



7th International Conference on Intercultural Education “Education, Health and ICT for a Transcultural World”, EDUHEM 2016, 15-17 June 2016, Almeria, Spain

## Social Mapping in the Context of a Community-build Day: Strategy to Strengthen Links with Community in a Small Rural School

Odet Moliner\*, Auxiliadora Sales & Aida Sanahuja

*Universitat Jaume I, Avda. Sos Baynat, s/n, 12071, Castellón, Spain*

---

### Abstract

In this paper we present a strategy for linking the school with its territory carried out in a colegio rural agrupado (a rural primary school serving several small populations on different sites) in the province of Valencia (Spain). A one-day community-building event was organised to promote community participation and development, with two aims: to provide information on the projects carried out in the school with local community involvement; and to apply a participatory social diagnostic tool (SDT), namely, social mapping. The strategy falls within the methodological framework of a process of Participatory Action Research (PAR). We analyse the meaning of PAR in the context of the experience and describe how the various stages were carried out. The results show the implications for community agents that the mapping strategy had in linking the school to its local area. We conclude by outlining a series of reflections on the basic factors that foster the link between the school and its local context, and we highlight the great potential of this strategy for resituating the school in its territory and revealing previously hidden relationships and resources.

© 2017 The Authors. Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

Peer-review under responsibility of the organizing committee of EDUHEM 2016.

*Keywords:* Participatory Action Research; social mapping; community links; inclusive intercultural education.

---

### 1. Introduction

A school that aims to be truly intercultural and inclusive must involve civil society in the decisions taken within it, in defining its purposes, coordinating personal and institutional relationships and proposing cultural models that make

---

\* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 964729809;  
E-mail address: [molgar@uji.es](mailto:molgar@uji.es)

the school an agent for social change. Some authors (Apple & Beane, 2005; Bolívar, 2000; Flecha & Tortajada, 1999; Jiménez & Pozuelos, 2001) have explored structured educational experiences from the position of democratic participation and joint action by the educational community (pupils, teachers, families and social and community agents). It is our view that the processes of socio-community transformation for building intercultural and inclusive schools have a strong ally in the democratising dynamics of schools. Our research experience also tells us that initiatives for change taken within the limits of the school cannot, on their own, bring transformations to its environment (Traver, Sales & Moliner, 2010). For this to happen the school must open up to its territory, and create links with the collective and individual agents that live and give life to community interactions. This opposite is also true: a transformation in the locality, neighbourhood, village or city is not possible if the school is not included. Permeability (Santos Guerra, 2000) is a key factor in allowing the school and the locality in which it is embedded to create links and open up to community life by contributing and building shared knowledge. These schools are embedded in their locality; they are places of collective action, plural and multifaceted educational spaces that enhance their local context. However, this possibility is neither uniform nor automatic, since participatory action must frequently overcome numerous structural, organisational, personal or cultural hurdles that interfere in the processes of change.

The notion of community links takes us to the concept of community. For Jiménez and Pozuelos (2001): “*The concept of community [...] is enriched when it is related to that of the territory (district). The neighbourhood, locality, or territory is not just a transitional space where we carry out our daily activities; it is also an environment of education and coexistence that is worth taking into account*” (p.13). Undoubtedly, the relationships between the families, the educational community and the school will vary considerably in accordance with how each school understands the concept of educational community, the degree of openness and its relationships with the local context, and the channels and kinds of participation and in what activities.

The school environment is therefore understood as an object of learning on which to reflect and analyse, and a didactic resource. This approach takes us towards a communitarian, integrating curriculum – neither localist nor ethnocentric – that enables and seeks the participation of all the social sectors making up the school and favours critical intervention in the environment and its transformation towards greater solidarity (Jiménez & Pozuelos, 2001). It is also crucial to look beyond the immediate environment; we believe that the criteria of proximity in learning should not be exclusively restricted to spatial criteria only, but should incorporate other aspects such as ideology, experience and life. For this to happen, the participation of all sectors in the educational community must be fostered and strengthened by building collaboration networks and ensuring flexibility in the participatory structures, thereby encouraging porosity and permeability between the various spheres of the educational universe: formal, non-formal, and informal education.

One general strategy for linking the school with its community is to run joint educational projects that connect the school with its surrounding area (Moliner, Traver, Ruiz & Segarra, in press). Such projects emerge and flourish when the following conditions are in place: 1) the opportunity for contact among community agents (people and institutions); 2) knowledge about each another, as communities are made up of various groups with different backgrounds, social structures, value systems and cultural conceptions of the world; 3) the opportunity to work together in such a way that people can explore their interests and needs as a group; and 4) the opportunity for joint reflection and active planning for transformative action.

In this vein, the mapping activity organised as part of a community-building day offers a frame of action that can mobilise the community in order to analyse, in co-ordinated manner, its immediate context and establish its priorities in relation to the educational resources available in the area.

## 2. Descriptive Study

This study describes and analyses a strategy for community participation and linking up with the territory, namely, mapping. The initiative began with a request from the educational community to organise a community-building day to provide information about the projects carried out in the school and the local community's participation in them, and to apply a participatory social diagnostic (PSD) technique – social mapping – that would open the way for proposals for joint action plans shared between the school and the community.

## 2.1. Context

This study took place in the Benavites-Quart de les Valls school, located in the province of Valencia (Spain). It is a rural primary school based on two sites: one in the village of Benavites (632 inhabitants) and the other in Quart de les Valls (1,083 inhabitants). The school was set up as a colegio rural agrupado in 2005/2006 with the aim of optimising the available education resources in the two villages. At the time of the study, the school had 150 pupils and 15 teachers, practically all of whom are permanent staff members. The school has a considerable range of computer-based resources (tablets, dropbox, blogs, interactive whiteboard, etc.). Both villages have several associations that are heavily involved in school life. It is a benchmark institution, now in the fourth year of a project to build an inclusive intercultural school. The school has a range of strategies for democratic participation through participatory methodologies in the classroom; it also organises open days and applies self-management strategies such as mixed working committees and an enlarged school council that is now a collective decision-making body.

## 2.2. Methodology

Participatory action research (PAR), which Alberich (2008) identified as a type of ‘involvement methodology’, is the framework for the general process of transformation of this school. From the range of PAR methodologies we use participative social diagnostic (PSD) techniques as tools for transformation (Marchioni, 2001; Villasante, 1998) and for ‘awareness raising’ (Aguirre, 2012; Aguirre, Sales & Escobedo, 2014). According to Martínez (1995), PSD enables members of the community to identify their needs, analyse the causes and effects of their problems, and determine strengths and weaknesses in order to find solutions. In this paper we describe the activity of ‘social mapping’ to build a comprehensive picture of a locality using technical and experience-based tools (Habegger & Mancila, 2006).

## 2.3. Description of mapping as a practice for linking the school with its territory

In order to share the educational project with the local community and strengthen its participation, at the beginning of the academic year 2015–2016 the school organised a community-building day at a local site of natural beauty, la Font de Quart de les Valls. The event took place one Sunday morning at the end of the local village festivities in Quart, and began with a presentation of the teaching staff and the official opening of the school year. The venue was arranged in various sections so participants could walk around and find out about the school’s activities. These included a general explanation of the school’s education project co-ordinated by school’s managers; aspirations that had been achieved, those yet to be achieved and those planned for the present year; Thursday evening workshops open to the community run by mothers and teachers; new technologies and channels of communication, WhatsApp groups and the school’s new website; participatory methodologies in the classroom (project work, reading in pairs, the LOVA opera music project, etc.); the school radio, the book bank, the parents’ association, extra-curricular activities offered, the school dinner system, etc.

Around 250 people took part in the event in a relaxed environment with many activities designed to foster social cohesion through music, dancing and traditional paellas.

The research team acted as facilitators in the social mapping activity, which consisted of presenting two large panels with maps of the school’s two villages. During the day, pupils, families, teachers, local agents and representatives from public bodies identified the most representative places on each map (marked with little houses), and the most frequently visited places (marked with coloured stickers) and then gave their comments about the educational potential of each place or resource on the map (interview). This initiative made the school visible in its surrounding area and showed it as an integral part of the locality. The stages in this process were as follows:

*Stage 1. Search for secondary information:* a literature review enabled us to understand and plan the mapping activity properly.

*Stage 2. Awareness raising, reflection and finding a compromise:* the idea for a community-building day arose in one of the community assemblies about the project after discussions on how to develop educational activities with a connection to the environment and that emerge from the community’s interests. The management committee started preparing for the event by meeting the local authorities in each village and organising publicity. The research group

would facilitate the mapping process, which would require the active participation of all the community. Dates were set for gathering the information and for a second meeting to return and validate information.

*Stage 3. Information gathering:* two of the mothers prepared large format 1/50,000 maps mounted on panels for the mapping activity. A set of symbols was then devised (different coloured and shaped stickers for each participating group). For the fieldwork the panels were set up at the entrance to the venue and the facilitators explained the aims and encouraged people to take part. Once they had identified the most frequently visited places, they were filmed as they responded to a few questions asking about the educational opportunities of the places identified in the surrounding area.

*Stage 4. Data processing:* the research team listed most frequently named places and their location on the map according to the group that had mentioned them. The information from the interviews (video recordings) was also summarised in a table. A video clip was made with some of the suggestions for educational activities in order to summarise the information, and reflect the diversity of participants and the large number of ideas generated.

*Stage 5. Information validation and analysis:* in a new session the information was ‘returned’, using the mirror technique, to those participants who wanted to attend. The aim of this stage was to review the information together, creating a space where people could respond to questions or observations, errors could be corrected, confusions cleared up and further information added. The presence and absence of places and community education resources was analysed and the educational opportunities of each one were listed.

### 3. Results

We now present the results from the analysis of the information generated in the social mapping activity.

The data codes that we have used are the following ones: DA= Documentary analysis; M= Minutes from meetings; T= Teacher; F= Family member; R= Researcher

Regarding the content on the key factors that foster links with the community, the participants expressed the need to find a *Shared cultural project for social transformation*. Activities were proposed that would allow the *Curriculum to be linked with the environment*. One mother highlighted the difficulty in persuading local organisations to plan activities related to the school, or *Activities open to the school*:

*“Once the drama group was invited to go into the school and do something to involve the smallest children but they didn’t want to. We have to find ways of doing it” (DA\_M\_F)*

To this end, one father proposed *“working with places where other people’s help isn’t necessary, getting rid of projects that rely on help” (DA\_M\_F)*.

Notable *Activities open to the school* would include, for example, activities involving other groups or associations. Some teachers proposed *“setting something up with the retired people who live nearby”* or the *“hunters’ association, for example”*. Another teacher suggested *“organising a domino competition with the old people and the children from the two villages” (DA\_M\_T)*.

The proposals for using public spaces in the area for educational activities were especially interesting. One teacher proposed creating:

*“A reading space in the park to encourage reading. For example, going to the park on Friday mornings to read, encouraging people to read for pleasure on that day and at that time...” (DA\_M\_T)*

Another suggestion was *“to run a workshop on Thursdays somewhere in the village” (DA\_M\_T)*. With notable enthusiasm for the principle of openness, another person said that *“they have to go outside the school. People will realise it’s an open school when they come out; if they don’t come out people don’t know” (DA\_M\_T)*.

The curriculum can also be linked to the environment through methodology, and the school already seems to have some experience of this. One teacher considered that *“village projects have been done in the past; this school does have a link with its environment” (DA\_M\_T)*.

The need for training in the service-learning methodology was noted; one interesting proposal was to run training sessions for the teaching staff but open up the sessions to anybody with an interest in service learning training, a proposal that reflects an exceptionally open attitude on the part of the teaching staff.

With regard to Collaboration with other organisations one teacher proposed that the school “*write to the town council to involve, through an agreement with the University of Valencia, fine arts students in the restoration of the church in the oldest part of the village*” (DA\_M\_T).

Of all the educational proposals, the one that would materialise as a school project involving the rest of the community was an idea to publish a book about the village. One of the teachers reported that,

*“one of the villages has published a series of books on the history of the village. They want to publish another book and they’ve spoken to the mayor about it. It would involve writing a book in the voices of the grandparents, parents and children, interviewing the older people, parents and grandparents to see how the public wash-house has changed or how it was used in the past... Or sending the children home with a photograph of the school and starting a conversation that way. Set targets for each course (class) to focus on and publish the book”.*

Another of the teachers pointed out that “methodology, ways of doing the research, which sections to develop, and so on, would have to be defined” (DA\_M\_T).

Hence, out of the assessment and reflections on this community-building day came a project to produce a book about the village and to start applying service-learning methodology in the school.

Another aspect concerns the appraisals of the social mapping strategy. On one hand, the participants agreed that the strategy had potential to resituate the school in its territory and start visualising the network of relationships and resources that had previously been hidden. The teachers noted that “the map gave us ideas to link up with the village through a school project. We have to go to the least visited places (those that didn’t have a sticker) to establish a link and work together with the people who want to be involved” (DA\_M\_T).

Another aspect is the autonomy and the power to make decisions offered by the technique; participants have the opportunity to decide how to analyse information on the map in the ‘return’ session.

*“I would take off the stickers and leave the most significant points”* (DA\_M\_T).7

*“The facilitator mentioned that there are not many associations on the map and asked for information.”* (DA\_M\_R).

*“We must have a brainstorming session for activities and concrete proposals and firm things up next month; each academic course can do certain activities”* (DA\_M\_T).

How to organise the way the activities are developed was also mentioned. The school managers favoured “*choosing targets for this year. For example this year were going to focus on the music school, the church in Benicalap, and go all out for that*” (DA\_M\_T).

#### 4. Discussion of the results

Through the mapping activity, the course was able to start off from the philosophy of the embedded school, by offering educational spaces and proposals and listening to what all members of the community had to say about local interests and the possibilities of linking the school with its surrounding area. We have demonstrated the potential of this strategy for resituating the school in its environment, for developing a community vision and involving social and educational agents. The intervention spawned the ‘village book’ project, which will embody the educational opportunities the school offers to its villages, although the proposals are still generated in the school.

On the one hand, teachers and families became aware of the social make-up of the two neighbouring villages and the educational potential of the available resources. The activity helped to understand the process of school change from the perspective of social and community transformation in which different voices are heard and the relationship between the social and the educational is visualised. On the other hand the fact that the children’s comments were not taken into account in stage 5 – the information validation and analysis stage – alerts us to some of the shortcomings and cultural inertias that hamper the process of change. In this vein, it is particularly difficult to establish shared leadership which, at the same time, is grounded on the conscious or unconscious assumptions of certain differentiated and highly stereotyped roles within the school organisation. One example is the case of the pupils’ comments that were effectively picked up in phase 3, only to be silenced in the analysis phase when decisions were made about future actions.

In summary, the study reveals that the challenge mapping poses is to break down the barriers that continue to separate the school institution from local social needs, and to build bridges from a socio-communitarian perspective so that improvements in the school and in the neighbourhood are truly conceived of as a shared common process. The school is no longer understood as being outside its territory and is perceived as a social space where barriers between 'inside' and 'outside' are removed (Aguirre, Sales & Escobedo, 2014). We are beginning to glimpse the repercussions of a strategy in teachers' professional development that involves learning to work together and with the city (Nixon, Allan, & Mannion, 2001), recognising the contribution made by the different backgrounds and cultural legacies of people and places.

### Acknowledgements

Research project: "La escuela incluida en el territorio análisis de las estrategias de participación ciudadana desde la educación intercultural inclusiva". MINECO 2014-15 (EDU2013-46491-R). Funded by Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness.

### References

- Aguirre, A. (2012). *Diagnóstico social participativo, desarrollo local y participación social: un estudio de caso sobre participación juvenil en la Comarca Els Ports*. Trabajo de investigación: Universitat Jaume I.
- Aguirre, A.; Sales, A. & Escobedo, P. (2014). Construyendo la escuela intercultural inclusiva desde el Diagnóstico Social Participativo. *Quaderns Digitals.net XI Congreso Internacional, XXXI Jornadas de Universidades y Educación Inclusiva: La Escuela Excluida*. Universitat Jaume I, Castellón.
- Alberich, T. (2008). IAP, Redes y Mapas Sociales. Desde la investigación a la intervención social. *Portularia*, vol VIII, nº 1, 131-151.
- Apple, M. & Beane, J. A. (2005). *Escuelas democráticas*. Madrid: Morata (4th ed).
- Bolívar, A. (2000). Los centros escolares como comunidades. Revisando la colegialidad. *Revista Española de Pedagogía*, 216, pp.253-274.
- Flecha, R. & Tortajada, I. (1999). Retos y salidas educativas en la entrada de siglo. In F. Imbernon (coord.) *La educación en el siglo XXI. Los retos del futuro inmediato*. Barcelona: Graó.
- Habegger, S. & Mancila, I. (2006). El poder de la Cartografía Social en las prácticas contra hegemónicas o la Cartografía social como estrategia para diagnosticar nuestro territorio, *Revista Araciega*, 14.
- Jiménez, J. R. & Pozuelos, F. J. (2001). Una escuela pública abierta a la comunidad. *Investigación en la escuela*, 44, pp.5-17.
- Marchioni, M. (2001). *Comunidad, participación y desarrollo*. Madrid: Ed. Popular.
- Martínez, A. (1995). *El diagnóstico participativo: una herramienta de trabajo para las comunidades*. Costa Rica: Catie.
- Moliner, O; Traver, J. Ruiz, M.P & Segarra, T. (en prensa) Estrategias que inciden en los procesos de democratización de la escuela. Una aproximación teórica. *REDIE. Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa*.
- Nixon, J.; Allan, J. & Mannion, G. (2001) Educational renewal as democratic practice: 'new' community schooling in Scotland. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 5:4, 329-352.
- Santos Guerra, M.A.(2000). *La escuela que aprende*. Madrid:Morata.
- Traver, J.A.; Sales, A. & Moliner, O. (2010). Ampliando el territorio: Algunas claves sobre la Participación de la Comunidad Educativa. *REICE, Revista Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 8 (3), 96- 119 .
- Villasante, T. R. (1998). *Cuatro redes para mejor vivir*. vols. I y II. Buenos Aires: Lumen.