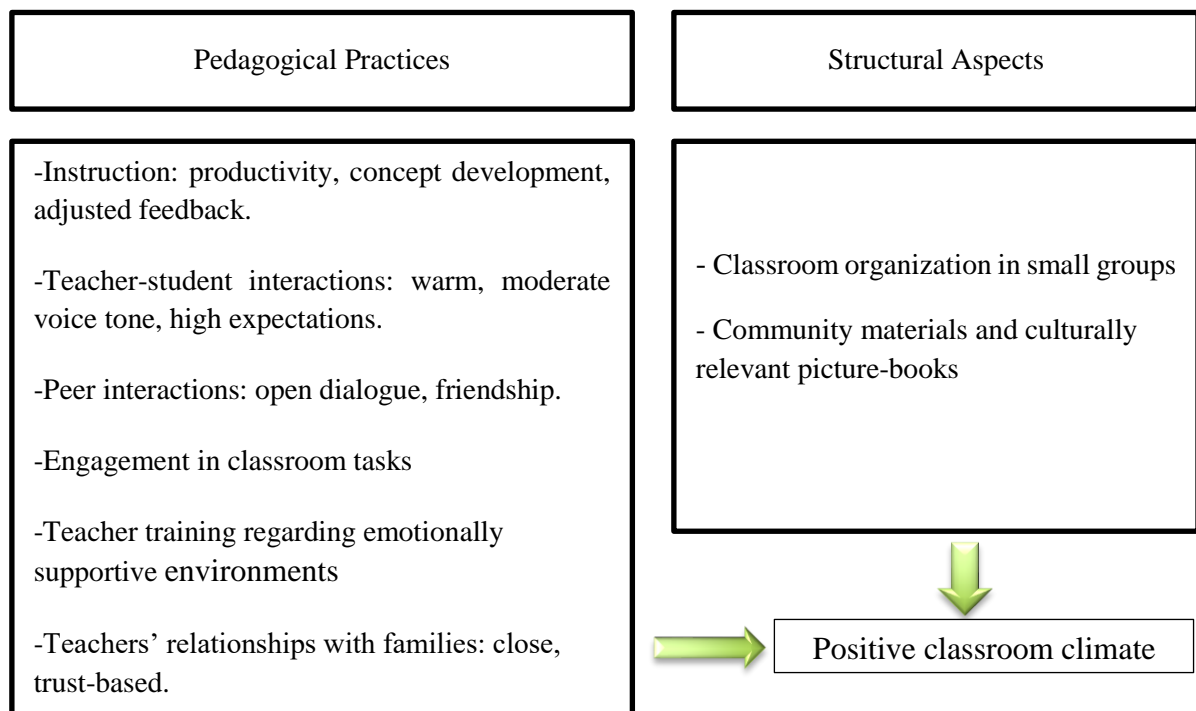


Figure 2. Categorization of the main aspects fostering a positive classroom climate

Pedagogical Practices

Twelve of the fourteen articles analysed reported pedagogical practices related to a positive classroom climate. Specifically, these articles focused on (a) instructional interactions between teachers and students, (b) student engagement in classroom tasks, (c) teacher training on emotionally supportive environments and (d) teacher-family relationships. These practices are presented in detail as follows.

First, the articles highlighted the role that instruction plays in favouring a positive climate in the classroom: increased instructional time and an emphasis on academic competences that foster cognitive development (such as literacy skills) help improve the classroom climate. In particular, the benefits reported in two of the studies highlighted a decrease in classroom disruption and conflicts (Howes et

al. 2013; Hartman and Manfra 2016). Likewise, the more instructionally and emotionally supportive teacher-student relationships are, the more the positive classroom climate (Morris et al. 2013). Howes et al. (2013) noted that an instructional climate characterized by aspects such as productivity, concept development, quality of feedback and children's engagement contributes to an improved classroom climate in ECEC (Howes et al. 2013). However, excessive control or an excessively tight schedule in instruction hinders the positive classroom climate in culturally diverse ECEC (Hartman and Manfra 2016).

Certain forms of interaction between teachers and students favour a positive classroom climate (Howes et al. 2011, 2013; Myers and Shedfield 2009). When the teacher supports and encourages academic tasks, offers feedback tailored to each situation and each child, asks questions, asks for further information, repeats student contributions and encourages participation from a place of respect and support without using sarcasm, there are fewer conflicts in the classroom, and disruptive behaviours decrease (Morris et al. 2013; Stanton-Chapman 2014; Spivak and Farran 2016). Likewise, being close to all students should be a priority for teaching staff in classrooms (Stanton-Chapman 2014; Curby et al. 2013). This objective can be achieved by, for example, teachers knowing the name of each child in the classroom or addressing the student with a moderate tone of voice. The care aspect is also an important component of this equation: when children feel cared for and included in the classroom (by having clear rules that provide security and knowing that their needs and demands are met) by the lead teacher, relations between teachers and students improve, which is reflected in the classroom climate (Myers and Shedfield 2009; Johnson et al. 2013). Maintaining high expectations with all students also positively impacts classroom climate in culturally diverse early childhood education settings (Howes et al. 2011).

During instructional time, certain conditions, such as open dialogue and respect for speaking time, facilitate stronger friendship relationships among students (Kim 2014; Williford et al. 2014). Friendships in the classroom contribute to an enhanced positive classroom climate by reducing conflicts, increasing student participation, and fostering safe and respectful environments (Kim 2014, 2016; Myers and Shedfield 2009; Hartman and Manfra 2016; Smith et al. 2009).

Second, children's engagement in classroom tasks and activities can promote a positive classroom climate since children's active engagement in tasks is associated with gains in emotion regulation. This becomes particularly relevant since successful emotion regulation influences children's functioning in behavioural, academic, and social domains to foster a positive atmosphere in the classroom (Williford et al. 2014).

Third, teacher training has a positive effect on the classroom climate (Howes et al. 2013; Morris et al. 2013; McNally and Slutsky 2018). Two articles indicated that the school should facilitate continuous ECEC training for teachers. In an experimental study, Morris et al. (2013) showed that teachers who had been trained to promote prosocial behaviours and limit disruptive behaviours had fewer conflicts in their classrooms and made better use of the learning time. Likewise, McNally and Slutsky (2018) reported that teachers' professional development related to interactions that contribute to emotionally supportive environments translated into fewer discipline-related behaviours and more emotionally supportive, trust-based behaviours in their classrooms.

Finally, when the relationship between teachers and families is close and based on trust, a positive classroom climate is reported. Engaging in close and trust-based relationships entails, for instance, teachers knowing the names of their students and students' families or legal guardians, and establishing a cordial relationship with them during school entry and exit (McNally and Slutsky 2018). In the same vein, teachers with close relationships with students and their families tend to build an atmosphere of respect with students as well as their families in which children feel respected and safe, as well as motivated and excited to engage in learning opportunities. In the US, this tendency was reported to be particularly important in classrooms where more than half of the children were Latino and did not speak English as their mother tongue (Howes et al. 2013).

Structural Aspects

In this category, we include the results related to (a) the group size and (b) the physical space of the classroom. This section includes information contained in four of the fourteen articles analysed.

These four articles indicated that organizing a classroom into small groups and offering school material in a way that invites peer-to-peer sharing (e.g., no names on pencils) favours a positive classroom climate in culturally diverse school settings (Kim 2014; Howes et al. 2011; McNally and Slutsky 2018).

In ECEC, organizing the class group into small groups allows for more dialogue among the children in each group, which, with clear rules that foster a safe classroom framework, reduces conflict (Howes et al. 2011; Williford et al. 2014). Collective moments (dialogues open to the whole class) also contribute to a lower number of conflicts when children work in small groups (Kim 2014). Johnson et al. (2013) found that in classrooms with a positive climate in which students were organized into small groups, children who were living with a caregiver with depressive symptomatology showed improvements in their prosocial behaviour (Johnson et al. 2013).

In culturally diverse contexts, the selection of children's literature that references the diverse cultural backgrounds of the students present in the classroom fosters a sense of community in the classroom,

which helps to improve the classroom climate (Kim 2016). In particular, culturally relevant picture books are shared by young children in the classroom, and children engage in interactions around the books, creating a supportive literature environment in which children also share their experiences from their diverse social backgrounds. Structural aspects, such as providing community materials in the classroom or ensuring moments to work in small groups, contribute to improving the classroom climate in culturally diverse early childhood settings.

Discussion and Conclusions

With the aim of identifying pedagogical and structural aspects that foster a positive classroom climate in preschool contexts, this systematic review analysed fourteen studies conducted in early years classrooms serving children from minority backgrounds. Overall, the studies addressed some of the main aspects that underlie the classroom climate, such as teacher interactions, peer interactions and child engagement. This finding is consistent with the definition of classroom climate included above and indicates how the classroom atmosphere is shaped by the interactions that take place in the classroom as a whole, including the teacher's behaviour, students' responses to the teacher, the teacher's response to students, and interactions among students (Gazelle 2006). Whereas the previous literature differentiates between positive and negative classroom climate, we decided to explore the aspects related to a positive classroom climate. Specifically, we examined the aspects that lead to a sense of connectedness and an emotionally supportive atmosphere with decreased conflicts and disruptions (Gazelle 2006; Reyes et al. 2012). Overall, eight main aspects related to pedagogical practices and structural aspects emerged from our analysis, which can be discussed with reference to the existing literature in the field.

Classrooms that emphasize instruction through emotional support create an atmosphere where children's behavioural problems and conflicts decrease (Howes et al. 2013; Hartman and Manfra 2016). Particularly, according to Harman and Manfra (2016), children's behavioural problems decrease when they receive warm, direct instruction related to prosocial skills. This is especially important for children with minority backgrounds since a disciplinary environment in the classroom and the school have been reported to have negative effects for more vulnerable students (Mallett 2017). Similarly, the concept of "authentic instruction" emphasizes the importance of the social and emotional aspects of learning that teachers should guarantee (Reyes et al. 2012), such as by offering adjusted feedback and ensuring conceptual development and productivity (Howes et al. 2013). This is consistent with a recent study conducted in the US with 267 children and 93 early educators that showed that children in classrooms characterized by higher levels of emotional support experienced greater improvement in their overall relationships and closeness with the teacher and their peers (Moen et al. 2019).

The relationships that children have with the teacher and their peers shape the atmosphere of the classroom. Therefore, engaging in quality interactions is fundamental to constructing a positive classroom climate, which has also been reported to lead to benefits in cognitive development. Warm, respectful, and emotionally supportive interactions can improve students' learning processes. Accordingly, we identified the following important aspects of child-teacher interactions: for teachers, knowing the name of each child in the classroom, addressing students with a moderate tone of voice and ensuring the establishment of clear rules that provide security, and for children, knowing that their needs and demands are met (Myers and Shedfield 2009; Johnson et al. 2013). These aspects of quality child-teacher interactions shape teachers' positive and encouraging expectations in classrooms serving children with minority backgrounds (Howes et al. 2011). Consequently, professional development that provides teachers with the tools to establish those interactions contributes to fostering a safe and supportive environment (McNally and Slutsky 2018).

Similarly, peer interactions are a key element for boosting children's friendships and positive relationships to foster safe and respectful classroom environments. Indeed, children's friendships contribute to reducing conflicts, increasing student participation, and fostering safe and respectful classroom environments (Fink and Hugues 2019; Kim 2014, Myers and Shedfield 2009; Hartman and Manfra 2016). This is consistent with a study conducted by Oh and Lee (2019) on Korean immigrant children's perspectives of friendship in the USA; the authors found that children recognized friendship based on qualitative interactions that included respect and the offering of mutual help. The results of this systematic review align with the findings of Oh and Lee (2019) on the importance of creating multiple opportunities for interaction and collaboration with diverse peers to encourage mutual appreciation and learning since mutual appreciation and learning are particularly important for the promotion of a positive classroom climate (Reyes et al. 2012).

The organization of the classroom in small groups is a structural aspect that favours children's interactions and engagement in instructional tasks (Howes et al. 2011). This finding is consistent with previous research that explored classrooms serving mostly Roma preschool students and reported that a particular small group organization, referred to as 'interactive groups', promoted an inclusive and emotionally supportive climate (Aubert et al. 2017). Similarly, the organization of culturally and linguistically diverse classrooms into heterogeneous groups capitalizes on children's and families' funds of knowledge. This strategy has been shown to be a facilitator of inclusion and social cohesion (Valls and Kyriakides 2013; Reid et al. 2015), as it increases the presence of the child's home culture and family values in the classroom (Souto-Manning and Mitchell 2010). Along these lines, including books, materials or print environments that reflect cultural diversity stimulates peer dialogues that help children affirm their identities and that show them they are a part of the community in which they live (Bennett et al. 2017; Kim 2016). In the print environment, which includes posters and decorative

artifacts, picture books also contribute to the creation of a supportive literature environment in which children share their experiences from their diverse social backgrounds.

Finally, these pedagogical and structural aspects contribute to fostering close, trust-based relationships between teachers and families, which is especially true for among cultural minorities (Souto-Manning and Swick 2006; Howes et al. 2013). In addition, Rios-Gonzalez et al. (2019) emphasized the importance of encouraging ongoing dialogue between families and teachers so they can agree on the messages and responses provided to children to develop a positive classroom climate.

Limitations and Further Research

Among the limitations most frequently highlighted by the studies analysed, the most prominent limitation was the absence of qualitative techniques that would allow for a deeper understanding of the aspects that contribute to improving the classroom climate in the early years. Of the 14 articles analysed, only two referred to comparing the results obtained with the participants with those of other studies (Kim 2014, 2016). Contributing to improving people's lives is a priority of educational research. Given that research with a social impact has shown the importance of the co-creation of knowledge through the inclusion of the voices of participants through egalitarian dialogue (Soler-Gallart 2017), it would be interesting to emphasize the importance of including participants' voices in the methodologies used in studies. Longitudinal studies would also be relevant to explore the aspects that affect classroom climate over time. When participants are preschoolers, participation in research is especially challenging; however, the ethical involvement of young children in research is children's right in early childhood research (Tisdall 2015). This is especially relevant when the research topic has to do with children's wellbeing, such as their engagement in a positive classroom climate.

The location of the studies could also be interpreted as a limitation of this systematic review, as most of the studies were conducted in the US and included minority populations, such as African Americans or Latinos. Further empirical research could address this issue by exploring other minorities across more diverse countries to better understand the particular role that cultural diversity plays in fostering a positive classroom climate.

In conclusion, despite the limitations acknowledged, this systemic review has reported the current knowledge of pedagogical and structural aspects to better understand how to foster a positive classroom climate in early childhood education for children with minority backgrounds. Indeed, these results have practical implications. In particular, early years teachers working in culturally diverse classrooms could adjust their own practices to foster cognitively and emotionally supportive interactions with their students and among their students and could structure classrooms in small groups, as well as implement other practices found to be beneficial for a positive classroom climate. Overall, for many young children

belonging to cultural minorities, the risk of being excluded from a quality education might be reduced if their teachers create a positive classroom climate.

Conflicts of interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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2.2 Artículo 2. Help and Solidarity Interactions in Interactive Groups: A Case Study with Roma and Immigrant Preschoolers

Khalifaoui, A., García-Carrión, R., & Villardón-Gallego, L., Duque, E. (2020). Help and Solidarity Interactions in Interactive Groups: A Case Study with Roma and Immigrant Preschoolers. *Social Sciences*, 9, 116. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9070116>

Abstract

Peer interactions in early childhood education play a key role in establishing the first structures of social relationships and foundations for future development. Engaging in social exchanges with different people enriches children's concurrent and future learning opportunities. Building on the importance of diversifying interactions, interactive groups (IGs) are a specific dialogue-based classroom organization format that creates an inclusive learning environment by allocating students to small heterogeneous groups with an adult volunteer per group. This classroom organization format has produced reported evidence of enhancing social cohesion and academic achievement, mainly in elementary education. However, its potential to foster positive peer interactions in Early Childhood Education among disadvantaged children remains unexplored. Therefore, this case study explores in depth the type and frequency of positive peer interactions in interactive groups in a preschool classroom serving mainly Roma and immigrant children with a very low SES. The results show that in this context, children acknowledge each other's work and provide help, guidance, and solidarity interactions when solving academic tasks. Our analysis reveals that children internalize the rules and functioning of the IG since those aspects emerge in their conversations during the activity. Implications for practitioners and policymakers are also discussed

Keywords. Interactive Learning Environments; Interactive Groups; Positive Peer Interactions; Early Childhood Education; Help and Solidarity Interactions; Roma and Immigrant Children

Introduction

Early experiences in childhood are fundamental for children's social development. Specifically, peer interactions during this critical period are particularly important, since they are key elements in the construction of children's social, cognitive and academic development (McCoy et al. 2017). Previous research has widely demonstrated that contexts that offer responsive, warm and sensitive interactions benefit children's foundational social skills (Shonkoff and Phillips 2000). However, being exposed to poor interactions in early childhood may hinder children's opportunities to get the best start in life. This may affect especially to Roma and immigrant children who usually are overrepresented in low performing classrooms with low quality interactions (Heller et al. 2012). Frequently, they benefit less from high quality teaching and learning and consequently struggling academically and showing high dropout rates and school absenteeism (Alexiadou 2019). Therefore, it is necessary to explore educational settings that are reversing this situation and promoting successful learning for these groups. One asset in this matter are the Interactive Groups, a specific dialogue-based classroom organization that creates an inclusive learning environment by allocating students to small heterogeneous groups with an adult volunteering in each group (Valls and Kyriakides 2013). Interactive Groups has reported evidence of enhancing social cohesion and academic achievement, mainly in elementary education and with underrepresented populations. However, its potential to foster positive peer interactions in Early Childhood Education among disadvantaged children remains unexplored.

Due to the key role that peer interactions play later in life and the potential that IGs have shown so far, this study seeks to respond to the following research questions: (a) what type of positive interactions takes place in IGs among young children with Roma and immigrant backgrounds in an Early Childhood Education? ; (b) With what frequency do they occur? To answer these questions, classroom observations were conducted in a school located in a very low SES neighbourhood in Northern Spain, where most of the inhabitants are Roma and immigrants. The rationale for choosing this school is that despite the disadvantaged social and living conditions of the population in this area, the school has achieved high standards since 2010. Our findings show that IGs increase the number of opportunities for young children to engage in positive peer interactions. Particularly, this study reports the help and solidarity interaction frequently emerged when children are working in IGs. These results provide useful knowledge to inform the decisions and practices of ECE teachers as well as of policymakers based on research findings that contribute to impact positively in young children's school engagement and social relationships (Reyes et al, 2012) This could contribute to ending with long-established education practices of segregation that Roma and immigrant children face since the earliest school years (Alexiadou 2019). Hence, tackling these inequalities in education is key to achieve the global goal of ensuring high quality ECE for all and to set the foundations for a better society.

Literature Review

Early childhood is an important period during which individuals establish initial structures of social relationships. Thus, children's socialization in the early years is a critical building block for their concurrent and future development. This process takes place through children's interactions with adults and peers while they participate in various activities (Booren, Downer & Vitiello 2012). According to Haanpää, Kuula and Hakovirta (2019), peer relationships also play a key role in infants' perceived life satisfaction; healthy or positive peer interactions might constitute a stronger predictor of wellbeing at early ages compared to sociodemographic factors, family income or material deprivation. Particularly in the school context, young children's relationships with teachers and peers have the potential to anticipate school success. Children who have warm and positive relationships show higher achievement and higher social competence than children whose relationships are characterized by conflict (Bierman et al. 2009).

Overall, children's relationships with peers constitute the way in which they share their routines, their values and experiences, thereby creating horizontal relationships where they learn new functions in ways that are less possible in the vertical dyadic interaction between an adult and a child (De Groot Kim 2005). When such interactions are weak or unsatisfied, research has pointed out some of the adverse consequences, including social isolation, loneliness, social rejection, or even bullying, along with a negative self-perception of social competence (Koster et al. 2009). Therefore, satisfactory, healthy and positive peer interactions are more desirable. According to Koster and colleagues (2009), when studying peer group features in inclusive education, satisfactory peer interactions consist of those that include being an accepted member of a group, having at least one mutual friendship and participating actively and equivalently in group activities. Indeed, the nature of the activity settings might support or constrain certain patterns of peer interactions. For instance, large groups have been shown to facilitate teacher-child interaction, whereas free choice or small groups promote peer interactions. According to Booren, Downer and Vitiello (2012), children might have fewer opportunities or feel less comfortable engaging, conversing, and positively asserting themselves with their peers in settings that are primarily teacher-directed, such as large group activities. In contrast, children's interactions with peers are more positive in child-directed settings, such as child-focused activities in small groups or free play, compared to a large group.

Therefore, children's participation in group activities could be boosted by certain types of group configurations, while other configurations could hinder it. For instance, ability grouping has been widely demonstrated to have long-lasting adverse consequences for the construction of strong social relationships. The literature on this matter has already evidenced how social stigmatization, lowered academic expectations, and decreased motivation are some of the effects that students in low-ability groups may experience (Chorzempa and Graham 2006), along with an undermined confidence and

sense of engagement (Higgins et al. 2015; Roberts-Holmes & Kitto 2019). Students from minority backgrounds and low socioeconomic status are overrepresented in the low-ability groups (Boaler, Wiliam and Brown 2000). In addition, when children are organized according to their ability (generally, as perceived by the teacher), social relationships across groups become difficult.

However, cooperative classroom atmospheres have reported healthier social attitudes towards peers of different abilities (Hallam, Ireson & Davies 2004). Cooperation, friendship and social mixing are among the advantages that Tereshchenko and colleagues (2019) have shown when examining learners' attitudes towards mixed attainment grouping, along with greater self-esteem and positive attitudes towards school. Such cooperative contexts constitute an appropriate social scenario for children to incorporate empathy into their social relationship repertoire, as empathy is an important part of children's relational skills and a prerequisite for successful interaction with peers (Nergaard 2019). These kinds of social interactions were at the heart of the research conducted by Acar, Hong and Wu (2017), who deeply explored the role of teacher presence and scaffolding in the nature of peer interactions in early childhood education (ECE). Acar and colleagues (2017) designed a coding scheme to gain a better understanding of the type of preschoolers' exchanges and whether they varied with the presence and support of the teacher. Specifically, they distinguished between positive peer interactions (such as acknowledging peers' work, offering guidance or seeking and providing help, expressing emotions or following established rules) and negative peer interactions (such as competing with a peer or ignoring them). Their analysis of young children's exchanges concluded that the number of positive peer interactions was over two times higher in child-directed activities compared to adult-directed activities in preschool. The analysis also revealed that teacher social scaffolding, when it occurred, was associated with children's positive peer interactions. Therefore, although adult guidance and scaffolding play an important role in fostering young children's social development (Svetlova, Nichols and Brownell 2010), the potential of peer interactions in that matter is also crucial.

Building on the importance of peer interactions and adult scaffolding, a specific classroom organization format, namely, interactive groups (IGs), has combined both aspects effectively to foster children's social development and academic achievements in many diverse contexts worldwide. In the IG format, students are placed in small groups, which are always heterogeneous, with the aim of ability grouping. Each group has a different task to solve while being supported by their peers and by a non-teacher adult volunteering in each small group. After a specific time, each group moves to another task. At the end of the session, all the groups have performed all the tasks. The volunteer fosters the children's interactions, and the teacher coordinates the class and provides support when necessary (Valls and Kyriakides 2013). The IG format is grounded in the dialogic learning approach (Flecha 2015), which is based on seven principles that guide interactions to achieve high-quality learning. The principles of solidarity and egalitarian dialogue are particularly relevant for achieving equity, learning and inclusion.

Furthermore, this dialogic approach, as part of a long tradition in education with many other scholars in the field of dialogic teaching and learning, has contributed improvements that have opened pathways towards the achievement of sustainable development goals in education (García-Carrión et al. 2020).

For instance, a recent study involving 442 elementary students showed that this specific interactive learning environment boosts elementary students' prosocial behaviour when considering help, solidarity and friendship (Villardón-Gallego et al. 2018). Participants recalled how the IG format helped them establish relationships of trust and friendship with those with whom they rarely interacted prior to the intervention. In the same vein, when Díez-Palomar and Cabré (2015) explored the types of interactions that take place within IGs when individuals come to a meaningful understanding of mathematics, help interactions were among the productive discussions in which elementary students were involved. Indeed, while children are working within IGs, they can help each other, which leads to them learning better (García-Carrión and Díez-Palomar 2015). Moreover, the IG format has been shown to be effective in promoting the bonds of solidarity and mutual help among native and immigrant students in high school (Valero, Redondo-Sama and Elboj 2018) as well as among Roma students in elementary education (Flecha & Soler, 2013). Indeed, this approach has particularly benefit the education of Roma children, who face discrimination in school that leads towards high absenteeism and early school leaving (Kirova and Thorlakson 2015). According to Alexiadou (2019), Roma children often attend schools of poor quality, which implies that about 18% of Roma between 6 and 24 years-old, are placed in an educational level lower than that corresponding to their age, and often in segregated schools or classrooms. This reality has exacerbated the stereotypes and the deficit thinking approach towards the Roma, increasing the educational exclusion they have been suffering for centuries (Flecha & Soler, 2013). Nevertheless, many efforts have been done to counteract this exclusion by creating supportive and inclusive learning contexts, such as IGs.

When considering earlier stages of education, such as ECE, only one study has been identified that explores the potential of the IG format as a tool for inclusion in ECE (Aubert, Molina, Schubert and Vidu 2017). The results of this study revealed that the IG format benefits children and promotes their cognitive, social and emotional development. This is especially important in regard to Roma and children with immigrant backgrounds because of the persistent social and educational inequalities they face starting in their earliest years (Vandekerckhove and Aarssen 2019). However, there has not been in-depth research on peer interactions in interactive groups. Due to the key role that the early years play later in life and the potential that the IG format has shown thus far, this study aims to explore in depth the type of positive interactions and the frequencies with which they take place in IGs among young children with Roma and immigrant backgrounds in a school located in a very low SES area in Spain. Our hypothesis is the IGs foster solidarity and help interactions.

Materials and Methods

The instrumental case study design fitted the purpose of this research as it allows gaining a deep understanding of a specific social activity within its important circumstances (Stake 1995). Our study focuses on a preschool classroom. In this section, the school context, the participants, the procedure, the ethical considerations, and the data collection and analysis processes are described.

The school context

The school is located in a very low SES neighbourhood in Basque Country, Northern Spain. The school serves children from 2 to 16 years of age, including elementary, primary and secondary education grades. Most of the inhabitants are Roma and migrant people. Despite the disadvantaged social and living conditions of the population in this area, the school has achieved high standards since 2010. In 2013, the school received a national award for its status as a learning community, particularly for its emphasis on providing high-quality interactions among students and a highly diverse population to improve learning and social relationships. It is a community-based school where family and community members usually participate and volunteer in several activities, such as IGs. Organizing the classes into IGs is coherent with the school mission and vision, as those are oriented towards providing the best education to every single child.

Participants and the classroom

The current study focuses on IG sessions within a classroom composed of 20 5-year-old students (10 girls and 10 boys), all of whom received free school meals. Of the 20 students, 53% were Roma, 20% were Moroccan, 15% were Pakistani and 12% were Algerian. The teacher was Basque and had 11 years of experience in ECE; the school year when this study was conducted was her first time teaching at this school. In general, the teacher prepares the activities for the students to solve in IGs. Those tasks must be cognitively challenging. The students recite the ground rules for working together in groups just before starting, i.e., help each other, share the material and tolerate no violence when doing the curricular tasks. These rules are agreed upon by all the children, the teachers and the volunteers in an assembly every school term.

In brief, for each session of IG, there are 4 small groups of children with one volunteer each. Each group has approximately 10 minutes to solve a task, and then they move to the next table until they complete the rotation. The non-teacher adult is in charge of fostering peer interactions to solve the task by providing the support and help they might need. The language used in the classroom is Basque, since it is the official language of instruction in public schools. However, for all the children Basque is the second or third language, since their mother tongue is Spanish or Arabic, among others, In the IGs children and adults combined both Spanish and Basque.

Table 1 shows the composition of the small groups, which ensured the maximum possible heterogeneity by taking into account the children’s skills, knowledge, cultural background and gender.

Table 1. Group Organization and Gender of Children

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
Omar (m)	Zainab (f)	Araitz (m)	Amina (f)
Esther (f)	Fatima (f)	Mohamed (m)	Tarik (m)
Malika (f)	Jorge (m)	Miriam (f)	Hassan (m)
Maria (f)	Elisabeth (f)	Pedro (m)	Jon (m)
Juan (m)	Jose (m)	Vanesa (f)	Silvia (f)

All the names are pseudonyms.

Data collection

A total of 10 classroom observations were conducted during the 2018-2019 academic year, particularly in November (1 session), January (3 sessions), February (2 sessions), March (3 sessions) and May (1 session). Peer interactions were observed and audio was recorded in each of the small groups, with the researcher (1st author) following all the groups and participating weekly in the class. Especially when the research involves young children, qualitative observation is one of the participatory methods that is more inclusive, respectful and closely related to children’s rights (Tisdall 2015). In May 2019, a discussion group was conducted in which the whole class and the researcher interacted with the children in Spanish (17 children attended that day) indicated that they were willing to participate, along with the lead teacher and coordinator. The aim of the discussion group was to check the preliminary results of the observations with the children. During this session, the results obtained during the analysis were shared with the children, and they were invited to share anecdotes or examples that could complement the information through questions such as “do you think you help each other in IG?”, or “What happens in IG if someone breaks a rule?” and the following prompts “In IG I feel...”, “during IG, I get to know ...”, “When I am in IG I always do...”.

Procedure

The aim of the study and its potential benefits were discussed with the head teacher of the school in October 2018. This information was shared with the ECE teacher team in a meeting held in November 2018. With the agreement of the classroom teacher, the coordinator and the students’ families, IG observations were conducted between November 2018 and May 2019. To do so, one researcher volunteered with the IGs during the Thursday morning maths sessions (9:30 a 10:45), during which class observations were audio-recorded with the children’s assent. During those mornings, the researcher gathered with the teacher team early in the morning (8:30-9:00) to talk about school life during the week and the tasks to be completed during the following IG session. After the IG session, the researcher and the teacher team shared their thoughts and impressions about the session.

Ethics

Ethical issues were addressed throughout in accordance with the European Early Childhood Education Research Association (EECERA) Ethical Code (2014). Deep respect for the rights of children was ensured by giving them a voice and the ability to participate actively in all the decisions and actions that affected them. Consequently, the researchers ensured that the children’s participation was voluntary and not coerced by collecting informed consent from both the school and the families. In the case of the children, the researchers ensured their informed assent by explaining the details of the study and highlighting the key role that they could play in it (Truscott, Graham and Powell 2019). The researchers reminded the students every day that they could withdraw from the study at any moment without any consequence. When a student did not want to be recorded, the researchers did not put the recorder at his/her table, and consequently, no audio recording was registered from this specific interactive group. This process required close attention to the nonverbal expressions and prompts of young children to ensure their ongoing willingness to be involved or to have their activities observed (Bitou and Waller 2017). The children showed a willingness to participate in the study and were committed as active agents in it (Cuevas-Parra and Tisdall 2019).

Data Analysis

This study followed a two-step analysis strategy to ensure a rigorous qualitative process. First, the audio recordings of the 10 sessions observed were listened to and transcribed verbatim, that is, 40 small group discussions in interactive groups. All the children’s utterances were screened since these utterances were considered the unit of analysis. For the analysis, we used an adaptation of the coding scheme of positive peer interactions proposed by Acar and colleagues (2017). The original scheme included 12 categories, for verbal and for non verbal interactions. Since the purpose of our study focused only on verbal interactions, the category “actively engaged” was excluded. In a second round, we clustered those 11 categories based on similar patterns of child interaction, resulting in the following 4 clusters: (1) acknowledgment and interest in peers, (2) help and guidance interactions, (3) expresses him/herself and (4) talks about the rules.

Table 2. Adaptation of the Coding Scheme of Positive Peer Interactions of Acar, Hong and Wu 2017; 25

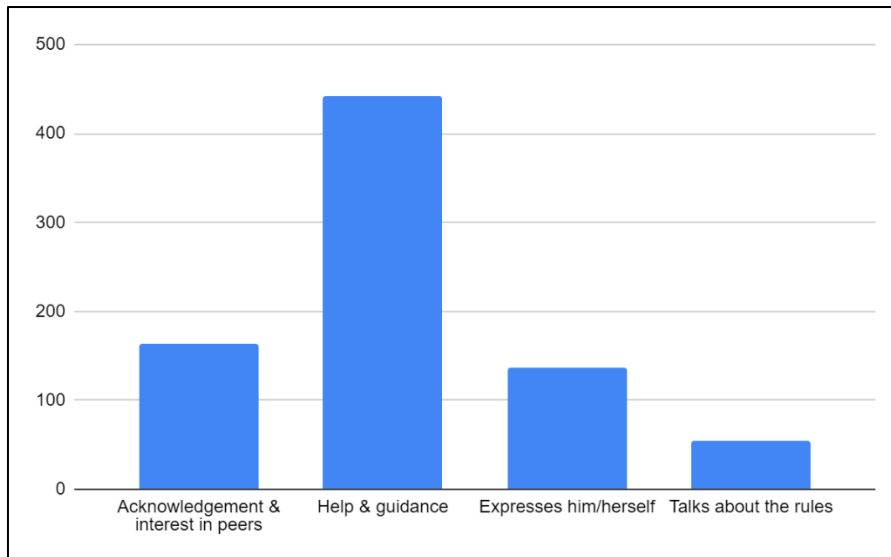
Cluster	Positive peer interaction	Description
Acknowledgement and interest in peers	Simple acknowledgment	Child provides or receives simple acknowledgments; supports peers’ statements; gains attention of peers; shows pride in peers.
	Shows interests in peers	Child imitates a peer’s verbalization or shows interest in what the peer does.
	Joins and/or invites peers	Child verbally joins a peer (who is alone) in a specific activity or invites the peer to an activity; beginning/initial stage of play.

Help and guidance interactions	Asks simple questions	Child asks a question to another peer; the question should not be a help-seeking question. Child provides explanation and/or information to a peer; provides help to a peer; offers help or shares materials that she/he was using; models behaviour; or indirectly helps peer accomplish or complete a task.
	Helps (active)	Child seeks or receives explanation and/or information from a peer; requests or receives help from a peer.
	Seeks or receives help (passive)	Child is leading a peer in an activity.
	Leads peers (active)	Child is being led by a peer in an activity.
Expresses him/herself	Is led by peer (passive)	Child is expressing emotions
	Expresses emotions	Child describes what s/he sees, hears, wants, needs and/or does.
Talks about the rules	Describes	Child recalls the rules and talks about them; child follows classroom rules; child follows the rules of the group activity
	Follows the rule	

Results

A total of 797 children's interactions were audible, transcribed and classified into the corresponding categories. This section is divided according to the four clusters specified in Table 2. As represented in Figure 1, the 'help and guidance interactions' category (442/797, 56%) contains the vast majority of the children's utterances, followed by the 'acknowledgment and interest in peers' category (163/797, 20%). The 'expresses him/herself' category (137/797, 17%) represents the third most-frequent cluster, followed by those utterances wherein the children recalled the rules of the IG during the activity (55/797, 7%). Extracts of the children's interactions are included for each cluster and presented in the following sub-sections.

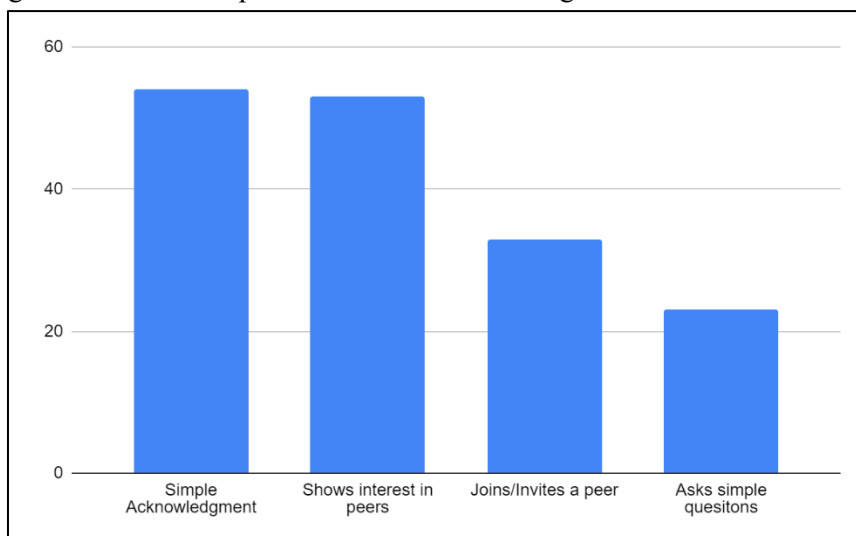
Figure 1. Positive Peer Interactions in IGs



Acknowledgment interactions and interest in peers

This cluster gathered references from the following categories: ‘simple acknowledgement’ (54/163, 33%), ‘shows interest in peers’ (53/163, 32%), ‘invites or joins a peer’ (33/163, 20%) and ‘asks simple questions’ (23/163, 15%). In other words, when a child provided or received acknowledgment from peers in the IG—for example, supportive interactions or showing pride in a peer—such utterances were classified in this wider cluster, along with interactions reflecting an invitation to a peer to join one’s work. Simple questions were also classified in this dimension, as they show interest in one another’s opinions or experiences. Figure 2 details the categories of positive peer interactions included in this cluster.

Figure 2. Categories and their frequencies within ‘acknowledgment interactions and interest in peers’



In this vein, the results showed frequent exchanges acknowledging peers’ work or effort during the task: 54 interactions were included in the ‘simple acknowledgment’ category, resulting in 34% of the

utterances in the ‘acknowledgment interactions and interest in peers’ cluster. Sometimes a single pupil acknowledged the effort of the entire group (e.g., “Hurray!”); other times, all the group joined together their encouragement to acknowledge a single peer’s effort. For instance, the following excerpt details an interaction among Tarik, Jon, Hassan and Amina. Amina had difficulties solving the task. When she finally solved the problem while being supported by her classmates, the group acknowledged her efforts as follows:

Tarik: “Come on, Amina!”

Jon: “Well done! Very well!”

Hassan: “Well, well!”

(14/02/2019. Session 8.1)

Across all the data analysed, the phrase “Well done, very well” is used the most by the children to support each other in the IG task process. Indeed, the power of teacher expectations beginning in the early years is well known in the literature; thus, these interactions provide some insights into the power of children’s expectations in preschool.

When peers showed interest in a classmate’s work, we also considered this an indirect type of acknowledgment, for instance, when a child asked a question with a positive tone to highlight interest in a peer’s work (e.g., Silvia: “Did you do this, Hassan?”). Other times, a peer’s work was valued through a positive comparison between one student’s production and that of another student (e.g., “Look, they are similar; mine and yours are identical.”)

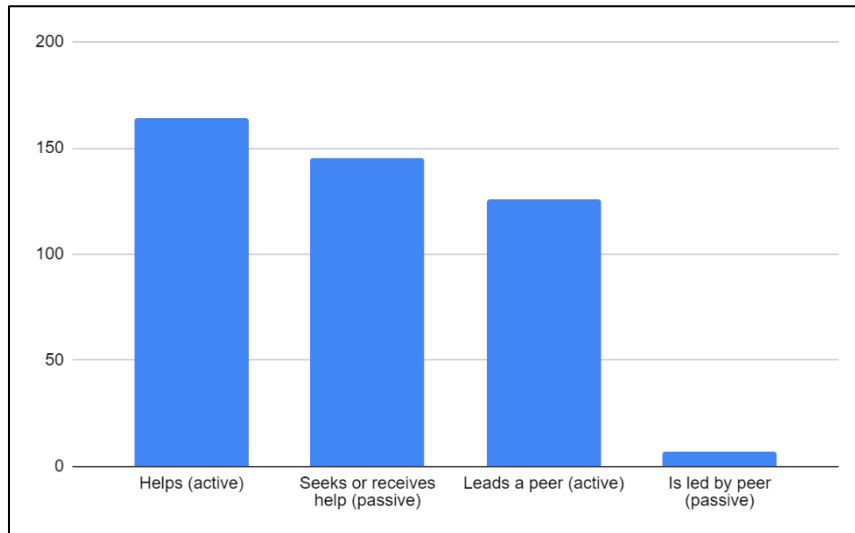
Twenty percent of the utterances coded under the ‘acknowledgment interactions and interest in peers’ cluster referred to ‘joins or invites a peer’. For instance, when Gisela said “We can do it together” (24/01/2019_session 2.2), she was inviting Omar to join her in the task. Simple questions were exchanged within IGs 23 times.

Help and guidance interactions

This cluster grouped all the interactions that referred to providing explanations or information to a peer, providing help to a peer, offering help or sharing material that a student was using or indirectly helping peer to complete a given task. This kind of interaction was identified 164 times (out of 442), resulting in 38% of the total interactions coded within the ‘help and guidance interactions’ cluster. In the same vein, interactions regarding seeking and receiving help were classified when children requested or received help for a peer, and this occurred 145 times, resulting in 32% of the total references within this cluster. These two categories were content-linked to offering guidance between peers; therefore, the utterances classified into the ‘leads a peer’ and ‘is led by a peer’ categories were also considered within

the ‘help and guidance interactions’ cluster. These categories represent 28% of this cluster. Figure 3 offers an overview of the categories and their frequencies within the ‘help and guidance interactions’ cluster.

Figure 3. Categories and their frequencies within ‘help and guidance interactions’



Providing help interactions

References to offering help such as “Can I help you?” and “Do you need help?” were found in the children's dialogues, with a total of 164 interactions in the 10 sessions analysed. In each of the 10-minute small group observations, these questions appeared up to 25 times. Sometimes a partner helped spontaneously by explaining to those who had difficulties with the task how to solve the task and supervising them. The process of providing these explanations and making such thoughts explicit increases the learning of both children, namely, those who explain and those who receive the explanation. The following excerpts illustrate some of the help offered during the IGs:

Silvia: “Hassan, can I help you? It is very easy, you’ll see.”

(28/03/2019_session 1.1)

Juan: “Malika, look, you can do it this way: 1-2-3-4 or this way: 1...2...3 and 4. Do you see there are two ways?”

(22/11/2018_session 3.2)

In IGs, students are not given roles as they are in other types of group work. In the previous excerpt, Juan helped Malika, but this helps is usually interchangeable since the dynamics of the IG format and the ground rules foster open and flexible interactions in which everyone is invited to contribute to the dialogue equally, opinions can be expressed and discussed, and help is fostered and promoted.

Often, peers' help serves as a scaffolding for understanding the task. The following excerpt details how Jon offered to help "give clues" and ask Tarik questions and how he guided and supported Tarik until he solved the problem:

Jon: "May I give you any clues?"

Tarik: "Yes."

Jon: "Let's see... what do you think, this or this one?"

Tarik: "This one."

Jon: "Ok. And... this one... and that one are similar?"

Tarik: "No."

Jon: "So, why is there one yellow and here one green?"

Tarik: "Because they are not alike."

Jon: "Therefore, the yellow one..."

Tarik: "Cross it out."

Jon: "That's it!"

(24/01/2019_session 2.3)

Interactions related to 'offering help' were observed in the groups when working together on the tasks (Tarik: "Hassan, can I explain it?" 02/05/2019_session 4.3), and those interactions appeared spontaneously or were requested by another child. However, help interactions were also observed when children offered some materials (Jon: "Why don't you also use my sheets because I have more" 07/03/2019_session 9.1) or gave prompts for completing a task (Amina: "Hassan, can I help you? Can I help you find your file?" 03/14/2019_session 7.1). Both when the children helped spontaneously and when the help was a response to a request, the analysis revealed that the interactions of offering help were not an isolated event during the IGs. Jon's words recorded reflect the basic idea of the IG: "If you need help, we help you" (02/14/2019_session 8.4).

Seeking and receiving help

Students sought help to solve a task 145 times, resulting in 32% of utterances within the 'help and guidance interactions' cluster. Sometimes the request was addressed to a specific peer who replied positively, as exemplified by the following excerpts:

Hassan: "Jon, how is that?"

(02/05/2019. Session 4.1)

Fatima: "Zainab, can you help me?"

Zainab: "Yes."

(14/03/2019. Session 7.2)

Fatima: “That’s so difficult... Omar, can you help me with this?”

(18/03/2019. Session 1.3)

On the other hand, the children also internalized the dynamics of asking for and receiving help. Maria, one of the girls, reflected on the importance of helping, especially for those who need it most:

Malika: “Maria... Maria, help. I don’t know.”

Esther: “Maria helps me.”

Maria: “No, I will help everyone. Because if not, if I help only one of you, then the other one will be mad at me, the time will pass, and we will not do anything. No, I must help. Therefore, I will do my work and help a little. Let us see, first the little one. Let’s see, what do you want, Malika?”

(28/03/2019. Session 1.2)

There were no interactions of asking for help that remained unanswered or unresolved, which indicates that the dynamic of the IG format fosters solidarity in such a way that no child is left behind.

Leading and being led by a peer

During the IG sessions, the children showed the tendency to offer supervision to a peer, whether someone verbally requested it or was simply quietly stumped and needed help. Due to the nature of the analysed material (only audio, without video images), the researchers could only identify verbally expressed interactions of this nature, which were frequently closely related to actively providing help to a peer. Overall, 128 interactions of this kind were registered, resulting in 29% of the content within the ‘help and guidance interactions’ cluster. The following two excerpts exemplify how two pupils led a peer by providing guidelines for solving a task. The first examples shows how Maria guided Esther through the task’s stages. The second example shows how Silvia helped Hassan to figure out the task by solving together the composition of the number 8.

Maria: “Esther, this is done, ok? Now, you keep going with the next.”

(28/03/2019_session 1.2)

Silvia: “Hassan, you put 7 and I put 1.”

(28/03/2019_session 1.1)

Expresses him/herself

Describing one's actions and expressing one's emotions come together in the 'expresses him/herself' cluster. During IGs, the children were observed putting words to their actions. By doing so, they specified their thoughts and the steps they followed to complete the task they were involved in. Such statements were classified in the 'describe' category, as no peer interaction intention was identified. In other words, the children's utterances were categorized here when the purpose of such a statement was mainly to guide their own actions. Overall, 18% (137/797) of the total coded utterances were of this type. The following extracts are examples:

Maria: "I thought we had to find the missing one, but I know this one is bigger. However, this one cannot be because its colour is different. Therefore, it indicates that this is not..."
(24/02/2019_session 2.2)

Silvia: "This is brown because this is 8, and it has the same form as this 8."
(22/11/2018_session 3.3)

Talks about the rules

During the IGs, the children talked and remembered the rules previously agreed to in their groups. A total of 55 interactions talking about the rules were registered, which results in the children remembering some of the rules an average of 5 times during each IG session.

Helping, sharing and reporting unfair situations or inappropriate behaviours were the rules agreed upon by the class. Helping each other was one of the rules that the group established from the very beginning, and as has been shown, this rule is a common practice during the IGs. This principle has been internalized by the children, and it emerged in the dialogue between peers, as shown in the following excerpts in which Maria and Fatima remembered that they must help each other solve the task and that this help can be given to any peer:

Maria: "Well... we have to help each other. We must help."
(28/003/2019_session 1.2)

Fatima: "You can help anyone or everybody. You can help her... or her..."
(24/01/2019_session 2.1)

The materials belonged to everyone, and everyone agreed to take care of them and share them. A reminder of this rule emerged at different times, i.e., when a child did not respect the materials and especially when a child used manipulative materials. When a student reminded the group about the rule, the children in the group took a stand in supporting and respecting the rule. The following dialogue is

an example of this, in which Vanesa and Mohamed reminded Pedro, who was monopolizing more strips than he needed to solve the task, that the material belonged to everyone and must be shared:

Vanesa: “No, it’s not yours, it belongs to everyone. You must share it because it belongs to everyone and is not only for you. They belong to everyone.”

Pedro: “It doesn’t matter.”

Vanesa: “It matters. We have to share (...). It is for everyone.”

Mohamed: “Yes, it is for everyone.”

Vanesa: “So, listen, we have to share. (Put the material) in the middle, and that’s it.”

(14/02/2019. Session 8.1)

Regarding the rule of reporting unfair situations or inappropriate behaviours, the children also agreed to always take a stand in favour of the victim and to consider those children who take a stand as brave and as heroes, thereby making them attractive in the group. The following excerpt details when Vanesa spoke aloud to denounce Araitz’s attitude, who was misusing the material instead of focusing on the task. Vanesa complained by reflecting on that rule, and Araitz changed his behaviour and refocused on the task:

Vanesa: “Araitz, this is not for that, it’s for doing the tasks. We are heroes, and heroes do not mistreat the materials that are mean for work. And I don’t like that [what Araitz was doing then]. I enjoy having friends who share their things and who listen and respect the rules.”

(28/03/2019_session 1.4)

Disruptive behaviours that broke the rules were openly rejected. Thus, the space for dialogue and help offered by the IGs contributes to the internalization of positive attitudes to build and maintain an egalitarian space for dialogue in which everyone can learn and flourish.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the analysis of peer interactions in Interactive Groups, our results show that preschool children mainly acknowledge and show interest in peers, provide and receive help and guidance, and internalize the rules, which they remind others about during group work. This specific classroom organization format appears to be fruitful in encouraging children to make their thoughts explicit, which is already shown to nurture early development (Vygotsky, 1978).

The acknowledgment among children and their attempts to verbally value their peers’ work or efforts to succeed in the task helps to create and maintain a highly motivating learning space in which every child is believed to excel. Thus, children’s expectancies might have a positive impact on peers’

academic and social performance, just as adult expectancies are already known to have such an impact (Rosenthal 1987). These acknowledgment interactions that highly value peers' doings might be aligned with the warm interactions that Bierman et al. (2009) suggested are related to school success.

Our findings show that the most frequent peer interactions during IGs are related to help and guidance. This outcome reveals the potential of this form of classroom organization to foster solidarity interactions among young children, even among those who might face greater challenges in education (Vandekerckhove and Aarssen 2019). In line with previous research, this study reveals that the IG format is an effective classroom organization for fostering core values, such as solidarity and empathy, through effectively promoting help and guidance interactions among peers (Díez-Palomar & Olivé 2015; García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar 2015). Moreover, these results show how the IG format promotes the bonds of solidarity and mutual help among disadvantaged preschoolers. This is consistent with previous research that has already demonstrated similar patterns with elementary and secondary students (Valero et al. 2018).

Based on the prominence of the help interactions we observed, we argue that the IG format challenges the idea that immigrant children are not stimulated to ask other children for help or to give support to another child (Peleman et al. 2019). Indeed, seeking and providing help appear to be optimal scaffolds for the children to support each other in understanding tasks. As the participants of this study came from disadvantaged Roma and immigrant families, the findings related to the children's interactions that provided and sought help and guidance might support the findings of Chen, Zhu and Chen (2013), who concluded that adversities might increase children's solidarity behaviours. As the observed help interactions included not only academic support—scaffolding—and guidance but also help related to sharing materials, this study challenges previous conceptions about children's limitations to act on the knowledge of unequal distribution of material (Cowell et al. 2015).

Along with enhancing solidarity among young children, IG has been shown to promote empathy. According to Aubert and colleagues (2017), children who participate in IGs from ECE onwards develop much more empathy for their peers and are more attentive to another person's needs. The present case study broadens this previous knowledge by revealing that the IG format not only fosters children's awareness of others' needs but also encourages them to act by offering help and guidance to peers and being emotionally supportive, thereby bridging the gap between being empathic and acting empathically (Fehr, Bernhard and Rockenbach 2008). This interactive learning environment, which has already been shown to promote prosocial behaviour, such as solidarity and friendship, creates a feedback loop in social situations, as students who have friends and who are socially accepted by their peers also tend to be more sociable, cooperative and prosocial (Villardón-Gallego et al. 2018). Indeed, socially supportive environments where friendship flourish have been identified as a powerful

protective tool for children to prevent violent situations (Rios-Gonzalez et al. 2019). For such spaces to succeed, an agreement about the rules is crucial.

Among the analysed interactions, talking about the rules appeared to be intertwined with the discussions held in the IGs. This finding highlights the relevance of stabilizing and agreeing on the rules at the social level so that children to internalize them, as this specific school does in its assemblies. The process by which the rules emerge in children's dialogues has been evidenced in other research that analyses the use of exploratory talk (Mercer, Wegerif and Dawes 1999). In particular, Mercer and colleagues (1999) pointed out how the ground rules for exploratory talk operate with elementary students. For instance, when pupils share relevant information and seek to reach an agreement, the group takes responsibility for their decisions and enriches the pupils with reasons. In the case of IGs, the principles underpinning the activity are those within the dialogic learning approach (Flecha, 2015). The principle of solidarity appears especially relevant for this particular case, as it surfaces during the vast majority of the analysed interactions aimed at helping and when children recall the agreed rules and take an active stand for them. Thus, the IG format emerges as a promising arena for children to train in core moral issues such as justice and the active defence of fundamental agreements.

Ultimately, the IG format contributes to overcoming the potential negative effects that Roma and immigrant students might suffer in ability grouping, such as social isolation, loneliness, social rejection (Koster et al. 2009), social stigmatization, undermined confidence and poor engagement (Chorzempa and Graham 2006; Higgins et al. 2015; Roberts-Holmes & Kitto 2019). By organizing the classroom into IGs, preschoolers become part of a dialogic learning context that fosters flexible interactions; that is, students are not giving a particular role to play in the group. In this context, everyone is encouraged to engage and work together by expanding, rather than restricting, the ways in which children can talk and think in school (Clark et al., 2003). This approach favours a strong foundation for establishing the first healthy structures of social relationships and therefore contributes to enhancing future development. Our results have implications for early-year classrooms located in highly disadvantaged areas, since this study might inform teachers regarding nurturing help and solidarity while also simultaneously fostering cognitive development when learning mathematics. Enhancing both dimensions at the same time becomes crucial in regard to vulnerable students (Melhuish et al. 2015). Although we acknowledge the uniqueness of every context, educational inequalities of historically marginalised students follow similar patterns across different countries (Lampert et al., 2019). Hence, the results of the present study might be applicable across diverse geographical contexts. This is coherent with the benefits of IGs reported in many diverse disadvantaged contexts: from rural poor areas in Latin America (Soler et al., 2019), to schools serving students with special needs in diverse contexts in Spain (García-Carrión, Molina and Roca 2018).

However, these implications might be limited by the nature of the current study, as it is focused on a single preschool classroom. Therefore, it would be interesting to contrast the obtained results with research that includes more groups in early childhood and in different contexts. In addition, as the present research is grounded on audio recordings of children's interactions, nonverbal interactions were not collected. As physical interactions are a common tool of communication in ECE, future studies could address this gap by considering both verbal and nonverbal interactions and thereby contribute by having wider insight into the nature of peer interactions within IGs. A more scientific approach to ECE might reveal the evolution and sustainability of the findings presented in this study and shed more light on the understanding of how practitioners could transfer the benefits of the IG format to diverse contexts.

Particularly in a highly challenging area, organizing early childhood classrooms into IGs is shown to increase the number of opportunities to engage in positive peer interactions. This approach implies useful knowledge to inform the decisions and practices of ECE teachers. Since research has shown that peer interactions become increasingly influential during middle childhood (Lin et al., 2015), offering early-year students the opportunity to experience positive peer interactions that lead to enhanced values such as solidarity can set the basis for better outcomes in middle childhood. Policymakers might find this case study useful for rethinking recommendations for grouping preschoolers, especially in highly disadvantaged schools that serve those who traditionally face more inequalities, such as Roma children and students with immigrant backgrounds. By providing an evidence-based picture of the affordances created by the IG format under which children exhibit help and solidarity among themselves, teachers, policymakers and citizens have a unique opportunity to increase the likelihood of every single child succeeding both educationally and socially. For this to happen, the political agenda in education should be based on what research has shown to be effective for the inclusion of these populations (Kirova and Thorlakson 2015). Indeed, evidence-based policies have demonstrated greater effectiveness, especially when it comes to overcoming long-established education practices of segregation in several schooling environments (Alexiadou, 2019). The evidence presented in this paper might contribute to the nearly 50 years of child development research, which informs a wide array of early childhood initiatives that improve the life prospects of vulnerable children (Shonkoff and Fisher 2013). Educating our children starting in the very early years about solidarity behaviours in classrooms in which no one is left behind can be the first step in advancing towards the global goal of achieving inclusive and cohesive societies.

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2.3 Artículo 3. Bridging the Gap: Engaging Roma and Migrant Families in Early Childhood Education through Trust-Based Relationships

Khalfaoui, A., García-Carrión, R., & Villardón-Gallego, L. (2020). Bridging the Gap: Engaging Roma and Migrant Families in Early Childhood Education through Trust-Based Relationships. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 28 (5)

Abstract

Family participation and involvement in schools has been reported to be crucial for improving academic achievement and social cohesion, especially among those systematically excluded such as migrants or the Roma population. However, these families often participate less in school life. This hinders any attempt to reverse the cycle of inequality experienced in Europe by the Roma and migrant population, among others. This study focuses on a specific school that has successfully engaged Roma and migrant families. Particularly, this case study aims to identify the characteristics of the relationship that the Roma and migrant families have with the school and the way that parents' involvement in the education of their children has been promoted. The main results show that the participation of these families has been fostered by a strong collaboration constructed with egalitarian dialogue, trust and confidence-based relationships, and having a shared purpose of ensuring high-quality education for all children.

Keywords: Family Participation, Early Childhood Education, Roma, Migrants, Relationships.

Introduction

As poverty increases in Europe, escaping from deprivation in a fast-changing environment demands a combined effort that calls for different community agents to engage with local schools (Suárez-Orozco and Qin-Hilliard 2004). To address this situation, schools may promote inclusion through comprehensive equity schemes which encourage the involvement of families and communities. However, engaging families with minority backgrounds in schools remains a challenge for European Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) institutions (Bove and Sharmahd 2020). It is essential to tackle this challenge from ECEC to ensure that family involvement has a positive impact on children's cognitive and emotional development (Reynolds et al., 2019). This is especially the case for Roma and migrant children, who otherwise are likely to be trapped in persistent social and educational inequalities (Vandekerckhove and Aarssen 2019).

There is substantial evidence that school-family collaboration contributes to various educational outcomes, such as development of social skills (Duddy 2019). Nevertheless, there are differences in the degree of family involvement. According to a study involving 605 teachers in Israel, the extent to which parents were involved in schools appeared to be different in schools serving students and families with low socioeconomic status (SES) compared with those with high SES. Teachers reported less involvement of families with fewer socioeconomic resources (Addi-Raccah and Grinshtain 2017). Souto-Manning and Swick (2006) showed that families from a minority background tended to participate less often in school committees, volunteering and school meetings, and teachers often interpret this lower involvement as lack of interest. However, while social, language and cultural differences have been shown to play a key role in migrant family participation (Smith 2020), they have rarely been considered a justification for limited family involvement.

Furthermore, a recent study focused on interventions tackling inequalities experienced by immigrant, low-income, and Roma children in 8 European countries suggested that only 41% of the interventions explicitly involved these families (Aguilar et al. 2019). This demonstrated that there is a gap in participatory approaches engaging these families, including in decision-making processes. Indeed, whereas it can be assumed that Roma families or parents from ethnic minorities are less involved, that is only the case when parent involvement is narrowed to specific school-based forms of parent involvement (Lareau, 2000). Parental involvement has received considerable attention in research for decades, and it includes a range of behaviours performed in the home (e.g., helping children with homework) and at school (e.g., participating in educational workshops) to promote children's academic and psychological development (Nguyen et al., 2020). However, despite the potential benefits parent involvement might have, when founded in traditional bureaucratic and inflexible environments has been less likely to report positive results than when a more collaborative and democratic organization occurs (Comer and Haynes, 1991). Indeed, involving families with diverse background requires to create

opportunities that are responsive to the diversity of the families (Hoover et al., 2005). In this vein, our understanding of family involvement aims at jointly co-create an egalitarian space for the families to participate from the periphery to the centre. This has become especially important when targeting immigrant and minority families to be involved in transformative school processes (Diez, Gatt and Racionero, 2011).

In a longitudinal study by Flecha and Soler (2013) highlighted that family participation in decision-making processes and in children's learning activities were particularly important for increasing both Roma children's engagement in school and their academic success. Furthermore, Garcia, Ruiz and Comas (2019) have shown that family participation in educational activities for themselves and as volunteers with children's groups contributes to strengthening the solidarity dynamics and to improving school climate.

Considering the positive links reported between the involvement of families with minority background, students' academic achievement and the improvement of school climate, it may be useful to pursue further interventions targeting equity and belongingness through family-school partnerships (Epstein 2011), within a democratic and open atmosphere (Van Laere, Van Houtte and Vandembroeck 2018). The positive effects from building and maintaining a trusting environment for the entire school community were explored by Price (2012), who concluded that having trusting school spaces has the potential to positively impact both academic success and social achievement. However, families in disadvantaged situations tend to be more distrustful of school professionals and reported feeling powerless and even bullied (Lareau, 2002). When Klaus and Marsh (2014) reviewed the challenges faced in Europe to achieve the inclusion of the Roma community in ECEC, they concluded that more flexible community-based services and activities that seek to build trust between educators and Roma communities could reach younger children. Recent research emphasised the importance of strengthening the relationship between ECEC services and the most vulnerable families to promote the inclusion of children and their families (Silva et al. 2020).

Along these lines, EU-funded research has reported the benefits that transforming schools into *Learning Communities* can have on educational success and social inclusion. *Learning Communities* is a community-based project that aims to transform schools through dialogic learning and involves research-grounded schools that implement Successful Educational Actions (Flecha 2015). More than 600 such schools in Europe and South America, many of them located in high poverty areas and serving Roma and migrant children, have shown a reduction in drop-out rates and an increase in education quality and attainment. Research conducted in schools as *Learning Communities* demonstrated that they developed specific structures and criteria that ensured that migrant and vulnerable groups became involved in school daily life (Soler et al., 2019).

The conceptual foundations underpinning the Learning Communities project, which are at the heart of the participant school in our study, are framed within the dialogic learning approach, which builds on the premise that dialogic interactions involving the entire community are essential for learning and development (Flecha, 2000). Grounded on sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1987) and critical pedagogy (Freire, 1997), among others, Flecha (2000) articulates seven pedagogical principles that underpin dialogic learning. According to these principles people engage in egalitarian dialogue, where everybody contributes his/her knowledge on equal basis capitalising each person's cultural intelligence, where everyone's knowledge is accountable and valued.

Within this dialogic approach, schools as Learning Communities create participatory approaches that foster equitable participation, generate opportunities for families to engage in educational activities with flexible scheduling, and they consider families to be allies in providing the best education for their children (García, Ruiz and Comas 2019). Yet, the ways in which school-family relationships operate and the characteristics that favour vulnerable families' participation remain under-explored. This study aims to explore the relationships between school-staff and Roma and migrant families in a *Learning Community* that has reported positive results since the 2009-2010 academic year. These have been particularly noticeable in academic attainment and in eradicating school conflicts and violence.

The following sections outline the research design used in this empirical study, which includes an in-depth description of the case study and data analysis, followed by the results obtained. The article ends with a discussion of the results and some concluding remarks.

Methods

An instrumental case study was conducted during the academic year 2018-2019. This design fitted the purpose of our research as it allows gaining a deep understanding of a specific social activity within its important circumstances (Stake 1995). Particularly, our case study seeks to gain a better understanding of which characteristics of the relationships between Roma and migrant families promoted their greater involvement in their children's education. The rationale for choosing this case relied on the sustainable success reported by the school in learning and social relationships, which serves Roma and migrants in a very low SES area. A detailed description is provided below.

The school

The school is located in the outskirts of a city in Northern Spain. Most of the population who live there are Roma and some 9.1% are migrants, mainly from North Africa. The school provides education to children aged from 2 to 16 years old. At the time of the study, 304 students were enrolled all of whom had received grants from the Basque Government (to be provided with school materials and/or as part

of school lunch programmes). A breakdown of the origin/ethnic background of these students is provided in Table 1.

Table 1. *Origin/ethnic background of the students*

Roma	North Africa ¹	South America	Other European countries ²	Asia ³
172	86	21	9	16
56%	29%	7%	3%	5%

¹Nigeria, Algeria, Morocco, Ghana, Sahara, Angola, Mauritania

²Portugal, Ukraine, Albania, Macedonia

³Syria, Pakistan, China

Despite the disadvantaged social and living conditions of the population in this area, the school has achieved high standards since 2010, when the school became a Learning Community. Aiming at reversing the circle of low achievement and high rates of drop-out the school was trapped in; the teachers open the school to engage in dialogic interactions with the families and communities to “dream” the school they wanted. This was the result of a bottom up approach and emerged from the need expressed by the community to implement research-based actions that had already demonstrated to be effective in promoting academic and social success in similar contexts. According to the school's data, drop-out levels have decreased, and absenteeism rates have been reduced from 20% to almost zero. In 2013 the school received a national award for its project as a *Learning Community*, particularly for its emphasis on providing high-quality interactions among students and a highly diverse population to improve learning and social relationships. They reported an 80% decrease in conflict at all stages of education.

The school's vision and mission are based on engaging family members and students from diverse cultural backgrounds to improve the education of all the children in the community (Garcia-Carrion et al., 2017). In this school, families volunteer in classroom activities, which involve 3-5 volunteers per group and session. They also participate in decision-making processes by sitting on four joint committees.

Participants

Six family members (see Table 2) and 6 school staff (see Table 3) of the ECE stage took part in the study. The six family members had regularly participated in academic activities in the classroom (1-3 days per week) for periods ranging from 1 to 7 years, and had at least 1 child in ECE. The three migrant mothers were not fluent in the official language of the school and participated in language training sessions for families.

Table 2. Participant families

Pseudonym	Gender	Number of children attending the school	Origin/Ethnic background	Activities enrolled in
Fatma (age 41)	Female	1	Algeria	Volunteer in classroom. Joint Committee member
Gabriel (age 40)	Male	2	Spain-Roma	Volunteer in classroom
Esther (age 40)	Female	3	Spain-Roma	Training. Volunteer in classroom
Dunia (age 30)	Female	2	Pakistan	Volunteer in classroom
Zineb (age 40)	Female	2	Saudi Arabia	Volunteer in classroom.
Carlos (age 27)	Male	2	South America	Training. Volunteer in classroom.

Table 3. Participant School-staff

Pseudonym	Gender	Role	Origin/Ethnic background	Years in school/ teaching experience
Rosa	Female	Deputy head	Spain-Basque	7 /29
Jon	Male	Headteacher	Spain-Basque	4/12
Miriam	Female	Coordinator of the Early Childhood stage	Spain-Basque	7/20
Lidia	Female	Teacher (5-year-old children)	Spain-Basque	3/11
Mikel	Male	Teacher (3-year-old children)	Spain-Basque	1/11
Amaia	Female	Teacher (2-year-old children)	Spain-Basque	10/12

Procedure

Ethical issues were addressed throughout in line with the EECERA Ethical Code (2014). It was ensured that all participants involved in the study were fairly and sensitively treated, with dignity and without prejudice, and respectful of religion, language, race, ethnicity, national origin or culture. Once the Ethics Committee of the University approved the study design, the research aims and the potential benefits for participants and the whole community were explained to the headteacher. Convenience sampling was

used and the selection of the participants was carried out in dialogue with the headteacher, who circulated the information among the teachers. To select the families, the coordinator of the ECE stage shared the invitation with those parents who potentially might be interested and have time to take part in the interviews. All participants signed the informed consent. None of the participants withdrew from the study.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between February and May 2019, based on participants' availability and preference, by two researchers. The structure of the interviews included four sections: general questions to set up the topic (e.g. in what activities do you volunteer? since when?); questions about their experience as volunteers, emphasizing the drivers and the barriers; prompts about the relationships between them and the school staff and questions about their vision about the school. With this structure, we aimed at (a) exploring the relationships between the school's staff and Roma and migrant families; and (b) identifying which characteristics of these relationships favoured their participation.

Teacher's interviews were conducted individually in the school by two researchers. All the interviews were transcribed verbatim and inductively analysed in a two-step process. The first round led to cluster the information into two wide thematic categories: (a) an established teaching staff, and (b) the features of the relationships between the school's staff and the students' families. In the second round, three sub-categories were identified, which allowed us to refine the data and to identify the features of relationships between the staff and the families.

This study acknowledged the potential of conducting research *with*, rather than *about*, the most disadvantaged population, such as Roma or migrant families (Gómez et al. 2019). The preliminary results were discussed with the participants before reaching any final conclusions. It is our belief that every person, regardless of their academic background, skills, and language competence, can participate in dialogue and contribute valuable knowledge.

Results

Supportive relationships and cohesion among the school's staff

Cohesion among teachers seems to encourage shared positive attitudes towards family participation (Cheung and Kam 2019). This was one of the key characteristics of the studied school. Mikel, the teacher of 3-year-old children, stated: 'We are a very good team; we understand each other very well. It is also a very heterogeneous group. I think we make a great team. And there is a brilliant atmosphere between us'

Having a cohesive environment among teachers was intended to offer children the best learning opportunities from their earlier years, through exhaustive planning and coordination. The coordinator

of the Early Childhood stage emphasised this by using a metaphor from one of the best-known Spanish Golden Age plays, *Fuenteovejuna*, in which the power of people coming together led to success in overcoming injustice and achieving a shared purpose: ‘Then also coordination, teamwork. Good work planning, knowing where we want to get to, where we are going...That’s the key for success. All for one, as in Fuenteovejuna’. This concept has also been referred as inclusive leadership and shared ethos of the setting by Lazzari and Vandebroek (2012).

Coordinated work promoted cohesion within the teaching team, of which families were also aware. This cohesion included the management team, who were involved as volunteers in the classroom on equal terms with the families. Positions of power became blurred, because all contributions were valued in light of the arguments provided. In this way, a migrant mother facilitated group dynamics with children in the same way as the deputy head of the school would, which is not ‘usual’ in other schools.

There is harmony between them, with the boss too. When she comes here with the children, she doesn’t seem like a boss. She’s the deputy head but she just comes and helps the children. This is strange, it doesn’t happen in another countries, but it does happen here. The people who work with the teachers, the same ones, come and help here. I’ve never seen that. (Fatma. Migrant mum)

New teachers tend to benefit from this cohesion, which feeds back to form even stronger trusting relationships in schools (Prince 2012). In this school, new teachers joined a dynamic environment where teachers, management team and families made it clear that their combined efforts go further than individual work, and managed to promote successful academic and social outcomes for all children.

Everything is so tied up, so well organised, everything is so clear to them that when we first join, we pick it up straight away. (Lidia. Teacher)

Features of the relationship between teachers and families

One of the mothers reported that the school was ‘like a family’. This section discusses the characteristics of the relationships identified by the participants that made this possible: (a) strong collaboration through egalitarian dialogue; (b) trust and confidence-based relationships; and (c) a shared, strong commitment to providing the best education for all children.

Strong collaboration through egalitarian dialogue

Egalitarian dialogue encourages the development of equal relationships, which can facilitate close collaboration between families and the school. Lidia, the 5-year-old teacher reported: ‘What [the school] is very clear about is that the relationship with the families is on an equal footing. Very respectful and on an equal footing: ‘no one is more important than anyone else’. This had a positive impact on young

children. This positive impact was perceived by Roma mothers like Esther, who saw an improvement in her son's attitude towards the school: 'I like (participating) because my son is more joyful, he is happier; they are more keen to do things, they pay more attention to you, they feel better.'

The teaching team worked day by day to build relationships based on equality. They showcased the cultural intelligence of the families (Flecha, 2000)- one of the seven principles of the dialogic learning approach developed in the school- and took every opportunity to interact with them:

I try to get families involved by having an equal relationship with them. I am always at the door from 9 to 9:30 and they talk to me about many personal things. People in their life and... that means that they have a relationship with me, and I can tell them: 'Come on, you can stay as a volunteer tomorrow.' (Miriam. Coordinator)

Even those in the most vulnerable situations, people felt included and capable of contributing just like others with academic degrees. Gabriel was a Roma dad who participated as a volunteer in the classroom on a weekly basis. He did not finish his primary education, and yet he participated on equal terms: 'They give you authority, just like they give to anyone else.' In the same way, Fatma reported: 'I'm like another teacher.' Their participation in the classroom diversified children's interactions, enriching their learning and social skills. This feature could be also understood through the lens of the radical collegiality proposed by Fielding and Moss (2010), which puts dialogue and solidarity at the heart of the notion of educational democracy.

A relationship built on trust and confidence

Trust was a characteristic of the relationship between the teaching staff and families at the school. The results showed that families trusted teachers, and vice versa: 'Teachers have a close relationship of trust with families' (Amaia. Teacher). These relationships of trust provided a safe environment for families: 'Our children's families feel loved and protected here, and this is very important.' (Rosa. Deputy head) The participants noted that greeting each family at the school's entrance every day fostered a feeling of trust between school staff and families, which led to families feeling safe to propose ideas.

For me, that short time is very important. That's where you really build a relationship of trust with families, they trust you more. They feel they can confide in you and talk to you more and more. And they feel more reassured, more secure. (Lidia. Teacher)

Here we hear everything they want to contribute to our school, and they can bring to us whatever they want to bring. It is very good that Miriam welcomes them first thing in the morning, so that they can feel safe to propose things (Jon. Headteacher)

This result reveals a specific way to welcome students' families that is key to improve classroom climate in ECE (McNally and Slustky 2018). Indeed, the relationship of trust between school staff and the Roma and migrant families also included community life issues. These results show that it is possible to involve Roma and migrant families by overcoming reproductionist conceptions about the lack of interest of these families in the education of their children:

Because families come very often. And not only as volunteers in the classroom. They come to ask you how to complete a grant application, and to talk about their problems. (Rosa. Deputy head)

They not only keep track of the children's lives, but also of their families' (Carlos. Migrant dad)

Common goal and shared purpose: providing the best education for all children

Inspired by the inclusive ethos of the school as Learning Community, its dialogic approach facilitates that families and school staff develop a shared the goal which is ensuring the best education available to all, without any distinction. Within this model, the teachers reflect on and work with the students' families to make this happen. The headteacher said that he wanted the same for his students as he did for his own children. This is a very powerful statement, since it does not apply the 'double standards' (Hargrove 1958) which have excluded the most vulnerable communities.

You do things because you want the best for your students. What do we want? Well, we want for others what we would like for our own sons and daughters. So, there is a strong commitment and willingness to do things in our school. (Jon. Headteacher)

Families perceived this commitment and saw the positive impact it had on their children. This led them to become engaged as well and to support teachers in their work. For this reason, Fatma participated in her son's classroom as a volunteer, where she experienced this progress, not only in her son but in all the children: 'Here the teachers give everything they have to help children improve. My son always comes to school now, he has made good progress. They (children) are all better than before'.

The vision of this school relied on high expectations for all their students. This was an essential requirement, and therefore they took advantage of the help from everyone in the community to ensure that every child reached their maximum potential. From this perspective, the impact of positive expectations on students increased, and it drove families' participation at the same time. As both a teacher and a mother stated, if they worked together everyone could do this, so this is how they managed to succeed:

Everyone can do this, and everyone will. It is our confidence in their abilities that brings success to everything; we trust that we are all safe, we can see from the data. It is not just my opinion. (Lidia. Teacher)

What helps students to succeed? Parents' participation, because you know what they do, because you see what they do, and that helps a lot. It's very important. (Zineb. Migrant mum).

Cultural differences or not speaking the language of the school was not an obstacle to participation, as the school's vision was shared by all. Zineb was a volunteer in reading and writing tasks, while she was also attending family education sessions to improve her level of Spanish. Lidia, the 5-year-old teacher see this participation as an asset for the class: 'When we have had volunteers from different cultures, we have seen that their purpose is the same as ours. They help the children, engage in interactive activities with a group. So, there is usually complicity [between us]'

Every family's contribution was valued (rather than focusing on what they could not contribute), and this led to the discourse of 'lack' being set aside (Stacey 2019). Building on what families bring to school and their strengths has been shown to be an extremely effective strategy (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti 2005).

Discussion

As the United Nations stated in the fourth Sustainable Development Goal, special efforts are needed to improve learning outcomes during the entire life cycle, especially for people in vulnerable settings. In this vein, the involvement in schools of families and community members from minority and vulnerable groups has been shown to be crucial in improving academic achievement, but it remains a challenge for European ECEC (Bove and Sharmahd 2020).

The results of this study are consistent with previous research on *Learning Communities*, which have shown that the participation of families in the classroom and in decision-making processes has a positive impact on improving students' attainment and social relationships in highly diverse contexts (Flecha and Soler 2013). The views of the 12 participants of this study revealed some key aspects that facilitate the involvement of families that traditionally have been less involved in school life (Addi-Racah and Grinshtain 2017), thus bridging the gap and engaging Roma and migrant families in ECE.

Strong collaboration through egalitarian dialogue minimises the hurdles that social, language and cultural differences can create for families from minority backgrounds (Souto-Manning and Swick 2006). When teacher-family relationships are built on trust and confidence, they showcase the knowledge of the community concerned by making meaningful connections between the school and

students' lives (Gonzalez, Moll and Amanti 2005). The school helps families feel that their participation is essential for their children's success.

The results of this study confirm that Roma and migrant families can engage in transformative action and improve their context and situation (Díez, Gatt, and Racionero 2011), helping to overcome the view that these families can only participate in routine tasks or informative meetings, which leaves little room for building partnerships (Cheung and Kam 2019). These findings exemplify the Freirean concept of 'untested feasibility,' which makes it possible to generate real transformations (Freire, 1997).

Building relationships based on egalitarian dialogue open new horizons for previous research, which has found that the difference in power between teachers and families could be an insurmountable obstacle to family-school collaboration (Whyte and Karabon 2016). As shown by the data provided, the most vulnerable families became involved in the school just like everyone else, and they all shared the common goal of offering high-quality education for all. This means that there were no distinctions, and that everyone involved wished for others what they wished for themselves. This evidence may shed some light on new dynamics where double standards are no longer used.

The features of the relationships reported in this article contribute to create an inclusive school environment by engaging teachers and families in dialogic relationships that create an atmosphere of trust. This might act as a driver that could be explored in further research to overcome the low-income families' distrust so far (Lareau, 2002). However, since this is a single case study conducted in one school, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, given the number of participants, the results of this study cannot be generalised to a wider population. Second, involving children in further research regarding family participation would enrich the findings, as children's participation is associated with 'influencing change and decision making' (Tisdall 2015). Future research could provide evidence through larger studies conducted in other contexts. Despite its limitations, this study has contributed to a better understanding of the relationships between families and schools that promote the involvement of Roma and migrant families in the education of their children. This is clearly a first step to overcome the vicious cycle of inequality in which many vulnerable populations are still trapped. Every effort must be made to contribute to the struggle to provide young children with the best start possible in education.

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3. Discusión

La educación infantil de calidad permite crear espacios que favorezcan que todo el alumnado alcance su potencial de desarrollo (Aboud & Yousafzai, 2016), y para ello, la convivencia es un elemento clave. Si las aulas de educación infantil son eficaces en la promoción académica y social de todo el alumnado, las desigualdades educativas y sociales que afectan a los grupos más vulnerables pueden superarse. Esta tesis plantea el estudio de los aspectos que inciden en la convivencia positiva en la educación infantil en contextos multiculturales a través de una revisión sistemática de la literatura científica sobre el clima de aula, y de un estudio de caso centrado en una escuela que representa un caso de éxito en convivencia y rendimiento académico con alumnado de etnia gitana e inmigrante.

3.1 Aspectos que afectan al clima de aula positivo en educación infantil multicultural

La revisión sistemática realizada revela una mayor incidencia de aspectos pedagógicos que estructurales en el clima de aula positivo. Por un lado, se han identificado factores pedagógicos como un mayor tiempo de instrucción, interacciones cercanas entre el profesorado y el alumnado, facilitar interacciones entre iguales y relaciones basadas en la confianza entre la escuela y las familias. Por otro lado, la organización del aula en pequeños grupos o el material compartido son aspectos estructurales que favorecen un clima de aula positivo en la educación infantil multicultural. De los 14 estudios analizados, cinco inciden en las interacciones entre iguales, enfatizando la importancia de la creación de amistades en entornos colaborativos (Smith, Joan & Bramlett, 2009; Hartman & Manfra, 2016; Kim, 2014, 2016; Myers & Shedfield, 2009), pero ninguno de ellos desvela posibles pautas para crear esos entornos colaborativos que fomenten relaciones de amistad. Del mismo modo, dos estudios refieren la importancia de las relaciones estrechas entre el profesorado y las familias en la construcción del clima positivo del aula (Howes et al., 2013; McNally & Slutsky, 2018), pero sin llegar a concretar las características específicas de las mismas.

Con todo, la construcción de un clima positivo de aula en contextos multiculturales favorece las relaciones sociales del alumnado al tiempo que contribuye a los aprendizajes instrumentales, que son esenciales para superar las desigualdades que enfrentan los niños y niñas de minorías étnicas (Sylva et al., 2013; Melhuish et al., 2013; Aubert et al., 2008). En este sentido, el tiempo de la instrucción es clave y especialmente eficaz en la reducción de conflictos cuando se da en una atmósfera de apoyo (Hartman & Manfra, 2016; Howes et al., 2013). Así, un ambiente de aprendizaje libre de conflictos, donde tienen lugar interacciones de apoyo entre el profesorado y el alumnado y entre los estudiantes,

potencia el compromiso con las tareas académicas (Reyes et al., 2012) desde los primeros años (Rios-Gonzalez et al., 2019).

Esta revisión sistemática plantea aspectos relevantes que analizar empíricamente. Por un lado, dado que las interacciones entre iguales son un aspecto que afecta al clima de aula en contextos multiculturales, es importante conocer qué tipo de interacciones concretas se dan entre niños y niñas de culturas diferentes en aulas con un clima positivo. Por otro lado, si las relaciones estrechas entre el profesorado y las familias favorecen un clima positivo en el aula y en último término, una buena convivencia en la escuela, sería interesante conocer las características concretas de dichas relaciones que favorecen la implicación de familias de grupos vulnerables (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006).

3.2 Interacciones positivas entre iguales en los Grupos Interactivos

A nivel de aula, los resultados de esta investigación indican que el alumnado de educación infantil de etnia gitana y origen inmigrante (5 años) participa frecuentemente en interacciones de ayuda y solidaridad cuando el aula está organizada en GI. Si bien se había constatado los altos índices de conflictos en contextos educativos con estudiantes de minorías (Mallett, 2017), este estudio revela cómo el alumnado gitano e inmigrante de educación infantil se ayuda y se apoya solidariamente en este entorno de aprendizaje dialógico que contribuye a un clima de aula positivo y libre de conflictos en educación infantil.

Estos resultados son coherentes con estudios previos que analizan la implementación exitosa de este modelo de escuela, desde áreas rurales en situación de pobreza en Colombia (Soler et al., 2019) hasta escuelas de educación especial en diversos centros de España (García-Carrión, Molina & Roca, 2018). En concreto, los resultados de este estudio de caso muestran que organizar el aula en grupos pequeños y heterogéneos con la participación de diversas personas adultas que facilitan las interacciones favorece que el alumnado interiorice las normas del funcionamiento y sea proactivo en ofrecer y pedir ayuda. Esto contrasta con la creencia de que el alumnado inmigrante tiene limitaciones para solicitar apoyo a los compañeros (Peleman et al., 2019).

Estos resultados son consistentes con la investigación de Chen, Zhu, & Chen,(2013) en la que quienes más adversidades enfrentan son quienes demuestran tener más comportamientos altruistas. Teniendo en cuenta que investigaciones previas evidencian que las actitudes altruistas son adquiridas desde los primeros años de vida (Svetlova, Nichols & Brownell, 2010) y que la interacción social es clave para su desarrollo (Barragan & Dweck, 2014), los GI en la etapa infantil conforman un escenario ideal para desarrollo de conductas altruistas desde los primeros años también con niños y niñas inmigrantes y de etnia gitana.

A la evidencia de que el establecimiento de normas claras en las aulas de infantil favorece un clima positivo (Myers & Shedfield, 2009), esta investigación doctoral añade que cuando las normas son consensuadas por el grupo-clase, éstas son constantemente respetadas y emergen en los diálogos del alumnado. En concreto, los niños y niñas que protagonizan este estudio de caso acordaron que el material del aula es de todos y todas y se comprometieron a cuidarlo y compartirlo desde el comienzo del curso escolar. Cuando alguien no respeta esta norma y acapara más material del necesario o no lo comparte, el alumnado lo denuncia en el pequeño grupo de forma unánime y logra poner fin a la conducta que vulnera la norma. Cowell et al., (2015) estudiaron este comportamiento en niños y niñas de preescolar y concluyeron que, a pesar de que los y las pequeñas identificaban situaciones de repartición desigual de material escolar, no eran capaces de actuar en consecuencia. En esta investigación el alumnado no sólo comparte el material escolar como norma, sino que también denuncia cuando alguien no la cumple, actuando para cambiar la situación injusta.

Un contexto educativo interactivo en el que alumnado inmigrante y de etnia gitana se ayuda, comparte el material y defiende activamente las normas acordadas por todas y todos, es también un espacio en el que se alimentan buenos sentimientos a través del reconocimiento mutuo. Los resultados de este estudio revelan cómo las interacciones de reconocimiento, ánimo y apoyo entre el alumnado son frecuentes durante los GI, y esto supone un avance en el conocimiento sobre qué interacciones concretas entre iguales contribuyen a un clima de aula positivo en contextos multiculturales. Si bien se conocen los efectos positivos de que las personas adultas (profesorado, familias, miembros de la comunidad) tengan y verbalicen altas expectativas hacia el alumnado (Rosenthal, 1987), este estudio de caso sugiere que tales expectativas, también cuando se dan entre iguales en un contexto interactivo, pueden revertir positivamente en el clima de aula.

Los GI demuestran ser un formato idóneo que combina tiempo de aprendizaje e interacciones positivas entre iguales, dos aspectos pedagógicos fundamentales en la creación y el mantenimiento del clima de aula positivo en contextos multiculturales (Hartman & Manfra, 2016; Howes et al., 2013). Además, puesto que esta forma de organización de aula incluye la participación de personas adultas voluntarias, generalmente familias u otros miembros de la comunidad, los GI también posibilitan una colaboración entre la escuela y la familia.

3.3 Escuela-familia: claves de participación con grupos vulnerables para una convivencia positiva

La participación de las familias en la escuela puede tener un impacto positivo en el desarrollo cognitivo y emocional de los niños y las niñas (Reynolds et al., 2019). Sin embargo, lograr una participación educativa inclusiva y generalizada de las familias más vulnerables en la educación infantil es un reto a nivel internacional y una prioridad europea (Bove & Sharmahd, 2020; Aguiar et al., 2019; Vandekerckhove & Aarssen, 2019). Si bien las relaciones estrechas entre las familias y el profesorado ayudan a la convivencia positiva en escuelas culturalmente diversas, no todos los contextos son facilitadores de dicha participación y la mayoría de padres y madres inmigrantes o de minorías étnicas no participan en la vida escolar de sus hijos e hijas (Addi-Racah & Grinshtain 2017). La supuesta falta de interés de las familias de grupos vulnerables en la educación es uno de los argumentos que sostienen esa tendencia (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Sin embargo, estas conclusiones se alcanzan a partir de las opiniones del profesorado (Smith, 2020), por lo que las voces de las familias pueden permitir identificar elementos que favorezcan su participación en las escuelas. Por ello, el tercer objetivo de la presente tesis se centró en conocer los aspectos que favorecen la participación de familias inmigrantes y gitanas en la escuela en la etapa infantil en un contexto de buena convivencia.

Los resultados revelaron que las relaciones entre esta escuela y las familias se basan en el diálogo igualitario y la confianza, además de en el compromiso compartido de aspirar a aprendizajes de máximos para todo el alumnado. Los resultados indican que la escuela y las familias gitanas e inmigrantes tejen relaciones igualitarias, en las que ninguna opinión es desacreditada o desechada por venir de una persona sin estudios o en situación de desempleo. Esto hace posible que se establezcan relaciones de confianza, orientadas a unir esfuerzos y trabajar conjuntamente en la mejor educación para los niños y las niñas (Khalfaoui, García-Carrión & Villardón-Gallego, 2020b). Estos hallazgos contradicen el argumento de que las familias de grupos vulnerables no dan importancia a la educación. Este estudio aporta evidencias de lo contrario, muchas familias son conscientes de que la educación es la única vía para ofrecer a sus hijos e hijas la oportunidad de una vida mejor.

Décadas de investigación comprometida con la mejora educativa y social han demostrado que la participación de las familias gitanas y marroquíes en la escuela es más efectiva cuando la escuela ofrece oportunidades de formación ajustadas a sus necesidades y prioridades (Amador López & Girbés Peco, 2016; Girbés-Peco, Gairal-Casadó & Torregó-Egido, 2019). Las familias son conscientes de que son una pieza fundamental en el éxito académico y social de sus hijos e hijas, tal y como se ha demostrado también desde la investigación en neurociencia (Neville et al., 2013). Cuando la escuela abre las puertas a las familias, éstas participan de manera eficaz en los procesos de toma de decisiones y en actividades educativas tanto de formación propia como de ayuda a los niños y las niñas en sus aprendizajes (Flecha

et al., 2009). Este estudio confirma el potencial de las Comunidades de Aprendizaje en el logro de que las familias participen, incluso en aquellos contextos más desfavorecidos (Gatt, Ojal & Soler, 2011) y apunta las características concretas de las relaciones entre la escuela y las familias que facilitan dicha participación, y que contribuyen a una buena convivencia desde la etapa infantil.

Para ello, contar con las experiencias, conocimientos y opiniones de las propias familias gitanas e inmigrantes ha sido fundamental para superar las limitaciones de los estudios que en este ámbito se han basado únicamente en las percepciones del profesorado (Souto-Manning & Swick, 2006). Por tanto, esta tesis se suma a una línea de investigación que desde hace décadas está comprometida con la ética, la transparencia y orienta sus esfuerzos a mejorar la vida de las personas, y por tanto la voz y la experiencia de todas las personas (profesorado, pero también familias de todas las condiciones) son valoradas y consideradas junto con el conocimiento previo para avanzar en la ciencia con impacto social (Gómez González, 2019).

3.4 Limitaciones y prospectiva de futuro

El estudio de caso llevado a cabo no está exento de limitaciones. La naturaleza de la información -recogida únicamente en audio- y el número de participantes son elementos que limitan un análisis más profundo de la conducta del alumnado, que se hubiera podido observar en mayor detalle a través de un análisis de vídeos. Por una parte, en tanto las interacciones no verbales juegan un papel importante en la comunicación entre niños y niñas en la etapa infantil, futuras investigaciones podrían profundizar en el conocimiento analizando las interacciones no verbales en los GI y en otros entornos interactivos de aprendizaje.

Por otro lado, este estudio ha profundizado en las interacciones en un único grupo-clase, por lo que la participación de más aulas y más personas (por ejemplo, todas las líneas de la etapa infantil, en más escuelas) podría enriquecer los resultados y aportar mayor detalle sobre las condiciones de éxito en contextos diferentes. Además, estudiar en profundidad otros centros escolares podría completar los hallazgos de esta investigación, tanto si son Comunidades de Aprendizaje como si siguen otro modelo de escuela. Si futuros estudios demostrasen la transferibilidad de los resultados presentados, más escuelas podrían incorporarlos y beneficiarse de los aspectos que favorecen una convivencia positiva en contextos multiculturales.

También sería muy interesante llevar a cabo estudios longitudinales, para explorar la sostenibilidad en el tiempo de los beneficios expuestos en este estudio. A partir de las evidencias presentadas, sería interesante analizar el reflejo a nivel neuronal de crecer en entornos interactivos solidarios. Si la

arquitectura cerebral se asienta sobre los cimientos de las primeras interacciones, los contextos culturalmente diversos basados en la interacción y el diálogo presentan un escenario ideal para un andamiaje seguro y sano, que pueda revertir las consecuencias nocivas de experiencias adversas como el estrés tóxico (Center on the Developing Child, 2011).

4. Conclusiones e implicaciones

Este trabajo doctoral parte de dos premisas: el papel clave que juega la etapa de educación infantil para la proyección de unas sociedades más justas y cohesionadas y la base fundamentalmente interactiva del aprendizaje y el desarrollo.

La revisión sistemática de la literatura realizada en el marco de esta investigación evidencia el papel clave que juegan las interacciones, tanto entre el alumnado como con el profesorado o con las familias, en la construcción y el mantenimiento del clima positivo de aula en contextos multiculturales. En concreto, el clima de aula es mejor cuando las relaciones entre el alumnado y con el profesorado son cercanas y honestas. Por otro lado, el tiempo de instrucción incluso en la etapa de infantil favorece el clima de aula, lo que refuerza la idea de que no se deben rebajar los aprendizajes ni por la edad ni por las dificultades que enfrente el alumnado.

En este sentido, el estudio de caso lleva a concluir, por un lado, que en los GI el alumnado inmigrante y gitano comparte interacciones positivas entre sí, reconociendo mutuamente los esfuerzos realizados, ayudando y pidiendo ayuda durante la actividad, y recordando las normas acordadas por todos y todas. Además, tal y como el alumnado comparte en el grupo de discusión, las dinámicas solidarias y de ayuda adquiridas durante los GI guían su comportamiento fuera del aula: ayudando en el patio o fuera de la escuela.

Por otro lado, se concluye que las relaciones entre la escuela y las familias inmigrantes y gitanas en un contexto de convivencia positiva se basan en el diálogo igualitario, en la confianza mutua y en las expectativas de máximos para todo el alumnado. En este contexto, la diversidad deja de considerarse un obstáculo para el aprendizaje y el desarrollo social, para entenderla como una oportunidad de enriquecimiento personal y social. Esto es especialmente importante para avanzar desde la educación infantil hacia la superación de estereotipos y prejuicios hacia estos colectivos.

Son varias las implicaciones prácticas que se derivan de este estudio de caso y que demuestran que es posible transformar las dificultades en posibilidades (Freire, 1997). En primer lugar, la ampliación del tiempo de aprendizaje, las interacciones sensibles y cercanas entre el profesorado y el alumnado, la promoción de interacciones entre iguales y la organización de las tareas académicas en grupos pequeños puede mejorar el clima de aula en aquellos contextos multiculturales. Ya que los grupos pequeños aumentan las oportunidades de interacción, sería interesante que el profesorado de educación infantil organizase sesiones de trabajo en esta modalidad. Los GI son una forma concreta de organizar el aula que aglutina los aspectos pedagógicos que inciden positivamente en el clima de aula. Además, en tanto

que los GI facilitan la participación de las familias en la escuela, ofrecen un espacio de colaboración familia-escuela que favorece una buena convivencia.

Esta investigación demuestra que en los GI se dan con frecuencia interacciones solidarias y altruistas. Estas interacciones se extienden fuera del aula, contribuyendo así a la creación de una buena convivencia en la escuela y en la comunidad. Dado que esta forma de organización de aula no requiere ningún esfuerzo económico, supone una forma accesible y eficaz de promover interacciones positivas entre alumnado inmigrante y gitano, favoreciendo la convivencia positiva entre las diferentes culturas del contexto escolar.

Los entornos interactivos de aprendizaje favorecen al mismo tiempo el aprendizaje académico y el desarrollo de habilidades prosociales (Aubert et al., 2017). Por tanto, los GI son eficaces combinando ambos aspectos exitosamente, lo que resulta fundamental especialmente para el alumnado más vulnerable. No se trata, por tanto, de elegir entre la excelencia académica o el desarrollo social ya que los GI fomentan al mismo tiempo ambas adquisiciones desde la etapa infantil.

Por otro lado, el diálogo y el debate sobre las normas del aula favorece que éstas emerjan en las interacciones del alumnado. Por tanto, se sugiere que el profesorado promueva que el alumnado debata y consensue las normas del aula. Cuando las normas que rigen la clase responden a las necesidades, preocupaciones y prioridades del alumnado, éstas son más eficaces ya que son los propios niños y niñas quienes las defienden cuando son vulneradas no sólo en el aula, durante los GI, sino también en el patio o en sus casas, especialmente con los más pequeños o con los más vulnerables.

Por último, el diálogo igualitario favorece la participación de las familias gitanas e inmigrantes en educación infantil. Por tanto, las escuelas deberían alimentar una cultura igualitaria donde la diferencia de estatus entre el mundo académico (el profesorado) y el no-académico (las familias de grupos vulnerables) no suponga una barrera para la comunicación y la colaboración. Cuando el diálogo igualitario es el principio que vertebra las relaciones familias-escuela, mejoran las relaciones de las familias y sus hijos e hijas, incrementa la motivación del alumnado, quien encuentra en la escuela un espacio seguro en el que crecer y desarrollarse. La colaboración honesta entre la escuela y las familias inmigrantes y gitanas muestra que transformar incluso las realidades más adversas es posible cuando se combinan la formación técnica y científica con sueños y utopías (Freire, 1997).

Los resultados obtenidos son fruto de una colaboración estrecha y un diálogo constante e igualitario con la escuela. Una parte importante de este estudio han sido las voces de los niños y niñas, quienes han demostrado un profundo compromiso con la investigación y han participado activamente incluso en la discusión de los resultados. Esta investigación doctoral ha promovido la participación ética y

responsable de la infancia y de las familias, priorizando los intereses de los niños y las niñas y abriendo espacios de diálogo que han posibilitado la creación de conocimiento colectivo, y han puesto en valor todas las aportaciones, argumentos y experiencias (Tisdall, 2015). Sin las voces de las personas protagonistas, la validez de las conclusiones de esta investigación estaría limitada.

Quizá tardemos años en garantizar a toda la infancia el mejor comienzo educativo posible, pero no hay duda de que muchos colegios caminan hacia ese sueño, que en la escuela de nuestra investigación es ya una realidad. Todo es posible desde una mirada dialógica del aprendizaje.

5. Referencias

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