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Aprendizaje e Interacciones en el Aula [Learning and Classroom Interactions]

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Review

N. Mercer, L. Hargreaves, & R. García-Carrión (2016). *Aprendizaje e interacciones en el aula*. Barcelona: Hipatia editorial.

In 2015, the first International Scientific Congress on Learning and Interactions in the Classroom (LeCI) was organized by the Community of Research on Excellence for All, CREA, and the University of Valencia. The aim of this congress was to share the latest advances in scientific research regarding how people learn and develop all human dimensions to their full extent. Three renowned experts in the field took part in the congress: Neil Mercer¹, Linda Hargreaves² and Rocío García-Carrión³. The results on educational research carried out by the scientific community and that were shared in this congress show how interaction and dialogue are two key elements in the development of the human capacities. It reveals that language is a key factor of learning because it has the power to incorporate the intersubjective dimension to the learning process, as it considers both the knowledge of others and the knowledge built with others. Therefore, it sets the focus on the elements that should be present in any class in order to maximize student interaction and foster the collective creation of meaning. The chapters which follow the introduction are then devoted to the exploration of these aspects.

In the first chapter, Mercer starts from Vygotsky's conception of language as a tool that allows multiple individuals to combine their intelligence and collectively create meaning. Through scientific studies, Mercer explains how in classrooms where teachers establish some ground rules to foster "exploratory speech", which is based on exchanging founded viewpoints and critically analyzing them, students learn to collectively think

and create meaning, developing higher levels of reasoning skills. Some students do not experience these dialogues at home, so the class may be the second and last chance to develop the valuable skills they promote, hence the importance of fostering exploratory speech in learning.

In the second chapter, Hargreaves explains how, traditionally, teachers have monopolized the speech in teaching and that students barely interact in class. In this context, she refers to “social pedagogy” and, citing several research projects, exposes how when students work in heterogeneous small groups to solve challenging tasks and follow the ground rules that guide group work, the quality and quantity of interactions is maximized, and students reach higher levels of learning. The teacher’s role is then to foster and moderate those interactions and give support.

The third chapter covers García-Carrion’s conference regarding scientific findings on Dialogic Literary Gatherings (DLG) as a tool to foster children participation in the classroom. In DLG students interact over the literary classics they are reading in an egalitarian dialogue, in which all contribution must be supported by arguments based on validity claims that are critically reviewed by everyone. This allows students to collectively create meaning around the valuable issues covered in the Classics and maximize the level of what they internalize. Garcia-Carrion explains how DLG have transformed the traditional patterns of classroom participation and changed students’ and teachers’ perceptions of what they can learn, scientifically proving to raise academic success, to improve the communicative skills and to ameliorate the relationships between classmates, thanks to the promotion of solidarity and the understanding of others.

In the last chapter the symposium which took place at the end of the congress is presented. The dialogic turn in education is acknowledged and relevant issues are addressed by the researchers, such as the necessary elements for quality group work, the evaluation of the quality of interactions, the importance of heterogeneous student aggrupation, the misinterpretations around the “Multiples Intelligences” theory and its educational risks or the need to foster “exploratory speech” when group work is developed using ICT.

Through the presentation of multiple scientific researches, this book shows the benefits of an educational approach that acknowledges the potential of classroom interactions for students’ learning and development,

not only regarding their academic skills, but also their emotional and social ones. The contributions of this publication are especially relevant when fighting to eliminate occurrence-based classroom practices, as they show the effectiveness of evidence-based interventions in the promotion of success. Thanks to this book, more policy-makers and teachers will be able to reorient their practices so more children get their “second chance” by benefiting from the latest advances in educational research.

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Notes

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