

Leading the curriculum towards social change. Distributed leadership and the inclusive school¹

Abstract

This study forms part of a participatory action research project, undertaken in four Spanish schools, analysing the planning and development of educational practices that link each school with its territory through community participation processes. The article describes how school leadership can help to develop participatory processes with the educational community in order to foster such practices. Multiple case study methodology was used. Information was gathered and analysed with qualitative research tools, including participant observation, interviews, discussion groups, documentary analysis and the researchers' field diaries. Results show the importance and influence of the management team's leadership style in facilitating and developing such practices, and reveal a need to move towards collaborative leadership models. The study also highlighted the importance of ensuring that families and students assume responsibility.

Keywords: participatory research, distributed leadership, curriculum linked to the territory, community participation

Introduction

Critical and responsible citizenship embraces the democratisation of social participation in decision making. School change must therefore provide for collaborative action and reflection that include community participation strategies to democratise the school structure (Sales, Moliner & Francisco, 2017). Hence, a pedagogical project designed to prepare critical citizens helps to construct a society that promotes democratic dialogue, egalitarian participation and commitment to social transformation.

In such a project, all members of the school community are encouraged to become actively involved and participate, motivated by leadership grounded in a process of reflection and collaboration to foster inclusion. Carr's (1991) moral conception of democracy is based on the pursuit of equality of opportunities in public decision making through the direct involvement of all citizens, and as such, can never be fully achieved. Participation in community development designed to satisfy the needs of society is therefore a tool for human development in democratic societies. From this perspective, educational transformation is framed in a social process that goes beyond cultural emancipation and social reconstruction, the implication being that education is a powerful tool with which to construct fairer societies that respect human rights. We must therefore build inclusive schools, understood as learning organisations, which strive to continuously improve by creating a sense of community and removing barriers to participation (Guerrero, 2012). Based on these premises, democratic societies must

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provide education that prepares citizens to participate in a social model that serves the collective interest.

As educational institutions, schools offer a favourable setting in which to redefine, in conjunction with other community agents, their own role in building fairer societies. The democratic school must galvanise around the proposal to create schools for all by involving the whole educational community in management, in developing learning activities and in engaging with community life (Moliner, Traver, Ruiz & Segarra, 2016). Participation is a crucial factor on the path towards this school model (Ainscow, 2001), as long as it involves a commitment to working together (Sales, Traver & Garcia, 2011) to empower the educational community (Magos, 2007). Based on these premises, we understand the inclusive school as one which is committed to ensuring that all students benefit from equal access to quality education, and which prepares them for democratic participation in a complex world (Magro, 2013). This proposal is coherent with the principles of inclusion, interculturality, democratisation and community development that lie at the heart of inclusive intercultural education (Sales, Ferrández & Moliner, 2012).

Social transformation and democratic practices – the lynchpins of collaborative culture and inclusive leadership – are understood to drive the autonomy that educational communities need to promote participatory processes aimed to include a school in its territory (Moliner et al., 2016). Democratic participation leads to social transformation through its intervention in personal and citizen empowerment educational activities. Preparing students to become critical citizens is one of the basic components for building more inclusive schools and societies. The participation of all individuals and groups in school decision-making processes is a skill and a capacity in these processes. Traver, Sales and Moliner (2010) highlight the importance of collective co-responsibility for the educational project in the process of change towards a collaborative culture that embraces a plurality of voices and information transparency based on tolerance, empathy, trust and commitment. For school change to be effective, collaborative cultures should therefore be nurtured (Guerrero, 2012).

Implementing inclusive educational practices linked to the territory calls for advances in planning and developing study programmes through educational community participation processes and from a perspective of dialogic communication. School dynamics based on these approaches encourage dialogue and exchange between scientific and citizens' knowledge shared in the same community, thus building a theoretical-practical rationale for educational improvement (Kaplún, 2004). The use of participatory social diagnosis (PSD) techniques in school contexts, such as the 'nominal group technique' or the 'Socratic wheel', can take this proposal forward. PSD is a form of citizen participation in which the whole community works together to identify its specific problems, needs and potential, with the aim of finding solutions and making proposals for social improvement. In our work, we use PSD as a transformative tool (Marchioni, 2001) and also as a way of raising awareness that enables citizen empowerment and social transformation (Aguirre et al., 2018).

Democratic participation can be applied to help build learning communities based on the shared needs and interests they themselves identify. This approach is particularly relevant among students, who are the focal point of the school curriculum. The ultimate aim of this process of democratic participation and curriculum negotiation, as we have shown,

is to improve students' learning of the curriculum content and to develop their skills by drawing on their immediate environment (Sales, Traver & Moliner, 2019). In previous studies based on participatory processes in educational proposals, we have observed how students' voices are frequently silenced (Escobedo, Sales & Traver, 2017; Traver, Sales & Moliner, 2010). Students' voices must be taken into account in order to encourage more democratic and participatory schools, as they provide a more comprehensive and complex vision of the reality experienced in the school and the practices developed within it. Furthermore, their experiences of learning can only be enhanced if they are actively engaged (Traver, Moliner & Sales, 2019). Based on these premises, it is pertinent to highlight the concept of students as co-researchers in educational proposals (Fielding, 2011; Rudduck & Flutter, 2007).

School management is a key factor in building an inclusive school culture (Guerrero, 2012). The traditional organisation-driven management approach designed to maintain stability in the school is a static and insufficient vision of leadership that does not serve this purpose. A management style that encourages school transformation towards an inclusive model requires changes in the school culture to ensure the commitment and involvement of all members of the school community in its management and day-to-day operations (Murillo, 2006). Indeed, numerous authors (Ainscow & West, 2008; Guarro, 2005; Tenuto & Gardiner, 2017) point to the structural dimension of school leadership as a crucial driver of educational and social improvement.

Educational leadership in the inclusive school attempts to break away from the traditional conception of hierarchical and vertical relationships to prioritise a collaborative culture, the expression of a dynamic, community organisation. Although educational leadership has materialised in diverse models over recent years, they all highlight the importance of democratic and participatory leadership in helping to develop the community and create more inclusive schools and societies (Fernández-Batanero & Hernández-Fernández, 2013). From the perspective of a democratic and participatory culture, distributed leadership has been proposed as an appropriate leadership model in the educational context (Bush & Crawford, 2012), although it is not without its detractors. Lumby (2013, 2019), for instance, criticises the lack of consideration the distributed leadership approach gives to the role of structural barriers in achieving real equality of opportunities in distributing and exercising leadership functions among all members of a community. Also, Hairon and Goh's (2015) literature review uncovers conceptual and operational problems, as well as other contextual issues that call into question the workability of the construct's definition. According to Harris (2007, p. 135), the "accumulation of overlapping concepts has served to obscure the precise meaning of the term, rendering it a catch-all phrase for any type of devolved, shared or dispersed leadership practice in schools". As well as its ambiguous definition, the vagueness of distributed leadership is due, according to Hairon and Goh (2015), to the lack of research analysing and measuring the construct. These authors argue that four factors of distributed leadership should be taken into account when introducing this leadership model: bounded empowerment, developing leadership, shared decision and collective engagement.

Despite these reservations, in this study we focus on distributed leadership as it is one of the most widely accepted models in the literature. The scholarship highlights the importance of this leadership style to achieve, through collective action, positive results in terms of both organisation and students' learning (Harris, 2007). In addition, studies such as those by Harris (2012) and Maureira, Moforte and González (2014) underscore

the potential of distributed leadership to bring about improvements, specifically among the most socio-culturally disadvantaged in the school. Finally, other studies have highlighted its usefulness in successfully attending to diversity (Fernández-Batanero & Hernández-Fernández, 2013), as verified by educational experiences such as learning communities, democratic schools, inclusive schools and inclusive playgrounds, and its positive influence on the school climate (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey & Ryland 2012).

The distributed leadership perspective calls for more flexible school organisations (Muijs & Harris, 2006). Guerrero (2012, p. 138) refers to distributed leadership as “the only conception of leading that adapts to the school as a learning organisation, a professional learning community and an inclusive school” (our translation) and highlights its relevance as a democratic leadership style, committed to inclusive values that help to create inclusive cultures in the school.

Based on these premises, distributed leadership is associated with “decentralised decisions on the practice and acceptance of diverse types of leadership” (our translation, Longo, 2008, p. 86), for which it strengthens democratic principles of decision making through the active participation of all members of the community in school matters (Leithwood, 2009; Ryan, 2006). When other members of the educational community assume leadership, the sole leader’s power decreases (Lumby, 2019); the aim of this strategy is to transform conflicts in the school and social context, which calls for aptitudes in dialogue, collaboration and negotiation based on a project grounded in mutual commitment.

The essence of distributed leadership is the transfer of power, authority and responsibilities to educational community agents, thereby laying the foundations for their interdependence and including them in the hierarchy as leaders of the educational community (Harris, 2007; Longo, 2008). Muijs and Harris (2006, p. 2) argue that a more democratic leadership style “implies a redistribution of power and a re-alignment of authority within the organisation”. School management plays a central role in developing such leadership; according to Sales (2012, p. 59, our translation), “management team leadership can spark change and motivation in the educational community, so long as it is willing to share and distribute leadership across all its constituent groups and individuals”. Leadership practice thus shifts from a hierarchical and vertical vision of the management team to the creation of multiple leadership networks in which leadership activities are shared among the groups and individuals that make up an organisation or social institution, in our case the school (Longo, 2008).

In a democratic school, leadership is understood as a collective, shared effort that involves all members of the educational community and engages them in a process of mutual learning.

Methodology

This research uses multiple case study methodology (Stake, 2006) to examine in detail the presence of distributed leadership in inclusive schools. We focus on the socio-educational context (Sabariego, Massot & Dorio, 2012) – specifically leadership in inclusive schools – by undertaking a systematic analysis of the reality in the cases to be

studied. This initial analysis provides the information on which to base our study of the leadership phenomenon in each of the four cases.

Research questions and aims

The study aims to describe how the process of linking the school curriculum with its territory was undertaken through educational leadership in inclusive schools. To this end we pose the following research questions:

What type of educational leadership was developed in school improvement processes to link the school with its territory? How were these processes implemented?

What contradictions, obstacles and/or limitations caused difficulties in the practical development of this leadership style in inclusive educational contexts?

Research context and participants

In Spain, the school curriculum is developed and shaped at three different levels, the first two being central government and the regional authorities while the third level corresponds to the schools themselves. There is a certain degree of curricular flexibility at this third level as each school can adapt the official curriculum to the characteristics and needs of its context. The fine details at this level are usually determined by educational publishers or the schools' teaching staff, meaning that the prevailing perspective is exclusively based on input from expert education professionals.

The case studies were undertaken in four public infant and primary schools (3–6 years old and 6–12 years old) in the Spanish regions of Murcia (C1), Valencia (C2), Madrid (C3) and the Basque Country (C4). The schools were selected on the basis of our previous knowledge, taking into account the alignment of their educational projects with the aims of the study. The four public schools are all open to the democratic participation of the educational community and the local area, and implement active, participatory methodologies guided by the principles of intercultural and inclusive education. All the schools are engaged in participatory projects to develop school improvement processes grounded on inclusive, democratic and collaborative approaches related to their geographical area of reference. All four projects were undertaken during academic years 2017–18, 2018–19 and the start of year 2019–20. The data gathering techniques were implemented between October 2018 and June 2019. Table 1 briefly describes the characteristics of each case.

School / Location	C1 School population: 449 students; 38 teachers. <u>Location</u> Murcia >10,000 inhabitants Urban area	C2 Multiple-site rural school in two locations: Quart 134 students, Benavites 90 students. Total school population: 224 students; 22 teachers <u>Location</u> Valencia<10,000 inhabitants Rural area	C3 School population: 550 students; 27 teachers <u>Location</u> Madrid >10,000 inhabitants Urban area	C4 School population: 713 students; 34 teachers <u>Location</u> Basque Country <10,000 inhabitants Urban area
Social Context	Medium-low socio-economic level Immigration from foreign countries (30%) Families' educational level: university level; in recent years, the immigrant families who have arrived have an intermediate level of education Place of residence: Most of the school's students live in the neighbourhood	Medium-high socio-economic level Urban immigration Families' educational level: intermediate; some families with university studies Place of residence: 70% in the two CRA locations; 30% in neighbouring towns and villages	Medium-high socio-economic level Families' educational level: growing trend of new families with university studies, in contrast to the original families who had secondary school level studies. Place of residence: gradually increasing numbers live outside the school's immediate neighbourhood. Families are attracted from further away by the educational programme.	Diverse economic levels Immigration from foreign countries Families' educational level: intermediate, with notable contrasts: medium-high in Spanish-born families, low in immigrant families. Place of residence: Ordicia, the town where the school is located.
Participants in the project	Participating students: 50 (year 5 primary school students) Teachers: 7 (2 year tutors, 3 specialist teachers and 2 members of the management team) Families: 10 (including grandparents) Local agents: 38 people from the local senior citizens' centre	Participating students: 30 (2 class groups, one from each site. Quart group: 18 students; Benavites group: 12 students) Teachers: 12 (2 class tutors; 3 members of the management team; 7 volunteer teachers for the PSD activities) Families: 12 (3 families from each site–6 in total–in each class-group intervention plus families participating in the PSD activities). Local agents: 3 members of the local councils.	Participating students: 100 (assemblies in 2 complete groups–one from the first cycle and the other from the third cycle–plus 50 primary school students in the PSD activities). Families: 80 Education professionals: 12 (9 teachers; 1 special needs teacher–SNT– and 2 management team members, director and secretary)	Participating students: 246 (all 12 classes from the second cycle–131 students– and the third cycle–115 students–in primary education) Families: 36 Education professionals: 7 (4 teachers; 1 SNT and 2 management team members: director and director of studies)
Experience with participation	- High family participation in school management and classroom activities. - Participation of local agents (neighbours, local administration, senior citizens' centre users)	- High family participation in school management and classroom activities - Previous experiences in shared decision making on curriculum related issues. - Participation of local agents (neighbours, local administration, senior citizens' centre users) - Student participation in community assemblies	- High family participation in school management and classroom activities - Student participation in community assemblies	- High family participation in school management and classroom activities - Student participation in community assemblies
Research project educational proposal	Increase participation of local agents (users of local senior citizens' centre) and families in school life through curricula activities such as story- telling, experience workshop, travelling book, which combine school tasks with links to and participation of all community agents (families, teachers, students and local agents).	Negotiate the curriculum with all sectors of the educational community (teachers, students and families). The subject chosen through a participatory deliberative process involving the educational community (PSD) was the reform and improvement of classroom infrastructures in the two-site rural school through a service learning (SL) project.	Reorganise participation in the school in response to increasing proposals for involvement from new families. Avoid simple activism by rethinking the meaning of participation: what is understood by participating, why participate, in what, and who.	Reach consensual agreement on changes in school maths homework in line with the series of needs expressed and actions prioritised by students, families and teachers at an individual and group level.

Table 1. The participants

The participants were members of the educational communities of the four schools from the following groups: teachers (T), management team (MT), students (S), families (F), researchers (R) and local agents (LA). The number of participants varied from one school to another and the level of participation in each of the activities undertaken was also different in each school.

The ethical considerations in the study were set out in an informed consent document, signed by each participant. This document specified that the principles of negotiation, collaboration, confidentiality, impartiality and equity would be upheld throughout the research process and in the dissemination of the results. The study complies with the ethical principles and permissions required by the Ethics Committee of Jaume I University (project coordinator) and the guidelines given by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness. Participants' anonymity has been assured by replacing names with pseudonyms.

Information gathering techniques

We used two types of information gathering tools: those applied in the participation projects underway in each school, such as participatory social diagnosis (PSD) activities (Aguirre et al, 2018); and techniques typically used in qualitative research, including interviews, research diaries and focus groups. These tools were used to explore the meaning of the situations and the significance participants attribute to them in the project's development (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012).

In Table 2 we describe each of the instruments and the data collection protocol: PSD activities (Aguirre et al., 2018) and traditional qualitative research techniques. For each verbatim quote the following coding system is used: case-tool-participant's group (for example Case 1, interview, teacher: C1-I-T).

Techniques/ Data collection process Phase when data were collected	Description
Semi-structured interviews (I) <i>Audio recording</i> Final phase (Evaluation of the project's implementation and results)	<i>Participants</i> Based on initial points agreed upon by all members of the research team, and in each case, adapted to the participants and the practice about which information was sought. Dimensions: Perceptions and conditions; transformations; strategies and roles; knowledge construction/mobilisation (learning, knowledge dissemination); participation: cultural collaboration, community leadership, citizen participation, cultural links with the territory etc. C1: 4 interviews [1 st Interview (5 teachers); 2 nd one (2 management team); 3 rd one (5 students); 4 th one (5 families)] C2: 7 interviews [1 st , 2 nd , 3 rd (9 teachers); 4 th , 5 th (3 management team); 6 th , 7 th (6 families)] C3: 7 interviews [1 st , 2 nd (5 teachers); 3 rd , 4 th (3 management team); 5 th (4 students); 6 th , 7 th (5 families)] C4: 3 interviews [1 st , 2 nd (4 teachers); 3 rd (2 management team)]
Research diary (RD) <i>Field notes</i> Throughout the process	Each research group described and evaluated the study phenomenon in the research diary C1: 3 (one for each team member) C2: 1 (project members collaborated on a single diary) C3: 1 (project members collaborated on a single diary) C4: 3 (one for each team member)
Participant observation (PO) <i>Audiovisual recordings/Written record</i> Throughout the process	Involved recording the presence or absence of a set of categories previously established by the whole research group, as well as other observations that could be useful in analysing the practice studied Description of context and participants; Student and family participation; Teachers' role(s); Description of the process (type of negotiation, content, agreements, etc.); results (agreements disagreements); facilitators and obstacles.
Research reports (RR) <i>Written report</i> Final phase	Used by the research group in each school to share information with the other research teams; the same tool was used by all the teams and was also used to evaluate each case, in line with the following structure: 1) Class/group context; 2) Research problem; 3) Action (development of the experiences [stages], participants, activities and tools used); 4) Social, educational and community impact (changes and transformations); 5) Evaluation through reflection (research team); 6) Conclusions 4, (1 per case: C1, C2, C3, C4)
Nominal group technique (NG) <i>Audiovisual recordings</i> Initial phase /Throughout the process	Technique designed to gather ideas and facilitate problem analysis. Conclusions on the issues raised are drawn from this highly structured analysis. Everyone participates in generating and prioritising ideas. Dimensions: Evaluation of development of activity; evaluation of degree to which objectives were achieved. C1: 4 (teachers, management teams, students, families) C2: 2 (teachers, students) C3: 3 (teachers)
Assembly (A) <i>Audiovisual recordings</i> Initial phase/ Throughout the process	Technique devised to respond to a problematic situation, starting with a series of questions for all participants to discuss and then reaching a solution agreed by all. Different roles are established: secretary, coordinator, moderator, spokesperson, etc. C3: 2 class assemblies (25 students and one teacher); 1 full community assembly (147 participants) C4: 26 students; 20 families, 2 teachers, management team
Socratic wheel (SW) <i>Graphic document/audiovisual recording</i> Initial phase/ Throughout the process	Evaluation technique used to prioritise a series of actions, ordered numerically, to decide which one provides the most suitable response to a detected need C2: 21 families, 9 students, 11 teachers, 7 research team members C4: 26 students, 2 teachers, 6 families
Travelling book (TB) <i>Written account</i> Throughout the process	Technique used to collate the participants' voices in a blank notebook which is passed around through participants collaborating with each other. Its main aim is to gather the opinions of the target group C1: 30 students

Table 2. Data-gathering instruments

Mixed content analysis was used to scrutinise the information according to the theoretical categories covered in the research questions and the themes that emerged from the data. The information gathered in each school was analysed according to a guide provided by the project coordinating team with the following lines for analysis: How is the educational

project negotiated: participants and procedures? On what issues is the negotiation promoted? What educational practices derive from it? What type of transformations and changes arise? How does the educational community evaluate these processes? The results of this analysis were then presented in individual case reports, which formed the basis for the cross analysis we now present on the specific question of leadership. Figure 1 shows the main explanatory categories that link leadership with the educational project and reveal their associations with the curriculum and achievements; leadership is defined as a style characterised by specific practices and the active role of participants

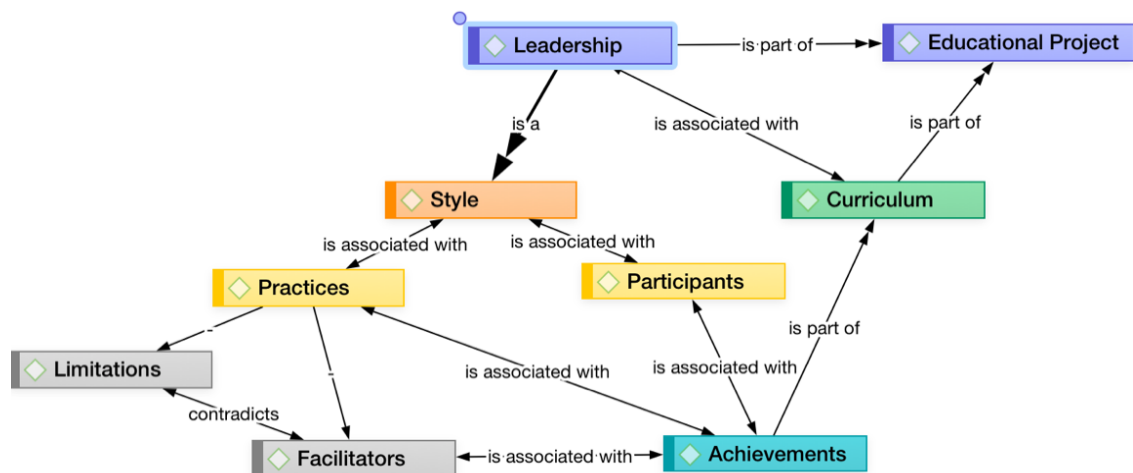


Figure 1: Category Network

In the results, we consider the responses from the four cases in terms of each research question. The categories were validated following qualitative research credibility criteria (Guba, 1985). To this end we used persistent observation, verification with participants, and triangulation. The data triangulation process began by selecting information from the units of analysis according to its relevance to the subject studied and the research questions. This procedure improves researchers' control over quality in the research process and guarantees the validity, credibility and rigour of the results (Aguilar & Barroso, 2015, p.73). Triangulation was undertaken from four perspectives: triangulation of techniques; triangulation of participants; triangulation of researchers (carried out in two intra-group phases in each of the case studies and other inter-group sessions in face-to-face or online seminars) and finally, triangulation with the theoretical framework that we returned to in the discussion of the results.

Results and discussion

The need to link the schools in the study with their territory is justified by the recognition that compulsory education is a space and a mechanism that guarantees social cohesion. The concept of quality education is not exclusively centred on strengthening students' individual capabilities; high quality education encourages participation and nurtures a sense of belonging to the group. Education is therefore conceived as a process of constructing and distributing socially and culturally relevant knowledge, as well as individual and collective transformation.

They learn to stand up for their rights and defend their ideas, and to support their classmates' ideas too (C3-I-F)

Compulsory education acquires meaning from this social approach linking school and territory. Engaging families and the local context from this social perspective aims to stimulate community development beyond the particular interest in achieving certain individual benefits (San Fabián, 2005). The curriculum acquires meaning when it is connected to the community. These are not schools that prepare children to cope in community contexts but schools with educational models that emerge from the community:

We moved from a situation in which the school proposed tasks for families to collaborate on, to one in which families came with their proposals to be developed in the school (C3-RD-R).

This educational and curricular model calls for leadership that can mobilise community spirit and draw on its values. The results from the analysis of leadership in these schools are organised around the research questions outlined at the start of the article.

Regarding the **type of leadership in the process and how it was carried out**, evidence was found in all four cases that the schools' management teams adopted a more collaborative and democratic educational leadership style in which actions and tasks were distributed among the groups in the educational community. The management team must not only manage the organisation efficiently, but also lead proposals for improvement (González, 2008) and encourage a dynamic of involvement based on an educational project that is negotiated and shared by the whole educational community.

The management team always encourages analysis and reflection. And if changes have to be made [...] in one direction, and if we're all working together and it's linked to the educational project, they [the team] prefer to guide that change themselves (C4-I-T).

We are looking at whether we can continue running these kinds of experiences where the school and the neighbourhood come together and where we learn in a different way (C1-NG-F).

In a group debate on the educational model we are pursuing [...] The students, families and teacher are in class, split into four groups [...] Leadership is shared because the teacher delegates [...] the decisions on what aspects [...] will be developed to the families and students (C2-PO-R).

The bonus: all the community has participated [...] everyone has seen their contribution, and that's motivating (C3-SW-T).

Although the leadership process was consolidated in different ways in each case study, shared or distributed leadership was a common thread running through each one, with priority given to the collaboration and sharing of tasks among all those involved (Benjamin, 2002; Guerrero, 2012) in planning and developing the curricular project. Distributed leadership does not only entail offering a space for participation based on

delegation of tasks; it is the result of building a community with shared purposes (Bolívar, 2012).

The plan was drawn up through participation. A questionnaire was created and given to the families to complete; then I met with the families in a discussion group, and spoke to teachers to find out what they thought participation in a public school should be like... and based on what they told me and similar experiences, we put forward a series of possibilities (C3-I-T).

With this form of school management, the schools meet the challenge of their curricular transformation process through a range of plans and projects in which the participation of all the agents involved makes the school a central hub around which all other entities and organisations revolve.

“There was family participation in planning the programme, above all to justify that this methodology isn’t just a lightweight ‘keep the kids happy’ approach to the curriculum. Then in the research phase, some families couldn’t take part in person but they helped their children with the research at home” (C2-I-T).

The school is thus linked to its community. The fact that the curricula were specifically formulated in the schools and classrooms through a participatory process involving teachers, families, students and local agents is a transformation in the way the curriculum is understood. As well as this collaborative approach, not only was the academic content in the schools’ curricula transformed, but other content was introduced based on the needs and interests of all the individuals and groups involved in the curriculum planning stage and by drawing on the social context (situated curriculum). The curriculum is therefore guided from the outset by a driving principle: learning as a dialogical construction, the result of social interactions in community contexts. The curricula plans and projects developed in the four cases incorporate key facilitators for dialogic learning through a variety of pedagogical methodologies: service learning through active participation in experiences associated with community service that stimulates interest in collective action and citizen education (Folgueiras et al., 2018); learning through projects, some of which are chosen on the basis of children’s interests while others are proposed by their families; experience workshops, in which knowledge is constructed through intergenerational dialogue between children and older people; forums for discussing and negotiating decisions (assemblies, children’s councils, committees made up of teachers and family members).

Through the curriculum, it is hoped that both students and all the actors in the educational community will gain valuable learning. In contrast to the rote learning of academic content, students learn through discovery, experience and dialogue; they develop their ability to argue, connect what they learn, negotiate meanings and make their own judgements. The educational community participates in these achievements: the educational project acquires meaning and value, and the educational community has a sense of belonging to it.

Teacher and students research and consult educational articles and experiences from which to take ideas for the project (C2-RD-R).

They had a 'problem' and the school wanted to put in place a mechanism for working towards a solution. If a need is brought up in an assembly, attempts are made to ensure they [the students] find a solution to it and propose ideas. They have investigated numerous issues; they've spoken to other schools, head teachers, councillors, they've visited the town council and spoken to council representatives... It's been a unique experience for them (C2-I-T).

I think it's an important springboard for the whole question of studying, projects and all of that... and it's a way of seeing that you can do things and study in different ways, in projects..., it's not just all about text books ... when no sooner have you gone out to play than you've forgotten everything you've just read. (C3-I-F).

The process of linking the school curriculum to the territory was undertaken through activities in which the whole educational community participated. Distributed leadership, through committees, assemblies and impetus groups, helps to foster coordination and the assumption of responsibility among members of the educational community (Longo, 2008; Lumby, 2019) in order to plan and participate in learning activities:

The education committee is conceived as a body with representatives from the teaching staff and families, charged with drawing up and monitoring the school's pedagogical plans and projects: the reading plan, assemblies, scheduling, coordination newsletters and the list of volunteers (families). We have taken part in the committee meetings since January 2017 in order to develop the inclusive school project; here, links between school and territory are analysed and its implications for the curriculum are explored (C3-RD-R).

The management teams gradually opened up community participation, collaboration among community groups and with local agents, and delegation of responsibilities to the families and students. They undertook these tasks through assembly-based participation activities (involving teachers, families, students and the research team), in which proposals were discussed and agreed upon. Although the delegation of leadership tasks and responsibilities to the students is the weakest part in this chain, it can be done and it is where the greatest potential for transformation lies (Susinos, 2012).

The students already had experience of participating in organisational aspects, but they hadn't taken part in any activities that included teachers, themselves as students, and families jointly (C4-I-MT).

The methodology has helped me to pause, reflect, and structure my planning better [...] you first have to reflect and carry out an initial study to find out what's needed. That was easy to do here because the students themselves had previously outlined their needs in the general class assembly (C2-I-T).

The students were the facilitators, the class itself. They didn't object to anything you [the teacher] suggested. The unstoppable motivation came from the class. We even scheduled the methodology into the second term and it went on until the end of the course because the students themselves made that request. Enthusiasm (C2-I-T).

In addition, the activities helped to generate a network of support and collaboration among the participating agents. This network has continued to grow as a result of joint

work and common projects taken on by the school and other agents in the area, which fostered a collaborative culture among the participants, born out of dialogue, in which every participant has a voice. Multiple leadership networks are thus created (Longo, 2008) in which leadership activities are shared among members of the school community and agents in the locality.

We try to take part in activities with different establishments in the town [...] The school is open to all the families. So yes, I think we are involved in the town, and the town with us, as far as that is possible (C2-I-T).

We have seen how the school's relationship with the neighbourhood, by opening up its doors as it has done, has enabled us to work together and do really interesting projects (C1-NG-T).

Connections and relationships between the school and the community must be strengthened because increasing diversity in the community calls for increased resources and capabilities that enable families to engage productively with the school, support their children's learning, and so on (González, 2008). The response to diversity demands that it be recognised as the norm; far from being the exception, each individual's uniqueness shapes that normality. Distributed leadership lends value to and harnesses diversity by encouraging dialogic processes with diverse students, diverse families and diverse teachers.

What I understand by quality, and it is one of the aspects I appreciate about this school, is that they engage the children in the idea of comradeship, values and conflict resolution. They encourage dialogue among them, and work hard on encouraging solidarity with children that have difficulties (C1-I-F).

They have sparked curiosity about other school models, instilling respect for other cultures" (C3-I-T).

The results show that the leadership in school processes is oriented towards fostering participatory practices as signs of identity in the school education improvement projects linked to the territory. However, the complexity of these processes can give rise to **contradictions, obstacles and limitations**. Participation associated with distributed leadership encounters tensions and resistance that our analysis must bear in mind as possible limitations in school improvement processes. These limitations mainly concern two interrelated dimensions: what is understood by leadership, and how it is put into practice.

Regarding what is understood by leadership, the first tension concerns the concept of participation that shapes the perception of leadership. Participation in educational processes is a recognised right and is called for as a proposal for improvement (School Council document, 2018). However, the 2013 Law to improve educational quality (LOMCE) relegated the capacities for approving, evaluating, deciding and establishing lines of action previously associated with institutionalised participation to mere consultative actions: evaluating and informing, but not participating in decision making.

We are therefore confined within a framework that hinders movement away from the rationale of representation towards forms of leadership that promote democratic participation in schools. In the schools we work with, progress has undoubtedly been

made in this challenge to break with the set model. However, in practical terms, who enjoys the right to participate?

Participation was understood as family involvement and collaboration. Students' participation has not been considered. It is assumed that the students are already in school and they don't need to be involved further. This idea of participating as being present, accessing and being taken into account in certain specific activities prevails over the idea of taking decisions (C3-RR-R).

It became evident that the delegation of leadership tasks and responsibilities to the students is the weakest part in this chain.

Meeting of the educational community (but without the students). Teachers and families take the decisions (C2-RD-R).

Santos (2003) notes that schools have a hierarchical structure, with many obligations, in which who participates, in what, and how are, to a large extent, naturally accepted. In other areas of participation, reservations are also expressed about joint construction. Some teachers and parents hold the view that the curriculum is the teachers' responsibility, and in any case, measures are in place to prevent some families from participating.

Forms of action and collaboration are established accordingly: partial participation is offered as a possibility, while control and power in specific areas – the most academic – remain the teachers' responsibility. The families and the community are included in complementary activities, extracurricular activities, and as a support in tasks previously defined in the classroom; tasks that, in addition, are considered as a bonus for participating on school councils (Egido, 2014). Nonetheless, the responsibility for leading the curriculum essentially falls to the teacher.

This leads us to question how far school leadership trusts the 'dialogue of knowledges' as an underlying principle: the act of educating accrues its meaning from the dialogue between different sources of knowledge on social issues, which demand other approaches, other responses interwoven with the voices of the participants. To what extent do all the actors feel they have the knowledge and capacity to intervene in the school's decisions, especially those dealing with aspects of the official curriculum?

Another mother said she thought decisions about homework should be left to the teachers, that families don't have sufficient knowledge or criteria to form an opinion (C4-SW-T).

On the other hand, the concept of distributed leadership is explained in terms of horizontal participation scenarios. However, there is a lack of training for participation in educational communities. Schools generally receive no specific training on how to relate to and with families, or how to encourage democratic involvement (Giro & Andrés, 2016). The practice of hierarchical leadership persists, which comes into conflict with the processes of planning, decision making and collective actions.

[In reference to the school secretary] *Her concern arose from a desire to know how to channel the motivation to participate in the case expressed by the new families who would join the infant school at the start of this academic year (C3-RD-R).*

Part of this difficulty in promoting leadership based on horizontal participatory processes is the influence of personal interest in certain bodies traditionally associated with decision making. One example is that of the head teacher at one of the schools we studied. This person could not conceive of the school without his presence, which cast doubts on the limits of participation.

Just like he does every Monday, A. slipped into [the meeting]. This time it was something to do with a bottle of cologne. Maybe A. systematically drops in on the committee on purpose... It's become a feature of every Monday meeting. He makes no noise, but he makes his presence felt and it's a reminder that we are in 'his' school (C3-RD-R).

The group tutor proposed making the students co-researchers in their absence and without previously having spoken to them about it (C2-RD-R).

A further limitation we identified in the way leadership is practiced concerns the practical aspects and issues that arise as obstacles to distributed leadership.

On one hand, unequal involvement is a problem. Not everyone is always equally willing or has the same opportunities to engage with the school's activities. We agree with Mata (2015) that leadership is the sum of collective potential and skills distributed across groups in a dynamic fashion; different people and groups in each situation can grasp the meaning of the activity and put forward appropriate proposals:

Not all the teachers had the same degree of involvement, which meant that although the activity was instigated and planned by the school, it was limited to the primary level only because of the low level of participation (C1-TB-R).

Different attitudes were observed among the teachers. The maths teacher was receptive and showed his willingness and considerable involvement with the project. In contrast, resistance was perceived from some of the language teachers (C4-RR-R).

Combining individual possibilities and interests with common interest is a challenge that requires the recognition of every community member's right to propose initiatives, and of the need for a climate of trust in which to build collective knowledge.

Finally, managing conflict is understood as both a need and a challenge: a need, because conflicts arise in all groups and must therefore be acknowledged; and a challenge, because they must be managed and turned into an opportunity for learning.

In their appraisals of the Socratic wheel activity, they take on board that listening to the other agents can lead to conflict but at the same time provides the opportunity to put forward arguments (C4-RR-R).

Any staff meeting is based on everyone's opinions, it isn't imposed by the management team, everything is debated and all opinions are heard. In fact, it takes us a long time to make decisions precisely because of that, because each one of us has an opinion which we all express (C3-NG-T).

Conclusions

Throughout the participatory action research projects we observed that in all four cases the management teams follow more inclusive and democratic leadership practices, with characteristics similar to what we know as distributed leadership. In this process, the role of the management team was central in the transition from a vertical, hierarchical leadership model to a much more participatory, democratic one, coherent with implementing educational practices linked to the territory through community participation processes. In the four cases, educational leadership is not restricted to the authority of a single person – the school head; on the contrary, this leadership is a community function. The good practices in these management teams include sharing leadership much more with groups and members of the educational community.

The school management style in the four cases analysed plays a crucial role in creating contexts for participation and collaboration that enable shared decision making and that allow all agents in the educational community to build a common vision of the school's educational project. In this sense, the diversity in the schools was not regarded as a problem, but rather as a source of enrichment. This focus was a predominant factor in welcoming new students into the schools without imposing barriers that limit their access opportunities. Equality of opportunities does not merely imply offering opportunities, but also providing the means and mechanisms that guarantee valuable outcomes for all, without excluding any group. The inclusive approach is seen in both the achievement of success at school for all students and the possibility for the community to participate in the curricular proposal (Sales, Traver & García, 2011). To guarantee equity, potential must be evaluated, different paces of learning and action are required, and the spaces, times and means must be made available to allow school–community collaboration to be established.

The management team therefore holds the key to developing an inclusive education in as far as it helps to foster different kinds of collaboration, a shared vision and collective decision making. However, we also found certain limitations or contradictions in this explicit recognition of management team leadership. In some cases, it can lead to the defence of the practice and consolidation of a more traditional leadership style, distributed in its forms and oriented towards a single individual. This approach harks back to a leadership culture akin to the vision of the commercial entrepreneurship embedded in neoliberal democracies that extol values antithetical to those of an inclusive culture and society, a vision that “promotes individual selfishness over collective solidarity. Transforms social responsibility [...] into individual responsibility” (our translation, Díez, 2014: 41).

The education for all project is constructed with the participation of families and students not through mere consultation on the general lines of pedagogical activity. For an educational project to be robust, the educational community must identify with it:

teachers, families and students must share the educational model, their interest and involvement. The four cases analysed present different educational experiences that show how, through distributed leadership, the school curriculum can be negotiated and shared among the various groups in the educational community. Through this process, the curriculum is transformed and contextualised in each of the settings, as can be seen, for example, when families and students participate in negotiating and deciding on the service learning proposals, or when families take part in evaluating the 'dialogue of knowledges' when drawing up educational proposals, or in relation to specific questions about homework.

This participation has some limitations and constraints, however. On the one hand, not all of the school curriculum is negotiable. If there are justifiable reasons for modifying the competencies defined in the official curriculum, compliance with which must be guaranteed, changes then have to be approved by the appropriate authorities. The part of the curriculum that is open to change through community participation is negotiated at certain times and in certain places and depends on who is involved. And finally, the participation of parents and other family members is mediated by the teachers. The times and spaces for curriculum negotiation were agreed among all the participants. In all the cases, it was decided that teachers, students and families must be represented. This negotiation was mainly carried out in school time and on school premises, although some exceptions were made to accommodate other demands on families' time.

The factors that have enabled this change include opening up the school to its community and territory, delegating responsibilities to the educational community and their acceptance of these responsibilities, community participation and collaboration, and understanding the school as an exceptional context in which to prepare critical, democratic citizens for their future lives (Dewey, 1995). This proposal, as we outlined in the theoretical framework, is approached from a position coherent with the underlying principles represented by inclusive intercultural education: inclusion, interculturality, democratisation and territorialisation (Sales, Ferrández & Moliner, 2012).

The transition to a form of leadership aligned with the open, democratic school model, such as distributed leadership, is not without its contradictions and paradoxes, which highlight the difficulty of transforming a culture of professionalism into a more collaborative one (Escobedo, Sales & Traver, 2017). In this transition, the four schools studied were highly conscious of the role that all sectors of the educational community can play in a range of different leadership models favourable to decentralised decision making (Longo, 2008) and, therefore, a much more equitable and democratic distribution of power. We found that the families, and especially the students, do not feel legitimised to take decisions on the curriculum. This barrier is accentuated by the sense of ownership teachers have over the school curriculum. Considerable support from teachers is required to implement an approach that engages students in the curricula design process. Crucially, democratic negotiation of the curriculum must be accepted as a valid process that forms part of school learning, and for this to happen, spaces and strategies must be established to facilitate collaborative curriculum building. It is therefore vitally important to change the teacher training approach to curriculum development in the classroom.

Essential to this process is the trust accorded to teachers on curriculum related questions. The commitment of teachers to the school's educational project is the foundation for engagement and participation in support of the common interest. This calls for, firstly, a

receptive attitude to the opinions of other members of the educational community, whether education professionals or not, and support for their involvement in the education process. However, if we want to shift towards the proposals of distributed leadership, the 'support' of families and students must give way to the democratic participation of all educational groups in school leadership. In this way, teachers can help to provide the necessary collaborative conditions for leadership to be distributed.

The distributed leadership resulting from alliances and collaborative work is developed in more horizontal organisational structures (Hartley & Allison, 2000). Schools must have the time and space for shared dialogue, reflection and the exchange of experiences and knowledge to encourage a collaborative culture that embraces commitment to students, families and the territory.

As we have seen, the leading role teachers play in the transition to more distributed leadership models is one of the factors to emerge from the analysis of the four cases and that must be taken into account in these educational improvement processes. That said, limitations associated with the teachers' central role in the school curriculum must be considered, as this can easily lead to the mistaken assumption that the curriculum is intrinsically linked to their power. From this position, and from an approach in which the democratic school is linked to the territory, the questions that arise are: who does the curriculum belong to? And if the answer is the teachers, then is that not a limitation to distributed leadership?

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