School of Humanities

The Teaching of English as a Foreign/International Language

Postgraduate Dissertation

Fostering social justice awareness through classic children's literature: insights from an ethnographic study at an international kindergarten in Switzerland

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Patras, Greece, January 2024

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Abstract

Early childhood education (ECE) scholars and teachers have been stating concerns regarding young students' attitudes towards social justice issues for decades. Recent findings suggest that preschoolers still have a tendency for negative attitudes for individuals who in their eyes seem different. By employing an ethnographic-based approach the current work aims to explore how classic children's literature can contribute to raising students' awareness on a range of issues related to the three Ds of social justice; difference, diversity and dignity. Books of classic children's literature were used into four inquiry-based lessons, that aimed to facilitate stereotype recognition and to raise positive awareness to social justice issues related to gender, race, disability and empathy. Participants included fifteen preschoolers at the age of five at an International Baccalaureate (IB) in Switzerland. Data gathered through class observation and interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings of current work emphasize the significance of incorporating social justice education in the modern era, emphasizing the use of classic literature as a tool to cultivate awareness of social justice issues. It stresses the necessity for educators to initiate this teaching from the early years. Utilizing classic children's literature, particularly texts that explicitly emphasize and celebrate the Three Ds, proved effective in enhancing preschoolers' understanding of social justice issues. The study revealed that the participating preschoolers developed critical reflection skills that challenged stereotypes related to physical appearance, gender, color, ethnicity, and ability. Moreover, they demonstrated the ability to engage in meaningful discussions about empathy and kindness.

Key words: early childhood education, social justice, classic literature, diversity, empathy

Περίληψη

Ερευνητές και εκπαιδευτικοί στην προσχολική εκπαίδευση έχουν εκφράσει ανησυχίες σχετικά με τις στάσεις των νεαρών μαθητών έναντι των θεμάτων κοινωνικής δικαιοσύνης. Πρόσφατα ευρήματα υποδηλώνουν ότι τα παιδιά προσχολικής ηλικίας εξακολουθούν να έχουν την τάση για αρνητικές στάσεις έναντι ατόμων που, στα δικά τους μάτια, φαίνονται διαφορετικά. Με τη χρήση εθνογραφικής προσέγγισης, η παρούσα εργασία έχει ως στόχο να ερευνήσει πώς τα κλασικά παιδικά βιβλία μπορούν να συμβάλουν στην αύξηση της ευαισθητοποίησης των μαθητών σε θέματα κοινωνικής δικαιοσύνης που σχετίζονται με: διαφορετικότητα, πολυπολιτισμικότητα και αξιοπρέπεια. Βιβλία κλασικής παιδικής λογοτεχνίας χρησιμοποιήθηκαν σε τέσσερα μαθήματα βασισμένα σε ερευνητικές ερωτήσεις, τα οποία είχαν ως στόχο την αναγνώριση στερεοτύπων και την προαγωγή θετικής ευαισθητοποίησης σε θέματα κοινωνικής δικαιοσύνης που σχετίζονται με φύλο, εθνικότητα, αναπηρία και ενσυναίσθηση. Στην έρευνα συμμετείχαν δεκαπέντε μαθητές προσχολικής αγωγής, σε ηλικία πέντε ετών, από ένα ιδιωτικό σχολείο (IB) στην Ελβετία. Τα δεδομένα που συγκεντρώθηκαν μέσω παρατήρησης της τάξης και συνεντεύξεων αναλύθηκαν μέσω θεματικής ανάλυσης. Τα ευρήματα της τρέχουσας μελέτης υπογραμμίζουν τη σημασία της ενσωμάτωσης της κοινωνικής δικαιοσύνη στην εκπαίδευση στη σύγχρονη εποχή, τονίζοντας τη χρησιμότητα της κλασικής λογοτεχνίας ως εργαλείου για την καλλιέργεια της ευαισθητοποίησης των μαθητών σε θέματα κοινωνικής δικαιοσύνης. Επισημαίνεται η ανάγκη για τους εκπαιδευτικούς να προωθούν αυτήν τη διδασκαλία από τα πρώτα χρόνια (νηπιαγωγείο). Η χρήση κλασικών παιδικών βιβλίων, ιδίως κειμένων που επισημαίνουν και γιορτάζουν τα τρία Ds, αποδείχθηκε αποτελεσματική στην ενίσχυση της κατανόησης των παιδιών προσχολικής ηλικίας για θέματα κοινωνικής δικαιοσύνης. Σύμφωνα με την μελέτη, τα παιδιά προσχολικής ηλικίας που συμμετείχαν ανέπτυξαν δεξιότητες κριτικής σκέψης που προκάλεσαν στερεότυπα σχετικά με την εμφάνιση, το φύλο, το χρώμα, την εθνοτική καταγωγή και την ικανότητα. Επιπλέον, επέδειξαν τη δυνατότητά τους να συμμετέχουν σε ενδιαφέρουσες συζητήσεις για την ενσυναίσθηση.

Λέξεις-κλειδιά: προσχολική εκπαίδευση, κοινωνική δικαιοσύνη, κλασική λογοτεχνία, πολυπολιτισμικότητα, ενσυναίσθηση.

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