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

Strategies to link schools to their territories. A Survey Study

Auxiliadora Sales[a]*, Odet Moliner[a] & Josefina Lozano[b]

a.Universitat Jaume I, Avda. Sos Baynat, s/n, 12071 Castellón, Spain
b.Universidad de Murcia, Campus Universitario de Espinardo. 30100 Murcia

Abstract

The inclusive intercultural school is based on a participatory and democratic education model. It promotes critical citizenship and links schools to their territory so they become agents of social transformation. The aim of this study is to learn about the links between territory and schools in different contexts in Spain.

To this end a survey was performed in preschool, primary, secondary and special education schools in the regions of Valencia and Murcia and the Basque Country. A total of 242 schools responded to a 32-item questionnaire, which gathers information from the school principals on the relationship between their schools and the territory.

The analysis shows schools are responsive to the notion of opening up to the surrounding community through curricular and cultural activities related to neighborhood or town organizations. However, there is a lower incidence of volunteer work and building networks with other institutions.

The results reveal a socio-communitarian and participatory vision of education in schools. This approach can encourage a sense of belonging and shared leadership. However, the approach lacks strategies to establish more sustainable and systematic links with the territory for promoting real social change.

Keywords: Intercultural and inclusive school; linking school and community; social change.

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +34 964729808.
E-mail address: asales@uji.es

1. Introduction

Education and culture must constantly reflect on and analyze today's diverse and plural reality. According to Kincheloe and Steinberg (1999), the great challenge facing education is to provide the conditions that ensure equal opportunities and social transformation based on cultural construction-reconstruction. The school, as a social institution, must therefore be a living space where active democracy facilitates full citizen participation and the construction of collective knowledge based on its social context (Susinos & Rodriguez-Hoyos, 2011).

Drawing on the above premises, our conception of the intercultural inclusive school is one that is fully embedded in its territory, that means an "included" school. This model of school constructs an educational and cultural project based on a vision of reality as an open system where, as in Gimeno Sacristán's (2001) metaphorical description, different cultural groups form a vast network connected by numerous threads acting as communication channels. This idea of school and society is grounded on critical citizenship that calls for commitment, active involvement, reflection and participation under an inclusive approach to leadership (Traver, Sales & Moliner, 2010).

Thus, the previous literature associates the intercultural inclusive school with democratic values and practices, and with citizen participation strategies that link the school to its territory so as to transform it (Torney-Purta & Barber, 2005; Bolívar, 2006).

This link refers to:

● A shared cultural project of common values and objectives that gives meaning and cohesion to the educational community. It means sharing a social-communitarian vision of education, breaking down barriers between formal and informal learning processes (Ainscow et al., 2012).
● Spaces and times for citizen participation: establishing routine moments and places for participation in school life, creating opportunities for learning and dialogue, and innovation strategies that promote intercultural communication, a sense of belonging and critical citizenship (Sales, Traver & García, 2011).
● A network of support and cooperation to increase schools' capacity to deal with diversity in an inclusive way (Echeita et al., 2013). Indeed, the search for support networks demonstrates a sustainable culture of change in a school (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006).
● Commitment to social transformation: the school-territory link is associated with social change, social improvement in a general sense. The school cannot be omitted from citizen movements that accept their responsibility to put their agency and empowerment into practice (García Perez, 2009; Sales, 2012).

These foundations provide the basis for our analysis of the school-territory links in three Spanish autonomous communities, through a survey study as a part of a broader research project on strategies for citizen participation in the included school.

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

The research question addressed in this study is: What strategies do schools use to build links with their territory? We aim to understand and analyze the strategies a school community uses to link to their territory: How do schools connect their activities to their neighborhood or town? What kind of organizations collaborate with the school? Is there a network with other institutions?

The study is based on descriptive-exploratory research methodology: a survey study. The questionnaires were sent by e-mail to principals of preschool, primary, secondary and special education schools. The response rate was 9.3%: 242 questionnaires were returned from the 2,614 sent out in the three regions.

2.2. Sample

The sample comprised 242 preschool, primary, secondary and special education schools in the regions of Valencia and Murcia and the Basque Country. The sample is distributed as follows: 118 (48.8%) preschool and primary schools,

47 (19.4%) secondary schools, 33 (13.6%) preschool, primary and secondary schools, 7 (2.9%) special education schools, 3 (1.2%) preschools, 3 primary and secondary schools (1.2%), and 1 (0.4%) residential school; 30 schools (12.4%) did not specify a category.

The majority, 119, were public schools (82.2%), 42 were subsidized private schools (17.4%) and 1 was a private school (0.4%).

Distribution according to location was as follows: 60 in rural settings (24.8%), 132 in urban settings (54.5%), and 47 (19.4%) in the suburbs.

2.3. Information gathering tools and process

We gathered the information by means of a 32-item checklist, including both multiple choice and open questions. The questionnaire, which was designed and sent out online using the Google Docs application, is structured in five sections: a) socio-demographic information; b) information about resources and diversity programs; c) space and time for community participation in educational activities; d) methodological strategies; and e) organizations and activities that link the school to the territory. In this study we analyze the responses to socio-demographic questions (5 items) and requests for information about organizations and activities that link the school and the territory (9 items).

An e-mail was sent to all the school principals with the checklist and a letter explaining the research goals, funding and instructions to answer the questionnaire. The online answers automatically generated a spreadsheet from which the data were transferred to SPSS 17.0 to analyze frequency of response in the checklist and to perform a content analysis of the open questions. Once the data had been processed and summarized, a report of the results was emailed back to all the participating schools.

3. Results

This study aimed to find out whether schools link their activities with community or town events; what kind of organizations they collaborate with; and whether they create networks with other institutions. The overall results are reported by autonomous community.

Table 1. School-territory links (n /%)

	Valencian Community	Murcia	Basque Country	Total
1. Is the material taught in this school related to local community or town events?	160 97.6%	24 100%	52 96.3%	236 97.6%
2. Do your school activities help to improve life in the local community or town?	151 92.1%	20 83.4%	53 98.1%	224 92.5%
3. Do the local authorities or other institutions ask the school to participate in their activities?	142 86.6%	22 91.7%	49 90.7%	213 88.0%
4. Does the school collaborate with local/regional organizations?	158 96.3%	22 91.7%	53 98.1%	233 96.3%
5. Does the school let local organizations use its premises for their activities?	134 81.7%	20 83.3%	49 90.7%	203 83.9%
6. Does the school have any volunteers?	55 33.5%	7 29.9%	29 53.7%	91 37.6%
7. Does the school organize activities open to the community and local families?	129 78.7%	18 75.0%	48 88.9%	195 80.6%
8. Does the school participate in community/town activities?	96 58.5%	18 75.0%	34 63.0%	148 61.2%
9. Does the school participate in any networking projects with other schools or organizations?	75 45.7%	11 45.8%	28 51.9%	114 47.1%

3.1. A shared cultural project and social transformation

Linking curriculum and context: 96% of schools in the survey report that what they teach is related to their social and natural environment, and 92.5% principals claim that curricular activities help to improve their local context.

Local activities in school: most of the schools (88%) receive numerous requests from organizations requesting their collaboration, and 83.9% of the schools offer their premises for other organizations to use for their activities. The most frequently used spaces are multi-purpose halls (25.6%), the gym (24.4%), the playground and the athletics track (18.6%), and the auditorium (16.1%). In some cases the dining room and school gardens are also available. Activities include music school activities, choirs, dance classes, chess club, sports, foreign language conversation groups, and adult education.

School activities open to the community: many schools (80.6%) open up their activities to families and neighbors. The activities that link the school to its territory are celebrations or festivals (45.5%), charitable events such as markets, rummage sales or food banks (15.3%), 'open-door' days (9.5%), and parenting classes (7.9%). A few schools offer open access to activities such as adult courses, concerts, sports competitions, exhibitions, theater or cultural seasons.

Local activities open to the school: Linking school and territory not only involves schools making their premises and activities (educational, recreational, sports) available to the local community, but also the school community taking part in activities organized in the town or community. Regarding the second point, 61.2% of the principals reported that their schools participate in local activities. This percentage is considerably lower than the figures for school activities accessible to the local community (80.6%) and local requests for schools to collaborate (88%).

The main activities in which the school community participates are community or village festivities (22.7%) (carnival, festivals, fairs), cultural activities (16.9%) (theater, exhibitions, concerts, promotion of reading programs, literary or drawing contests) and related to environmental and activities (12.8%) (fundraising or charitable campaigns, walks, educational workshops).

3.2. Spaces for dialogue and innovation

Linking schools to their territory involves allocating space and real time for participation. Schools provide places for meetings, activities, and storing materials: 97.1% of schools take bookings or make spaces available for family and local organization activities, and 59.5% have a room or office for the Parents' Association. However, only 14% offer their classrooms for family meetings. Likewise, schools should have common social spaces available for the educational community to propose all kinds of activities, not only related to the curriculum or teaching, but also for cultural and social activities, debates, etc. Most of the surveyed schools have such common spaces to accommodate these activities whenever possible (90.5%).

3.3. Support and collaboration networks

Collaboration with institutions: 96.3% of the principals report collaborating with local or regional organizations. The main agents that collaborate with schools are: local governments (79.8%), NGOs (61.2%), universities and associations (48.8%), teacher training institutions (35.1%), and other schools (14.9%). Overall, schools work very closely with their local governments and other public entities (libraries, social services, police, health centers, sports centers), NGOs (Red Cross, Caritas, Amnesty International, Manos Unidas, Food Bank, Save the Children), cultural associations (dance, music, local festivals, cultural and environmental heritage), and associations and foundations for people with functional diversity (ONCE, Asperger Association, ADHD Group).

Volunteering: Another indicator of the links between schools and their territory is whether they have a volunteer service. Only 37.6% of principals reported any volunteer participation in their schools. In many cases, these volunteers are parents who help teachers by supporting activities in the classroom, workshops or outdoors (interactive groups, school garden, trips and camping). Other examples include conflict resolution or mediation workshops run by former students; help from university students with cooperative learning activities or 'homework club'; theatrical or other recreational activities supported by young people from cultural associations; retired people who teach chess or manage the library; and volunteers from municipal social action programs.

Networking: 47.1% of the schools have a networking program or project with other organizations and schools. Most of these connections are with municipal programs and social action projects coordinated between towns, social services and schools.

Although it is not the aim of this analysis to conduct a comparative study, we highlight some findings that we consider relevant and that give an alternative view of the educational reality in the different regions. The principals have a positive perception that school activity can help to improve the immediate environment in all three autonomous communities. However, the percentages fall when specific issues are examined, as shown by the higher presence of volunteer services in the Basque Country (53.7%) than in Valencia (33.5%) and Murcia (29.9%); in contrast, schools in Murcia participate most actively in activities organized by the town (75%). In all cases, percentages referring to networking with other institutions are lower, although they are slightly higher in the Basque Country (51.9%) than Valencia (33%) and Murcia (29.9%).

These results provide an overview of schools' links with their territories according to responses from their principals. From these data we can draw conclusions and educational implications to improve linking strategies between schools and their social reality.

4. Discussion

Schools are responsive to the concept of connecting curriculum with their context, by opening doors and linking their activities with the cultural life in their community to become another agent of change. This involvement pursues common values and interests to support a shared educational project (Torres, 2011).

We conclude that a certain communitarian vision of education is seen in the way schools make spaces and times available to the community for participation in school activities. This vision may lead to a sense of belonging, of encouraging part of the school community to participate, make decisions and build links with their social reality (Traver, Sales & Moliner, 2010). When common spaces are opened up to all kinds of community activities, they make the collaborative culture visible and break down barriers between the school and socio-education outside it. Mutual support between school and territory allows us to draw a map of relationships that goes beyond the restrictive curricular point of view. Rather, these links can bring back an experiential approach to the curriculum, based on a situated learning model to understand and reflect on plural realities and opportunities for transformation (Sagástegui, 2004).

Schools open up to the needs of their immediate environment by offering cultural, educational and sports activities, but they do not always generate sustainable collaboration and support networks with other institutions such as volunteer services. This type of collaborative strategy is more difficult to set up and keep going. However, only schools that integrate this networking philosophy into their organizational culture are able to create stable and enriching links (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Muijs, Ainscow & Chapman, 2011).

In summary, the schools in this study show they have some links to the territory through the access they provide to school premises, participation in local events, and school activities that are open to the local community. These linking strategies could be more effective if the collaborative network were extended and citizen participation were included to strengthen the links between people and institutions in the local context. These links could become strategies for transformation if the support for connections between the school culture – including its formal structures – and citizen movements were deeper and had medium- or long-term outlook. The development of participatory action research projects and learning-service methodologies could promote this link based on inclusive and democratic practices (Sales, Moliner & Ruiz, 2013).

Acknowledgements

References

Ainscow, M., Dyson, A., Goldrick, S. & West, M. (2012). Making schools effective for all: rethinking the task. *School Leadership & Management*,

32(3), 197-213.

Bolívar, A. (2006). Familia y escuela: dos mundos llamados a trabajar en común. *Revista de Educación*, 339, 119-146.

Echeita, G., Simón, C. Sandoval, M., y Monarca, H. (2013). *Cómo fomentar las redes naturales de apoyo en el marco de una escuela inclusiva: propuestas prácticas*. Sevilla: Editorial MAD.

García Pérez, F. (2009). Educar para la participación ciudadana. Un reto para la escuela del siglo XXI. *Investigación en la Escuela*, 68, 1-5.

Gimeno Sacristán, J. (2001) Educar y convivir en la cultura global. Madrid: Morata.

Hargreaves, A. & Fink, D. (2006). El liderazgo sostenible. Siete principios para el liderazgo en centros educativos innovadores. Madrid: MINEDUC/Morata.

Kincheloe, J.L. & Steinberg, S.R. (1999). Repensar el multiculturalismo. Barcelona: Octaedro.

Muijs, D.; Ainscow, M. & Chapman, Ch. (2011) *Collaboration and Networking in Education*. Londres: Springer.

Sagástegui, D. (2004) Una apuesta por la cultura: el aprendizaje situado. *Revista Electrónica Sinéctica*, 24, 30-39. Recuperado de http://www.redalyc.org/pdf/998/99815918005.pdf

Sales, A. (2012). Creando redes para una Ciudadanía Crítica desde la escuela intercultural inclusiva. *Revista de Educación Inclusiva*, 5(1), 51-68.

Sales, A.; Moliner, O. & Ruiz, P. (2013). Procesos de transformación hacia la escuela intercultural inclusiva desde la gestión participativa. En Miguel Navarro & Arturo Barraza (Coord.) *Dirección, Liderazgo, Modelos y Procesos de Gestión: Claves hacia la transformación*. México: REDIE.

Sales, A.; Traver, J. & García, R. (2011)**.** Action research as a school-based strategy in intercultural professional development for teachers. *Teaching and Teacher Education,* 27 (5), 911-919.

Susinos, T., y Rodríguez-Hoyos, C. (2011). La educación inclusiva hoy. Reconocer al otro y crear comunidad desde el diálogo y la participación. *Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado*, 25(1), 15-30.

Torney-Purta, J. & Barber, C. (2005): Democratic School Engagement and Civic Participation among European Adolescents: Analysis of Data from the IEA Civic Education Study. *Journal of Social Science Education*, Special Edition: European Year of Citizenship through Education, 2005. En: http://www.jsse.org/2005-se/torney_purta_barber_iea_analysis.htm

Torres, X. (2011) *La justicia curricular. El caballo de Troya de la cultura escolar*. Madrid: Morata.

Traver, J.; Sales, A. y Moliner, O. (2010) Ampliando el territorio: algunas claves sobre la participación de la comunidad educativa. *Revista Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, 8 (3), 97-119.