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Building inclusive and democratic schools in Spain: strategies for mobilising knowledge on inclusive education through participatory action research

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ABSTRACT

This article presents the results of a research on transformation processes for creating more democratic and inclusive schools. Through a multiple case study of four Spanish schools, the authors analyse how the actors involved in participatory action research processes mobilise knowledge on inclusive education. The authors explore the strategies that favour said mobilisation when inclusive, democratic and community curricular practices are implemented. These practices are carried out in schools within the framework of Participatory Action Research (PAR) processes. The results show that collaborative and dialogical practices allow to question the pedagogical practices, and serve for linking contexts (school, territory and university) and mobilising the available knowledge (generate it, apply it, share it and disseminate it).

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Introduction

One of the biggest educational challenges that teachers face today is how to address classroom practices from a truly inclusive and democratic perspective. The management of diversity in the classroom using an inclusive approach implies developing the teaching and organisational strategies that enable each student to learn. However, in addition, there needs to be a contextual framework through which a climate of interdependence and acceptance can be created, where democratic coexistence governs the relationships between the students. According to Stainback and Stainback (1996) the inclusive classroom is, or must be, a space for everybody, which has been thought about and developed as a participatory community. In this way, as contended, the concept of community is built on the assumption that all its members belong to it. It implies that each member has the right to feel, as a social actor, that he/she participates in his/her environment, is recognised as such and that all have the possibility of participating in it as full members. The notion of full participation corresponds to an image of the inclusive

classroom as a democratic classroom. In such a classroom, democratic structures and processes that organise the school life and the curriculum are created (Apple and Bean 1995).

This approach assumes that the school, as a social institution, should be a living space where active democracy facilitates full participation and the construction of collective knowledge based on its social context (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997). As a democratic strategy, full participation calls for a mechanism through which members of the community take decisions by listening to all voices and accepting the commitment to play an active role in a process of social change towards equity, inclusion and social justice (Muijs et al. 2011).

The precision of those values leads the educational centres to immerse themselves in transformation processes that involve collaborative, open and participatory dynamics that are in constant reconstruction. These are processes that create linkages between the school and its environment, enabling transformation in both directions. These schools develop strategic actions aimed at leading change towards 'open source' and non-ethnocentric schools, in which curricular practices are linked to the territory and require the participation of the educational community. These schools implement democratic, inclusive and linked to the territory curricular practices. These practices are defined by the following characteristics:

- Based on a shared cultural project of common values and objectives that gives meaning and cohesion to the educational community (Ainscow et al. 2016).
- Developed in spaces and times that facilitate citizen participation: establishing routine moments and places for participation in school life, creating opportunities for learning and dialogue (Fullan, Quinn, and McEachen 2018).
- Committed to social change (Bourn 2016).
- Involved in a network of support and cooperation to increase schools' capacity and culture to deal with diversity in an inclusive and sustainable way.
- Planned and guided by the school, inside or outside the school, but related to the teaching–learning of content, processes and dynamics for community life.
- Embedded in its territory to strengthen the links between people and institutions in the local context. Mutual support between school and territory allows us to draw a map of relationships that goes beyond the restrictive curricular point of view (Moliner, Sales, and Traver 2017).

Participatory action research (PAR) as a process for knowledge mobilisation

In a school that develops inclusive, democratic and participatory practices is essential to rely on the opinions of the various parties concerned, bringing together the experience and knowledge of the professionals, students, families and academic researchers. According to Ainscow et al. (2016, 149) 'schools know more than they use' and, therefore, this knowledge needs to be mobilised, harnessed and democratised.

Participatory action research (PAR) is a tool for social mobilisation of knowledge that creates spaces for analysis and discussion among participants, actors and researchers, in

constant dialogue, within the framework of a scientific collaboration (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2014). It allows the mixture of scientific and citizen knowledge, which on the basis of the school's own dynamics, communally share the construction of a theoretical-practical rationality aimed at improving education. This is an opportunity for the transformation and improvement of the classroom and school practices, in interconnection with the immediate environment and the local community.

Starting from these approaches, this article focuses on the analysis of the knowledge mobilisation methods used by the schools immersed in processes of change and transformation towards more inclusive and democratic approaches. These schools implement curricular practices linked to the territory, within a comprehensive PAR process, following each of its stages (Ander-Egg 2012). In each school, these approaches are channelled through a unique project, but, in all cases, mobilisation of practical knowledge is promoted, on the basis of shared construction (bottom-up), socialisation of the research, cooperation among its protagonists, and dissemination within the participating community, with a clear impact both within and outside it.

Knowledge mobilisation (Bennet and Bennet 2007; Levin 2011; Naidorf 2014) is understood as a reciprocal and complementary flow of knowledge between researchers, intermediaries and users, not only within the academy but also outside it, in such a way that the users can benefit from it. It is used as an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of activities relating to the production and use of research results, including knowledge synthesis, dissemination, transfer, exchange and production or co-production by researchers and knowledge users (SSHRC 2019).

Within the framework of the processes for building inclusive, democratic and participatory schools, some studies show the development of action research processes in the schools. These are group interpretive processes that involve the different perspectives of practitioners, students and academics in ways that encourage critical reflection, collaborative learning and mutual critique for the shared analysis of one's own practice (Ainscow et al. 2016; Moliner, Sales, and Traver 2017; Sales, Moliner, and Traver 2020). Action research enables participation in a process of shared knowledge production, professional development and improvement of the classroom practices. It is a strategy to create a school network with two interrelated cycles of action research, implemented in collaboration between practitioners and researchers. The first cycle is focused on using the knowledge available within the schools, and the second one tries to examine these developments using the existing theory and the previous research. Accordingly, Echeita et al. (2014), within the framework of a Comenius European Project, show how in different schools of the United Kingdom, Portugal and Spain they have implemented collaborative action research processes, and they highlight mechanisms that are crucial in the inclusion process, such as: considering the students' voices in order to help them to change, and the teachers' collaborative work in the form of Study Lessons in order to improve their practice. It is also emphasised as a mobilisation strategy, sharing knowledge through collaboration networks, both among the actors, among the researchers, and among both of them (Arnaiz, De Haro, and Azorín 2018;; Moliner and Ramel 2018; Parrilla Latas et al. 2017).

On the other hand, some studies stress those dissemination strategies that allow research findings to be accessible to other people who do not belong to the academic community. They refer to the search for alternative forms of representation and

communication that make others want to read, see or listen, feel and learn. For example, strategies that use art (Petrarca and Hughes 2014; Sonn and Baker 2016) as a language that invites to address complexity. The study of Kaplan, Miles, and Howes (2011) points to the use of participatory photography as a participatory research strategy that enables the participants to establish links between theory and practice. The work of Landry et al. (2008) ensures that documentation of good practices or innovative practices through databases allows to optimise knowledge management and facilitates that it is shared and disseminated among the education professionals. Some studies (Ceballos-López, Saiz-Linares, and Ruiz-López 2017; Parrilla Latas, Raposo-Rivas, and & Martínez-Figueira 2016; Sandoval and Messiou 2020) refer to participatory strategies such as short stories, surveys, techniques (message in a bottle, drawing, tale, etc.) and analyse the production and communication strategies used in each of the stages of the PAR process, starting from the students' voice.

Considering that PAR is a participatory research method that favours mobilisation of knowledge on inclusive education in schools, the research question of this study is: which knowledge mobilisation strategies are used in these Spanish schools immersed in PAR processes that implement democratic, inclusive and linked to the territory curricular practices?

Method

This work is part of a research project financed by the Ministry of Spain. It is a Multiple Case Study (Stake 2006) that allows to answer the research question posed from a qualitative approach. Four Childhood and Primary Education Schools (3–12 years old) participate in the case study, from the regions that are part of the research: Region of Murcia (C1), Valencian Community (C2), Community of Madrid (C3) and the Basque Country (C4). The research team is composed of four groups of researchers, one from each community, who share a research project. All of them are consolidated and each one is involved in the PAR process of one school.

The selection of cases is intentional and is determined by the prior knowledge the researchers of each centre have, based on three criteria: (a) developing inclusive and democratic practices, (b) having a School Project in which inclusion, democracy and links to the territory are made explicit as signs of identity and (c) developing knowledge mobilisation strategies in the PAR process.

According to Stake (2006), this is a multiple case study research because the individual cases share common characteristics or conditions, but their individual study will allow us to understand their complexity and situational uniqueness. It is instrumental because 'in the multiple case study the interest will be primarily instrumental' (8), and our purpose is to go beyond the case to answer the research question.

Case 1 is a Public School located in a neighbourhood of Murcia. It is a non-religious school with a high percentage (30%) of foreign students, which respects and educates students of all faiths and ideologies. The socio-economic status of the families is middle-low. In the school, there are 430 students, distributed among 16 classrooms, and 2 specific Open Classrooms for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). They promote measures to compensate discriminatory socio-cultural realities and it makes a

commitment to the teachers' continuous learning, the participation of fathers and mothers, and a greater participation in activities promoted by cultural associations and entities.

Case 2 is a rural school (Gathered Rural School), comprised of two school groups who belong to two small neighbouring villages of the Province of Valencia. About 150 students and 15 teachers attend this school. This is the fifth year that they are developing a project in order to build an intercultural inclusive school. It has become an educational community managed by a Coordinating Committee, composed of teachers, students, families and local administration. The school's educational style is dialogical, democratic, inclusive and included in the territory.

Case 3 is a public school located in Fuenlabrada, a big village situated in the south of the city of Madrid. It is one of the municipalities with the youngest population in all the national territory, due to a migration process that took place in the 1980s. The school is surrounded by a road and tall blocks of flats built about 15 years ago. Participation is a fundamental pillar and is one of the reasons why families choose this school. It is known and spread among the families that in the school 'all children are treated well'.

Case 4 is a school located in a historic municipality of the Basque Country with a high industrialisation level. Its immigrant population is the highest of the community. One of its fundamental axes is the students' participation, together with other groups, in different curricular activities linked to the territory. It is a public and multicultural school where more than 25 different languages are present. It is a member of the *Amara Berri* network (innovation system).

For data gathering/production the transformation processes (object of study) have been documented using different qualitative research methods and tools: dynamics characteristic of the participatory social diagnosis (PSD), interviews (I), participant observation (PO), discussion groups (DG), and assemblies (A). The informants and participants have been: the students of the centre (S), the teachers (T), the families (F), the social actors (SA), and the research team (R). Triangulation of methods and information sources allows to complement reliability and validity, and thus integrate the information and results obtained. Data analysis has been conducted through a deductive content analysis, on the basis of the four theoretical categories obtained from the literature review (Table 1).

The content analysis involved the identification of units of meaning that allowed us to identify the strategies characteristic of each category. The coding system for the units of meaning is: Case, Tool, Participant Group (for example, Case 2, Discussion Group, Teachers: C2, DG, T). When narrating the cases, verbatim are included using these codes.

Table 1. Codebook. Definition of the theoretical categories

Theoretical categories	Definition
Generating	Using the knowledge existing in the schools and comparing it with the theory. Creating knowledge from the experience. Learning. Building and co-constructing knowledge. Raising group awareness and developing a learning process from the immersion in its own reality.
Applying	Using the existing theory and the findings of previous research and implementing them.
Sharing	Disseminating to insiders. Disseminating knowledge among actors, education professionals, families, students and community involved in the process, and knowledge users.
Disseminating	Disseminating to outsiders. Communicating in an accessible and flexible way. Communicating assuming an aesthetic attitude. Telling and connecting with audiences outside the process, using alternative communication methods.

Results

A narrative of each case is presented to get an idea of the strategies employed in its usage context. Subsequently, we offer a chart (Table 2) that summarizes and gives us an overview of the strategies by category, depending on the cases and the participants.

Case 1

In this school, the project started with the analysis of a demand for a greater participation of the school community in the centre. For that reason, different meetings were held with the sectors of the educational community: school management staff, inclusive educational support team, teachers, families and other external community actors, such as members of the local Centre for the Elderly. In this way, participation and commitment began to be generated, bringing the school closer to its context.

Creating knowledge from the experience

The second stage of shared assessment and analysis involved collecting the suggestions from the families, students and teachers, taking advantage of the meetings held with the families at the beginning of the academic year. Through the technique 'MyIdealSchool' some cardboards were placed, as murals, in order that the families wrote in

Table 2. Summary of the strategies employed by category, case and participant

	Strategies	Case	Participants			
			(S)	(T)	(F)	(SA)
Creating	Socratic Wheel	2	x	x	x	
		4	x	x	x	
	Timeline	3	x		x	
	Photovoice	2	x	x	x	
		3	x			
	My ideal school	1	x	x	x	
		4	x		x	x
	Discussion Group	4		x		
	Social Mapping	2	x	x	x	x
	Traveler Book	1				x
	Coffee with ...	3	x	x		
	Nominal Group	4	x	x		
	Creation of the Self-tracking Form	4	x	x		
	Storytelling and Workshop of Experience	1	x	x	x	x
Applying	SL Project	2	x	x	x	x
	Photovoice	3	x			
	Coffee with ...	3	x	x	x	
	Participation Plan	3	x	x	x	
	Homework	4	x	x		
	Mirror Technique	4	x	x		
Sharing	Book of Life Stories	1	x	x	x	x
	Discussion Group	1	x	x	x	
	Assembly	1	x	x	x	x
	Video Clips	2	x	x	x	
	Workshops and interactive displays	2	x	x	x	x
	Academic Committee	3	x	x	x	
	Round Table at the University	1	x	x	X	x
	PAR video	2	x	x	x	x
	Presentation in the plenary session of the city council	2	x	x	x	x
Disseminating	Presentation in the Regional Ministry of Education	2	x	x		x
	Meeting with the Secondary School	4				x

different coloured stickers their answers to the question: What would you like to do in the School to facilitate the participation of everybody? With the desire of collecting also the proposals of each of the external participants from the local Centre for the Elderly, another technique called 'The Traveller Book' was designed. It consisted of a white, itinerant book, in which proposals for participation were written, aiming at collecting the voices of all the external partners. Many ideas were provided, pooling their knowledge on different forms of participation. The use of different strategies **generated** some information relevant for analysing and conducting a Participatory Social Diagnosis (PSD) in a process of conscious collective construction. The third stage involved action planning. To this effect, the university research team gathered and analysed the proposals submitted by the different sectors of the educational community. At first, these proposals were given to the school management staff, then they were given to the faculty in order to be analysed, and later they were commented with the students and their parents in the following meeting held by the tutors. It was also taken into consideration that these contributions coincided with the ones made by the external partners. In this way, they were able to share values based on an inclusive culture. The proposal was to improve, favouring a greater participation of the community, two curricular practices that were being implemented. The curricular practices chosen were the 'Storytelling' and 'The Workshop of Experience'. These practices were implemented in two classes attended by students with families from different nationalities and with specific educational support needs. They benefited from the collaboration of the tutors of both classes, several mothers, a member of the school management staff, several people from the local Neighbourhood Centre for Elderly and the university research team.

Using the existing theory and the findings of previous research

The process of action implementation allowed to **apply** the knowledge resulting from the research on inclusive, participatory and democratic methodologies to design and develop interactive groups, assemblies and Dialogic Literary Circles. During this stage, for monitoring the action, different tools for data gathering were used: participant and non-participant observation, field diaries and interviews conducted by the research team.

Sharing knowledge among actors and community

The Discussion Groups and the Assemblies for evaluating the practices allowed to **share** knowledge and reflect on the facts experienced and the knowledge acquired, as the participants commented:

It is a pleasure to transmit what you have done ... this is an experience of coexistence that makes them feel very happy, and at that moment, I feel satisfied and thankful, and at the same time admired by them, because, of course, they ask you questions, sometimes difficult ones (C1, DG, SA)

To me, it is more important having been able to work and learn the values of loving those around us, and even more if they are old people, because they are the people from whom we can learn the most, more than studying the unit x of Spanish Language. (C1, A, T)

It is worth noting that as a result of this collaborative work and intergenerational participation, the students wrote a Book about the Life Stories of their grandparents and relatives, and presented it to all the sectors involved in the research, as part of a training

activity of the Workshop of Experience. This book, as a product, allowed to *share* the knowledge generated among the actors involved.

Disseminating to outsiders

The *shared dissemination* of the findings and the knowledge generated was conducted through other forums such as the University, by means of a Round Table. Thus, the representatives of the teachers, students, families, external partners from the Centre for the Elderly, and the university research team explained the university students from the Department of Education what they had learned about curricular practices linked to the territory. In addition, it is worth mentioning that these practices, with the desire of creating a school for everybody, of bringing the school closer to the families and the neighbourhood, have enhanced the self-esteem of the elderly people. Their participation makes them feel appreciated by the students, and at the same time, it has been promoted the transmission of the culture that surrounds the school, as a shared value. It should be emphasised the intercultural and intergenerational communication which has taken place, which has helped both students and families, especially those from other countries. Through the variety of strategies, participants have been involved in the dissemination process and its consequences, they have become aware of the value of their engagement in addressing the challenges of the inclusive school. The activities have become a vehicle for showing the valuable experiences and knowledge acquired thanks to the participatory process developed.

I want to thank everybody for the moments you have given us in the school with all the stories, and I think that what you are doing is one of the best things that have ever happened in this school. (C1, A, S)

The fact of collecting the voices of the students, their families and the local social actors promotes the path that leads to a more democratic, tolerant, intercultural and inclusive society.

Case 2

This rural school had previously developed a project that stressed family participation and the linking of the school practices to the territory, on the basis of the concept of 'included school': a school placed in a context with which it interacts for mutual benefit. During their evaluation, the families explicitly requested that the active and cooperative methodologies implemented in the classrooms focused more on the development of the curriculum contents.

Developing a learning process from the immersion in its own reality

In order to start the project and conduct the shared diagnosis and analysis, some PSD strategies were used such as the Social Mapping and the Photovoice, facilitating everyone's participation in different ways. The mapping consisted of a cartography of the territory in which all the members of the school's educational community participated (students, teachers, families, neighbourhood and territorial actors, and local administration). The participants used stickers to point out in the maps of each municipality those places or institutions in which, from their point of view and experience, meetings

and activities with educational value were fostered. Later, in an interview, they described and explained in greater detail the activities and places identified on the map (the park, the Centre for the Elderly, the laundry, the observatory, and the school, among others). Taking advantage of the celebration of a Day of Coexistence in the school, the Photovoice technique was used. Joint Working Groups were set up (students, teachers, families and neighbours or local administration). Each team, using a smartphone, approached one of the places identified on the map and captured in images the topic of their proposal. Then, they wrote on a card a possible action and the educational value of their proposal. In this way, possible educational practices were considered, bringing the school closer to its context. Next, using the Socratic Wheel technique, the prioritisation of the proposals was conducted, in which representatives of each group participated, encouraged by the research team. During this stage, a large amount of knowledge was **generated**, and value was given to the local, popular and experiential knowledge of the students, families and neighbours. Not only about the places, facts and educational possibilities of those places, but also about the consequences of making decisions in a democratic way, arguing and taking account of everybody from an inclusive and participatory approach. Based on the findings, the decision of developing a Service-learning Project (SLP) in the classrooms of sixth grade of Primary School was taken. For planning the action, in a community assembly, students, teachers and families decided to focus on the school itself, in order to jointly design the renovation of the building, and project the educational model they wanted to develop. During this stage, the research team conducted the training of the teachers and the students of sixth grade of Primary School, the SLP methodology and how to document all the processes. In mixed groups, they reflected on the SLP proposals and wrote them in a mural. The families, together with the students, analysed the official curriculum of each subject in order to explicitly state the curricular contents that would be addressed in the project; becoming aware of their actions and being an opportunity to jointly negotiate and construct knowledge.

Applying the knowledge acquired

The fourth stage of the process was to implement the action, and the SL Project was started with the gathering of information to design the school. Some cooperative group work sessions were conducted, on innovative ideas to design the learning spaces on the Internet, and they consulted architecture teams, the municipal architect and the city council. These external agents, but who are at the same time linked to the school, promoted a shared construction of the curriculum between scholar and professional knowledge. The **application** of the knowledge acquired in various fields took shape, for example, in the production of maps and scale models where the mathematical contents were applied: measurement methods, calculus, geometry. 'We learn to measure, to calculate and to represent it in a map' (C2, I, S). It was also an opportunity for developing the linguistic competence:

Linguistic competence, really well: having to explain, narrate, research, reconstruct information and formulate it by themselves (...) learning how to send a letter to Ikea, learning how to present and speak directly with the Regional Director ... exposing oneself to a television camera, making a public exhibition in the city council ... it is difficult. (C2, I, S)

The procedural knowledge learnt in the previous training stage was used, for example, through the guided reflection by means of the Learning Notebook used in the SL project.

Sharing in an accessible and creative way

Once the proposals for the school buildings renovation had been specified, different actions were taken in order to **share** the project and the knowledge acquired with the community during an Open Doors Day. The students used video clips, which they distributed via WhatsApp groups, posters, and the school's website. Workshops and interactive displays were conducted (scale models, songs, murals, and videos) in order to explain the work process and the findings of their project, which empowered them, and allowed them to raise awareness and share the curricular learnings acquired.

They accompanied the presentation with scale models and murals, and an explanation. There were the mayoress, the city councillor, the architect ... they discussed about the viability of everything. It was really good, they (the children) did it fantastic. (C2, DG, F)

Dissemination and advocacy

The **dissemination** of the project to other audiences was conducted through the students' presentations in the plenary session of the city council and in the Regional Ministry of Education. It was an opportunity to exercise advocacy on the situation in your school by offering proposals for improvement in a proactive way. Overcoming the bureaucratic and administrative barriers was one of the difficulties that undermined the students' motivation and the teachers had to face. The regional press echoed the project and the research team recorded a video about the PAR process in the school.

Case 3

In this school, from the first contacts, the school management team invited the research team to participate in an already existing school committee, the Academic Committee, which is responsible for developing programmes and projects, supervising the Literacy Programme, the voluntary work, and the Participation Plan. This Commission acted as an authentic group that generated participation in the school, sharing values and defining school culture, and comprised representatives of the mothers/fathers, teachers, the school's secretariat, the school counsellor, and the former students.

Co-constructing knowledge from the own reality

During the first sessions, they discussed and made decisions with regard to how to organise the participation of the families, how to build a volunteer database, and how to improve the way in which the Participation Plan was conceived and developed. On the basis of these objectives, two dynamics were proposed aimed at diagnosing the initial situation, which was the 'Coffee with ...' and the Discussion Groups with the teachers of each cycle. In this stage, knowledge was **generated** on the concept of participation, developing a Timeline to raise awareness of the channels of participation that had been used during the last years. In this way, there were established the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the proposals for improvement that made possible an increased participation aimed at inclusion and equity. It is important to mention that

the ordinary life of the school has been respected and that the activities performed are integrated into the formulas that the school has been developing during these years, such as the 'Coffee with ...'. The PAR conducted has been considered a very appropriate formula to be able to recognise the barriers to participation, and apply improvement proposals on the basis of the Participation Plan developed during the last four academic years. From the first sessions, it became obvious that participation was understood as the families' involvement, rather than the students' involvement. It was implicitly accepted that the students were already in the classroom, and therefore, they participated. Participation was the focus of the project.

Non-linear application of knowledge: dilemmas and barriers

The stage of action implementation involved the **application** and use of the knowledge on the techniques that the scientific literature and the experience of the actors involved consider that facilitate participation, such as the Photovoice and the Coffee with ... families, students and teachers. We were interested in considering the students' voice, and the students took photographs and commented on the places where they considered that they participated, explaining why they had chosen them. They felt a sense of well-being when, at this time, they communicate with boys and girls, and with students of different ages. During the class assemblies, it was said that participating is 'saying what you think', 'contributing ideas and imagination', 'having fun', 'learning many things, English, dividing, learning the multiplication tables, baking cookies'. In the 'Coffee with ...', the families expressed their concerns about the fact that not all the families participated, and requested the creation of more open spaces in order to achieve it.

Those who can come to the school and speak with other fathers or mothers, or with the teachers, give their opinion and participate, but many of us can't come, and there is no way to know what we think ... other channels should be provided. (C3, DG, F)

It is important that not only those who go to the school participate. Faced with this ethical barrier, some virtual tools were proposed such as a support to make it possible that everybody participates, and it was decided to open the school on Saturdays and outside school hours. Therefore, it was requested a Participation Protocol that prevents the feeling of overabundance and disorganisation. 'People get tired and quit the activities ... they don't know either what to do, or how to do them ... or they participate in so many activities that they get exhausted' (C3, DG, F). There is a positive conception of many of the activities for the families and the opportunities to collaborate and contribute what one knows and thinks.

The teachers, in the discussion groups, expressed their doubts about how to increase the families' involvement in the classrooms. They wondered what and how to do it. A major dilemma arose when it was recognised that the school, even though being a public school, does not receive gipsy nor immigrant students, although they are present in its neighbourhood and territory.

Sharing and reflecting

The evidence gathered was **shared** and discussed in the Academic Committee, and three key ideas were summarised: (a) analysing how to include the families so that their

participation involves a greater inclusion and the achievement of the curricular objectives by everybody; (b) giving a voice to the school's children and showing that participation activities are also part of the curriculum; (c) redefining the Participation Plan on the basis of the revision of the sense of participation in the school, its reason and purpose.

Case 4

In the case of this school, a Participatory Social Diagnosis (PSD) was made about the usefulness of homework assignments. Two of the conclusions were: (1) the inconsistency between some classroom curricular practices and the ones sent to the family environment, and (2) its monotony.

Problematising to build knowledge

From problematisation, a Teachers' Discussion Group held within the Spanish Language and Mathematics Seminar promoted a collaborative inquiry space in which they compared the school documents with the existing practices about homework. This awareness **generated** knowledge that was materialised in a typology of homework assignments. The planning and decision-making stage involved that the students, families and two teachers, who jointly participated in the dynamics of the Socratic Wheel and were supported by the research team, assessed different options of tasks. Two mixed groups were created which agreed on the value that should be given to the different options on the basis of three criteria: functionality for learning, interest-motivation, and viability-ease. The curricular decision taken on the basis of the shared enquiry of different collectives became a reality. The tasks blocks were performed on a weekly basis, and some activities were optional. During the session, the following question was faced: How can we know if these new curricular tasks are useful for us if we perform them outside the classroom? It was decided to create a self-tracking form with the following consensual variables: start day and hour, understanding, difficulty, interest, appropriate amount, further completion for fun and learning.

Implementing – reflecting-sharing: mobilising the knowledge

During the stage of action implementation, the knowledge generated was **applied**, and all the students, except one, rigorously filled in the tracking forms. Two weeks after implementing the action, the assessments and tracking of the four areas were **shared**. By means of the Mirror Technique, the data were presented in charts, which is a curricular content known by the students. The level of satisfaction was very high, and it is important to emphasise that, from the optionality, the students did more homework than requested. Students had a self-perception of learning based on other variables, such as that it was more entertaining and easier. They added that they talked more about these tasks with their families. The students themselves proposed to continue two more weeks in order to know all the typologies of tasks and be able to evaluate them. In this inspiring way, the action-reflection-action circle was completed. The second shared reflection was also conducted using the Mirror Technique, and during this reflection the new data were interpreted qualitatively, obtaining similar results. Through these participatory and decision-making tools, students became critically aware of how their actions facilitated their curricular learning. With the aim of planning new actions and advancing in

the transformation process, we took advantage of this second assessment session to ask ourselves: And now what? Through the technique My Ideal School, the students wrote their dreams on cardboard stars, which dealt with sharing this experience of knowledge with the school actors, with continuing in this way and with extending this proposal to the rest of the classes of this cycle, to the whole school, as well as to the Secondary school, where they would go the following academic year.

Disseminating to a new audience: the secondary school

The prioritisation of the dreams was conducted using the tool Nominal Group Technique, and the chosen option was to inform about this type of homework to the Secondary School, which was located in another neighbourhood. Thus, there were the students themselves who requested to *disseminate* this knowledge on new forms of doing homework outside the school context. The teachers and the school management team did not feel able to communicate these successes to their colleagues in the secondary school. It was agreed that the researchers informed the Secondary School teachers, which created a dilemma for this supporting actor. Nevertheless, it was accepted considering that, in this collaborative research, students had already become an active group in making proposals for curricular changes. This meeting was held at the end of the academic year, and the school management staff showed interest in the whole process and the results, considering the possibility of reflecting on its viability in the school.

In order to get an overview of the four cases, the results are summarised in [Table 2](#).

The revision and inquiry strategies for mobilising the knowledge of the agents or actors has meant an interaction among all of them. The processes of shared reflection that involve knowledge interconnection have taken place especially when using the strategies coded within the categories ‘generating’ (for example, social mapping in Case 2) and ‘sharing’ (for example, the assembly in Case 1). They coincide with two stages of the process; namely, with the shared needs assessment and the assessment-reflection on the action developed. Nevertheless, the strategies coded within the categories ‘applying’ (for example, homework in Case 4) and ‘disseminating’ (for example, the presentation of the project to the Regional Ministry of Education in Case 2) refer us to a more lineal and one-way view of knowledge mobilisation. The implementation strategies have allowed to connect the scientific, academic or experimental knowledge of the actors to action, whereas the dissemination strategies have had a more transmitting and communicative function. Occasionally, the same strategy has been used with a dual function, such as the Photovoice, used both to generate knowledge in diagnostic processes, and to promote the students’ participation, in accordance with the scientific knowledge resulting from previous researches.

In [Table 2](#), it is shown how all the strategies have involved the participation of the students and the teachers; whereas the number of strategies that involved the participation of the social actors was lower and, when they have involved them, it has always been in the dissemination stage. The social actors did not participate in every case, although in Case 2, and especially in Case 1 and 3, the strategies used favoured the linkage between the schools, the territory and the university.

Discussion

PAR is an opportunity for those actors committed to transformative projects for inclusive, democratic and participatory school, to develop collaborative inquiry. The methodology itself allows a scientific collaboration that favours the mobilisation of the knowledge and learning of all the parties, from processes in which knowledge is jointly built since it flows in a multidirectional and mutual way (Abma et al. 2017). In the schools studied, the educational challenge consists of legitimising the whole community in the improvement of cultural, organisational, curricular, and social models.

The first lesson learned is that the development of PAR processes emphasises the importance of the involvement of all actors in a common project, including the local social actors (Ander-Egg 2012; Ainscow et al. 2016; Arnaiz, De Haro, and Azorín 2018; Moliner, Sales, and Traver 2017). The main objective is the group's awareness, which entails a process of learning and immersion in its own reality. This is widely evident in the four schools studied throughout the whole PAR process, but especially in the stage of needs assessment when they use some PSD strategies that allow them to explicitly state the knowledge about their own realities and experiences. In the four cases, the PSD is a process of conscious collective construction. Strategies such as Social Mapping, used in Case 2, or Storytelling and Workshop of Experience used in Case 1, involve both school and community actors in the shared construction of knowledge. These are communitarian and intergenerational strategies that link people to the school and, in turn, what happens in the school has an impact on the local context. In other words, they are committed to social change (Bourn 2016). In the cases studied, it is developed a democratic and transformative research; consequently, the PAR is a consistent methodology for promoting processes of change in the schools, mobilising knowledge through joint inquiry processes. It is a systematic process, not without dilemmas and barriers, conducted by a particular community to gain a deeper understanding of their problems and try to solve them. These dilemmas and barriers emerge, for example, in Case 3, when it becomes evident that the participation concept is understood differently by the actors who use it. Another dilemma emerges in Case 2 when teachers have to 'convince' families that participation, democracy and inclusion are also curricular contents. Students learn this content experientially, for example, when in Case 2 they have to manage their frustration to overcome administrative barriers to meet the regional government. The second lesson learned concerns the characteristics of the curricular practices implemented. These practices foster the path towards a school for everybody (Echeita et al. 2014) and bring schools closer to the family and neighbourhood (Lozano et al. 2018). First, these have an impact on school cultures and policies. By working together, the actors share values, the school and social culture are transmitted and redefined, and intercultural and intergenerational communication is facilitated (Kemmis, McTaggart, and Nixon 2014). These are processes with a deep democratic vocation in which no one must be excluded from the creation and recreation of culture, and of the curriculum that specifies it. Nevertheless, the school practices analysed take place in a specific socio-political context. This context determines administrative matters, such as the Student Registration System for Schools, the choice of schools by the families, who, occasionally, cause a high percentage of school segregation (Murillo and Martínez-Garrido 2019), and conflict quite strongly with the inclusive and

democratic approach that the school aims to promote, as in Case 3. Secondly, these practices have an impact on the organisational and curricular models of schools. The schools analysed have become reference centres for families, who value the way in which the school is organised and especially, the participation channels established. Accordingly, participation is present in all the schools. In some of them, such as in Case 3, the idea of participation as 'being physically present' prevails over the idea of 'being part of and actively involved in decision-making' (Aguado and Ballesteros 2015). Therefore, participatory strategies need to be diversified to enable participation in different ways, instead of being always subject to rigid timetables or long-term commitments.

In addition, the findings suggest that the strategies used by the schools become a vehicle for resuming the valuable experiences and knowledge gained by the participants throughout their life, and their importance is highlighted, integrating them into the curriculum and promoting learning from stimulation (Lozano et al. 2018; Sales, Moliner, and Traver 2020). Strategies such as Photovoice, used in Cases 2 and 3, and My ideal school used in Case 1, are an excellent opportunity to give students a voice. This constitutes a unique experience for experiential learning of democratic participation and this contributes to increase the sense of belonging of the whole student body and feeling included.

The four schools have gradually developed a project that allows to mobilise practical knowledge, from the shared construction of knowledge (bottom-up), using participatory strategies (Naidorf 2014) that connect academic and citizen knowledge, what the school already knows (Ainscow et al. 2016) with the knowledge resulting from the research. All strategies, such as the Assembly used in Case 1, the Workshops and interactive displays, the video clips and the service-learning projects used in Case 2, are curricular practices. This means that they are part of the curriculum, and are planned and developed during class time. This is consistent with the inclusive and democratic school model (Ainscow et al. 2016).

The third lesson learned is that the strategies for knowledge mobilisation are many and various, and most of them collect the voices of the students (Sandoval and Messiou 2020), their families and the social actors from the neighbourhood. These are strategies that make participants raise critical awareness of how their actions, individual and collective, will hinder or help to address the challenges of the school and its project (Kaplan, Miles, and Howes 2011). Nevertheless, according to Shaeffer (1994), it is necessary to continue focusing on the processes of people's mobilisation and empowerment to acquire skills that allow to participate more actively, more democratically and more collectively in the development process. Socializing and expanding the research and the cooperation between its protagonists is one of the challenges achieved by all the four cases studied, in view of all the strategies used to share knowledge among the participating community, with a clear impact on it. Regarding the strategies for knowledge dissemination and communication connecting with audiences outside the process, it is necessary to encourage participants to disseminate through alternative communication methods. Three of the four cases studied use outsider dissemination strategies. Case 1 disseminates to a university audience, Case 2 uses advocacy strategies targeting local and provincial administration, and Case 4 targets high school students. According to Ceballos-López, Saiz-Linares, and Ruiz-López (2017) and Parrilla Latas, Raposo-Rivas, and Martínez-Figueira (2016), multimedia or transmedia products are very suitable

to connect with groups or audiences who are more distant from traditional scientific dissemination channels (journals, conferences, congresses, etc.) bridges among different knowledge communities. It is important not only to link school, territory and university, but also to reach audiences and people with different political positions, sensibilities and interests (Anderson and McLachlan 2016) who engage in a fruitful dialogue on how to build a more democratic, intercultural and inclusive society.

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