Empathy in Inclusive Classrooms: Exploring Prosocial Behaviour Through Children’s Academic Writing Skills

**Background.** Empathy is a crucial means through which diversity is appreciated. Students who are more empathic may be more willing to help other students, subsequently creating a successful inclusive classroom. Applying inclusivity at a young age and throughout the curriculum is optimal for social and emotional development in children. Often, increased development is found by using interactive methods. Narrative writing can improve affective dimension in their writing skills, but it is still unclear if writing skills translates into prosocial behaviour. **Method.** This study looked at 19 students in Grade 5 whose teacher implemented a language arts curriculum program. The *Shakespeare Can be Fun* program is based on Lois Burdett’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* children’s book. Two writing samples were collected before and after a perspective taking lesson and coded for empathy. **Results.** Independent t-tests comparing the pre-post writing categories of Organization, Creativity, Voice and Affect, and Grammar generated no significant results. Further t-tests were conducted within Voice and Affect and the item identifying Evidence for Empathy was approaching significance. **Discussion.** Inclusive classrooms have an underlying respect for diversity. Teaching students about diversity hopefully enables a more collaborative, positive classroom environment. Embracing differences, which is not usually outlined in the educational curriculum, teaches lessons of equity that children will apply in various contexts throughout their lives. **Interdisciplinary Reflection.** The “hidden curriculum” appears to aid social and emotional development in inclusive classrooms alongside traditional academia. Teachers, counsellors, and the broader community are involved in the promotion of diversity within the education system.

Key words: empathy, social and emotional learning, child development, writing skills