Exclusion and Neoliberalism in the Education System: Socio-Educational Intervention Strategies for an Inclusive Education System

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Abstract

Not only numerous academic and empirical studies recognise the educational factor as decisive on life and work trajectories, but also its integrating potential and role in the promotion of social cohesion are widely acknowledged. The diversity of current societies, the economic situation and the impact of neoliberal policies represent new challenges for an inclusive education that should maintain its integrating potential, especially in countries such as Spain. This opens two unavoidable approaches and reflection spaces. The first one, regarding the fight against social inequality and the second one, focused on the construction of a socially sustainable educational model against the hegemonic neoliberal impact. Both levels of reflection are the pillars of an inclusive education system. This article combines an analytical and reflective approach to these issues recommending a series of intervention experiences and strategies for the construction of an inclusive educational model.

Key Words: *Social inclusion; Education; Neoliberalism; Equity; Socio-Educational Intervention*

Introduction

There is an extensive and rooted consensus around the recognition of education as a factor of social inclusion and social justice (Apple, 2013). This fact is endorsed by numerous academic and empirical studies that reached the shared conclusion about the educational level as a decisive factor of people's life and work trajectories (c.f. Flaquer, 2010; Moreno, 2011). In this regard, social sciences have also been focusing on identifying reproduction dynamics of family poverty and the intergenerational transmission of poverty in households. More precisely, studies in those fields emphasise how factors, such as the educational degree of parents and the employment and income situation of families affect the life trajectory children will develop in terms of poverty (Choi de Mendizabal and Calero, 2013).

In this scenario, the value acquired by the educational system as an inequality corrective (generated by the labour market or the redistribution of income) is a policy of preventing inequality and fighting poverty in the future, fundamentally, in countries like Spain, where there has been among others: a strong impact of job insecurity; family wage devaluation; and implementation of austerity policies.

For a few years, the paradigms linked to social investment in childhood had a strong impact on social policy debates and are highly recognised by international organisations, such as the European Social Network (2014) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). All of them insist on the importance of incorporating this crosscutting approach in social policies and especially in the childhood scope. Simultaneously, it is an investment on social harmony, highly valued by European societies. Therefore, the educational and childcare spaces stand as a key environment in the promotion of a cohesive and multicultural society.

The impact of the neoliberal ideology crossed the economic and political space, evidencing important pressures in public services, such as education. Changes imply new risks in educational exclusion. The resistance to such strong hegemonic pressure is undianiably difficult, however, the literature and the systematisation of some experiences provide some feasible alternatives, even if they are still on a small scale.

The next lines go into detail and introduce socio-educative experiences that move towards an inclusive direction in the educational field. First, the main dynamics of exclusion in the educational environment will be presented. Next, the risks of the neoliberal impact on education and its consequences on socio-educational gaps will be analysed. Finally, the text concludes with a series of socio-educational experiences that build an inclusive educational model.

Inequality and Exclusion in the Educational Field

Poverty has a very strong impact on the educational development of minors. International reports such as Ferguson, et al. (2007) record that minors from low-income families have a greater delay in their educational development. The main factors may be economic, but there also others, related to the educational degree of the parents, the parental support and the social isolation of these families.

A recent report by the Foessa Foundation in Spain, coordinated by Raúl Flores (2016), states that 8 out of 10 people, whose parents did not enter or finish primary school, were unable to complete high school. In the same way, this study indicates that economic difficulties in the household have a close connection with the education degree reached by the minors. In fact, 4 out of 10 adults (41%) who lived their adolescence with very often financial problems did not manage to finish secondary education.

The above two results alert that children from households in disadvantaged economic situations or less educated environments show more difficulties in completing secondary education before those who live in homes with fewer economic difficulties. Inheriting the economic situation of the household is a fact that also acquires a greater intensity in times of difficulty, such as the present, where 8 out of 10 people who experienced serious economic difficulties in their childhood, are reliving them as adults (Flores, 2016).

Current reports on the social impact of the crisis warn about an increased risk for these minors and a rise in the social vulnerability of the families. The impact of the crisis on Spanish families altered, both quantitatively and qualitatively, the Spanish social cohesion. According to data from the Living Conditions Survey (2016), 22.3% of the Spanish population is in a situation of relative poverty. Although it had a slight decrease since 2014 (which stood at 28.1%), the poverty rate among the employed population is alarming, while it reaches 14.1% of the employed population. This result has been clearly determined by the precariousness of wage conditions and the reduction of salaries; in 2013, narrowly 11% of this population manifested symptoms of relative poverty.

According to the Education Statistics, Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports of Spain (2015), the early school leaving is traced in Spain at 25%. Although this rate has been reduced since 2008 (33%), it is far from the European recommendations for Horizon 2020, which is to reduce the rate to 10%. Early school departure also finds answers in the poorest families. Studies (c.f. Serafino and Tonkin, 2014), maintain that the school performance of children from disadvantaged backgrounds is lower due to insufficient opportunities for support and curriculum reinforcement.

Early school leaving, in a context of few job opportunities, sets a risk of inactivity for these children and young people. Young people who neither study nor work have abandoned the educational trajectory and are not absorbed by the labour market (García and Jiménez, 2017). This rate, according to the Survey of the Active Population (2015), is 20.9% in Spain. This amount is alarmingly high.

The consequences of early school leaving go beyond economic poverty. Fernández and Calero (2014) confirm the non-monetary costs of this abandonment and identify the health deterioration of those with weak educational trajectories, in relation to those who remained in the education system. In this sense, drug consumption, low self-esteem and physical and psychological health problems derived from job insecurity and economic uncertainty, are determining factors of the present and future health of these people.

This domino effect of socio-educational exclusion is identified in some national and regional analysis throughout the economic crisis (Lasheras et al., 2012; Martínez Virto, 2015). A big amount of the social exclusion cases in Spain, as a result of the economic crisis, were triggered by the unemployment or the loss of affordability levels in the households. As a result, many of the basic needs in terms of food, housing, health or education have been strongly questioned. In response to this, families deployed strategies of resistance at very different levels of intensity.

While some households could undertake internal strategies based on spending adjustments on leisure, household supplies or after-school activities of minors, others in more difficult situations, faced processes of residential exclusion or high indebtedness. The need to have more than one jobs or long working hours

in order to maintain the family house was unavoidable (Virto, 2014). However, while these strategies allow surviving the impact of the crisis, the latter has not been free of cost, opening new spaces for exclusion and limiting the capacity of its resistance to the future (greater indebtedness, unwanted coexistence to reduce costs, forced family regrouping, isolation or loss of health, among others). These costs are larger and decisive in households with children. The multiple employment of adults or their living in shared apartments implies less time for educational support, less space for growth and greater exposure to risk, due to the coexistence with adults from other family units (conflict or role confusion and educational patterns).

The ability of families to resist the crisis has been defined by the ability to find help along the way. Institutional, social and family resources (public policies and services for people) are buffering against falling into social exclusion (Virto, 2015). In this sense, a strong social fabric, socio-educational resources or more protective economic benefits can slow the consequences of those strategies.

The uncertainty environments, to which the minors of the most disadvantaged families are exposed, are critical for the risk of school failure. These issues were even revised through the Pisa reports by Choi de Mendizabal and Calero (2013). The study on the Pisa Report (2009) found that gender and non-schooling in childhood stages define the probability of school failure. Similarly, the professional degree and the parental place of origin, in addition to the educational resources at their reach, has a similar impact at a socio-family level.

To overcome this scourge, the authors reached the conclusion that early intervention, the individualisation of school attendance and its intensification

students from disadvantaged environments, as well as, the promotion of educational equity should be the backbone of educational policies.

In summary, there is wide empirical evidence on the impact of social inequality on the good academic results of minors. Although it is a subject that traditionally questioned the efficiency and equity of the educational system in Spain, the crisis increased this reality quantitatively and qualitatively. The exclusion level experienced not only by traditionally disadvantaged families, but also by those whose breadwinners face job insecurity and devaluation of wages, make them suffer intense economic uncertainty.

Although some of the 'precarisation and dualisation tendencies' of the labour market are also shared in other neighbouring countries, the Spanish reality is particularly serious (CES, 2017). This is due to the fact that an expensive residential model intensifies labour exclusion and a minimum income system does not protect the presence of minors. In this sense, family poverty and the strategies of resistance to the crisis exposed the minors to social exclusion and educational poverty.

The Impact of Neoliberalism and its Risk of Increasing Social Gaps

As various studies claim, the hegemony of the neoliberal paradigm, far from favouring justice and greater social equality, is contributing to larger social inequality and precarious living conditions (Piketty, 2014) and to the progressive degradation of public services (Navarro, 2007). Citizenship rights protected by the State have been substituted by actions from private initiatives or charities (Ball, 2012). These consequences are suffered more intensely by vulnerable groups, which are increasingly heading towards public social and educational services. It is a process that constitutes an authentic 'dispossession of citizens' (Harvey, 2002) through the privatisation and commercialisation of

these public services. In that sense, three distinct and parallel dynamics stand out as strongly contributing to educational exclusion: privatisation, the implementation of austerity policies in the educational space and the increasingly punitive treatment of groups at social risk.

In the neoliberal social agenda (Rodríguez and Díez, 2015), once sectors, such as industry or communications have been privatised, it is necessary to liberalise the last pillars of the welfare state: education, health, pensions and social services. These stand as potential business areas for private financial capital, particularly the public education sector, which in the EU territory has a higher economic value than that of the automobile market (Hill, 2011). In order to economically exploit these sectors, still in the hands of the state, it is necessary to introduce different privatisation mechanisms that allow them to be configured as a market or quasi-market (Whitty, 1999), and therefore offer business opportunities outside the state monopoly.

Following Ball and Youdell, (2009) the privatisation process can follow several directions. On the one hand, an internal privatisation based on the progressive introduction in the public sector of functional models from the business world, such as 'New Governance' (Collet and Ball, 2016). These are organisational strategies that break the idea of social rights and introduce paradigms based on market relationships where the individual is not a citizen but a customer-consumer of a specific product/service (Rodríguez and Díez, 2014). On the other hand, privatisations may be external, through the implementation of a public service by private management, which may be subsidised by the public administration, as it is the case of 'charter schools' in the English-speaking countries or 'direct-grant schools' in Spain.

In both cases, the neoliberal argument for the privatisation is based on the fact that private management guarantees more efficient, rationaland flexible economic procedures. To put in other words, more capable of offering quality care rather than the obsolete, slow, and bureaucratic public service. The Secretary of State of the Spanish Ministry of Social Services stated categorically: ''We want to derive a large part of the activity towards the business sector, because it is the correct choice, there are many companies that are dedicated to it, it is a mature sector that does a magnificent job'' (El País, 2013).

However, the consequences of the public services' privatisation have led to a quality loss, to the social 'ghettoise' of some schools, the precarisation of the working conditions, a price increase, and the rupture of social cohesion (Hirtt, 2003). Furthermore, the internal functioning (selection of staff, operating standards, etc.) of the private company is less transparent to the democratic control than that carried out by public companies, however bureaucratic the latter may become. On the other hand, there are no studies that show that private management is better, both in terms of efficiency, organisation, and quality of service (Apple, 2006). The ultimate reason that explains this 'privatisation habit' is the continuous need for private capital to expand in search of new business grounds so as obtain economic profitability (Harvey, 2012).

The second consequence of the implementation of these policies is the reduction of the public sector at the economic and personal extent. A study by the Spanish State Association of Directors and Managers of Social Services (2016) indicates that in the period of 2011 to 2015 the budget of public administrations in social services was reduced by 11,000 million euros (3,000 million euros in education in particular). These cuts put social and educational resources at risk of disappearing; home help, canteen dining scholarships, 0-3-year-old nursery

schools or compensatory education programs, fundamental resources for vulnerable groups are at risk of exclusion. We must add to the latter, the reduction in the number of public staff, with a resulting quality loss on services and a precariousness of staff contracts. For example, teaching staff has suffered a reduction of more than 20,000 teachers since the 2010-11 academic year, with the cutback in the secondary level being particularly significant, where the reduction of staff was 17% (Merchán, 2013).

The growing decline of living standards of the Spanish society has led to a pressure increase on social protection systems, which, together with the reduction in public spending, has contributed to a criminalising discourse on social exclusion. This neoliberal and neoconservative questioning reinforces the idea that public social spending must be reduced, and the education must be managed as an individual product, aimed at promoting employability (Hirtt, 2003).

In the very aggressive neoliberal discourse of social inequality, the poor is the reverse of the entrepreneur's image of social success: the lazy, the idle person who does not want to go to work or young people who do not want to take advantage of educational opportunities. They are responsible and guilty of their own situation. The measures towards those will be, firstly, charitable, (those offered by charitable-religious entities based on charity); and secondly, corrective actions which exercise greater pressure and larger control to the users of those services (Wacquant, 2010). The experience in social intervention values the accompaniment processes in the fight against exclusion, however, in the current context, this neoliberal criminalising policy distances social services from deep actions with poor collectives.

Socio-Educational Strategies for an Inclusive System

The previous points have identified some situations of risk and vulnerability in terms of educational exclusion. Many of them, intensified by the economic reality of numerous families, and others stimulated by the new neoliberal political paradigms. At this point, we can highlight a series of experiences and alternatives for the construction of a more inclusive society from (though not just) the education field.

The reconstruction of another type of society requires challenges, proposals, demands and concrete actions, direct and short-term, aimed at facing the gaps of educational exclusion. Simultaneously it requires a fundamental strategic approach on the longer term: the need to educate new citizens and, especially, the new generations in the new socio-cultural values. It is here, in the education battlefield where the strategic and essential struggle is waged. The promotion of an inclusive education system requires considering these two analytical perspectives: the urgent one, in the fight against social inequality; and the strategic one, from an inclusive perspective to the construction of a socially sustainable educational model.

The struggle against neoliberal ideology is not an easy one, but even small contributions to more democratic and equal spaces can contribute to larger changes in the educational environment. Below are some experiences of social intervention with good results reducing the exclusion of vulnerable groups, as well as other more egalitarian educational ways to counteract the neoliberal impact.

<u>Invest in Childhood and Promote Equity</u>

The education system has a decisive role in the correction of social inequalities (Apple, 2013). It is a crucial system to break the intergenerational poverty

circles in more economically vulnerable households. The consequences of economic insecurity situations and job uncertainty have an important impact on the access of children from disadvantaged homes in the education system.

Based on what was identified in previous points, the main situations of exclusion in poor households are manifested in two ways. On the one hand, those minors manifest a greater risk of abandoning the education system for economic, territorial or mobility reasons and, fundamentally, for emotional and self-esteem reasons. On the other hand, they find less educational support, and their families project in them lower educational expectations. In this sense, both the resources to battle economic poverty and support subsidies coming from the educational environment are key to stop factors of early education abandonment.

In recent years, the development of socio-educational resources has been a focal point in many social and educational agendas. The approach of social investment in childhood, a protagonist in the Scandinavian countries created different experiences, with good inclusive results tested. From these, different socio-educational intervention strategies are recognised. At a strategic level, education from 0-3 has been reinforced. As mentioned (Masten et al., 2006), the period of 0-3 years is a decisive phase in the evolutionary development of minors. Attending to definitions such as that of López (2005), the children's needs are biographical, cognitive and emotional. In addition to the basic needs of food and care, the stimulation and creation of a positive bond with their family and environment are defining elements for the healthy and resilient development of the students.

From this theoretical approach, experiences of parental training and early detection of risk factors had positive results (Martínez et al, 2016). Among

them, the 'Life' program stands out. Developed between the years 2010-2013 in 24 Danish schools for the age 0 to 3, the project involved 6,000 children as total beneficiaries. The program targeted families from disadvantaged backgrounds who attended these centres and had two parallel lines of work with families. The first one was focused on a training program aimed at professionals for early detection of risk situations and monitoring these families. The second was dedicated to parental training and the promotion of a positive link both in the educational development of minors and in the well being of their families. The development of this tool had the technical support of the University of Aarhus and the Danish School of Education, and it was also funded by the Danish Government. After its evaluation in 2012, among its most relevant results were: the enhancement in the detection capacity by the educators of the centre; an increase in the prevention capacity of the family care teams' and finally a greater group cohesion among families and children who attended the school (Blades, 2012).

In Spain, the low enrolment rate in the 0-3 stages has many reasons. On the one hand, a good part of the population opts for other forms of alternative care based on marketable resources, including among others family care or private care. However, the high price, even in those with public funding, evidences the barriers those families of medium and low-income face while trying to access these resources.

Childhood educational resources not only entail an investment in the educational development of the minors, but they are also a conciliation and support resource to the families themselves, vital for their well-being and their access to the job market among others. The educational space offers opportunities to meet families, and this can be of great interest for some of the proposals already mentioned till this point, such as advice on care, positive

parental training, and even professional support. Therefore, beyond a resource with high potential for the development of minors, it also generates a professional workspace among caregivers. The latter provides the opportunity to look after and uncover pottential risk situations in the most vulnerable families.

Morever, in later educational stages of minors, these needs are determinant of maintaining the link with the educational system and preventing rupture dynamics. The presence of resources for socio-educational support and positive adult bonds are protective factors for these minors (Gonzalez and Paredes 2017). In this regard, the low self-esteem and the lack of positive references in the most disadvantaged students widen the gap with the less vulnerable students. For more than a decade, the methodology of social mentoring has been established as a strategic base for socio-educational intervention. The University of Malmo (Sweden), in 1997, promoted the 'Näktergalen' program of social mentoring among university students and minors from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Mentoring is an instrument of social intervention which promotes the relationship between people who voluntarily offer to provide individual support to another person facing a difficult situation. The bond is built on a positive and supportive relationship in different spaces of social need. The results of this project confirm that the mentor becomes a figure of reference and support for the child, offering a different horizon to the one known. This has a very positive impact on the child's self-esteem, allowing them to acquire new knowledge and increasing their personal development. In the same way, the mentor builds a positive adult model and improves their social and intercultural skills (Sild, 2007). The good results of this experience led some Spanish universities to promote the project under the name of 'The Mockingbird Project', such as the

University of Lleida, the Public University of Navarra and the University of the Basque Country.

Attention to minors and the guarantee of their wellbeing include different areas of reference, all aiming at promoting the healthy development of the minors: the educational system; paediatrics; and the social services minor and familiar protection system. This combined objective requires adding strength and overcoming the perspectives of intervention in areas (health, social services, education) and move to a coordinated and collaborative community intervention (Chana, 2007). The methodology of networking begins to consolidate in some territories, such as in Navarre, northern province in Spain, with the 'Local Network of Good Care for Children'. It becomes a reliable tool for the construction of an inclusive and transversal care model. These networks could help develop joined actions that work, in a coordinated manner, to promote the early detection of risk situations and the lack of protection and/or educational absenteeism. Moreover, there are many preventive actions regarding situations of drug use, violence or lack of protection that can be put in practice in collaboration with students and parents.

The results of these experiences offer very interesting elements for the debate. On the one hand, they represent an investment strategy in childhood. On the other hand, the experiences also show a strong work with families, promotion of parental training and prevention of vulnerable situations. In short, they represent a strategic space for intervention that already has innovative experiences and shows good results.

The terrible consequences, in terms of social cohesion, that may derive from the impact of neoliberalism on the education system have also been highlighted in the previous points. Hereof, the challenge leads us to ask ourselves how to

educate the new generations in another way of thinking that is not colonised by the unique thinking of neoliberal capitalism. We know of course, that this approach is a challenging one since the hegemonic discourse applies plenty of pressure. However, some alternatives to the traditional school, with verified bibliographic evidence, could support small resistance spaces.

Towards a Socially Sustainable Educational Model

The education system is a form of political intervention in the world, with capacity for social transformation (Freire, 1970; Giroux, 1992). Socially sustainable education considers education a moral and political activity. It sustains the premise that learning is not focused only on the processing of the received knowledge, but on the transformation of this, as part of a broader struggle for social rights and justice (Apple, 2010). Therefore, the experiences or alternatives presented could move towards education as a public citizen right, based on collaboration, democracy, and inclusiveness. In this way, although the struggle against neoliberalism is a difficult one to win, through these small actions, it is possible to educate towards a more socially sustainable citizenship.

Democratic Schools

Democratic schools (Apple and Beane, 1998 and 2007) are centres that grew from the idea that all people who are directly involved in the school have the right to participate in the decision-making process. Not just about what is to be learned and how this will be done, but also on the organisation of the centre.

In these schools, diversity is something that is appreciated; it is not considered a problem, but an opportunity. They give more importance to cooperation and collaboration, rather than to competition. That is why cooperative learning is a crucial aspect of the democratic way of life, not only as a specific strategy to improve academic performance, but also as part of a vital and relational

knowledge. They work in heterogeneous groups in such a way that those who are experts in certain aspects show their skills to new learners. This gives opportunities for the less experienced ones to see and observe the most knowledgeable person and then practice at their own pace.

The curriculum of these schools is not reduced to the 'official' knowledge that the dominant culture produces or supports. The voices of people who are outside the dominant culture are not silenced, particularly people of other ethnic groups, marginalised groups, women and, of course, young people. Knowledge is not taught as if it was an established truth, arising from some immutable and infallible source. It is understood, explained and shown that knowledge is socially constructed, produced and disseminated by people who have particular values and interests who try to transmit them through the textbooks and the cultural and social productions. Students learn to be 'critical citizens' of their society. This democratic curriculum invites students to dissociate themselves from the passive role of knowledge consumers' and to assume an active role in order to develop a critical conscience that allows them to act as responsible citizens.

The daily work and school knowledge are built from the debate and argumentation (Feito, 2009) around essential issues in different subjects that shape the curriculum, including among others, mathematics, social sciences, and history. Teachers are responsible for developing the 'art of questioning' and open and honest dialogue, considering that scientific knowledge is controversial and involving students in these arguments. The project curricula imply using knowledge in relation to problems and real-life issues, thus breaking the boundaries established by academic disciplines and creating authentic immovable spaces within the school.

Accelerated Schools

This project was initiated at Stanford University in 1986, by Henry Levin, a professor and director of the Centre for Educational Research, following a research on vulnerable students in the United States. This study defined as 'student at risk' the young people whose success in school was very unlikely. The profile of these students came from minority groups, immigrants, non-English-speaking single-mother families and populations at risk of social exclusion.

With his work, Lewin discovered that the poor effectiveness of schools in reducing the failure of at-risk students was not accidental. Most of the centres in which these children enrolled used educational strategies that stigmatised and reduced the expectations of social success of the students. They offered poor educational experiences and did not consider potential resources of teachers and families.

The general objective of accelerated schools is to create the best schools for all boys and girls, so that each one has the maximum opportunities to participate daily in enriching learning experiences. Typical values that regulate the function of these schools are: equity, participation, communication, collaboration, community, reflection, experimentation and trust. This is based on three basic principles (Hopfenberg, Levin and Cois, 1993): the active collaboration between families, educators, students and the local community to mark a set of common objectives and values for the school; the empowerment and the ability both at school and home to make important educational decisions and to take responsibility for the implementation and the results of such decisions; and finally relying on the positive aspects and the virtues of both students and the community and not focus on their flaws, following the previous limited model.

In these schools, students see the meaning of their classes and perceive the connections between school activities and their real life, so that learning transcends the classroom and covers all aspects of the school, home, and community.

Learning Communities

The origin of this movement is located in the Centre for Research in Adult Education (CREA) at the University of Barcelona, formed by a multidisciplinary team that is developing this line of work since 1980 in popular education. Learning communities are an educational project to combat inequality of many people at risk of social exclusion. Its basic pedagogical approach focuses on facing social changes and reducing inequalities. Learning is understood as dialogical and transformative of the school and its environment (Flecha, 2001).

Learning depends more and more on the correlation between what happens in the classroom, the house, social media and the street. Beyond the mere representative participation of the families or community individuals, the emergence of true democratic structures of active participation that surrounds the educational institutions is promoted; the educational centre is open to the participation of social individuals as professionals and volunteers.

The democratic organisation favours the establishment of horizontal relationships with determine aspects those of contents, evaluation systems, methodologies, educational activities and the objectives to be met. The process of democratic participation becomes in itself a learning activity.

Inclusive Education

In all these organisational and pedagogical models, there is also an underlying approach on how to address diversity. That is, to give an educational response to the dynamics generated in the increasingly heterogeneous classrooms. As critical educators, we have to face questions such as: what to do regarding our students' differences, how to ensure that students with learning difficulties or from other cultures will enjoy the right to an enriching education under equal conditions?

When a student faces learning difficulties, there are three basic strategies to deal with that situation. One wonders: 'What's wrong? What difficulties, limitations or personal deficiencies prevent them from learning?' It is the predominant focus on the deficit, which would offer a response in order to act on those deficiencies.

A different perspective would be to ask: 'Does what I wanted to teach you fit to your possibilities and needs?' From this point of view, the general educational curricula, in its broadest sense, would be the core of reflections and actions. It would be a matter of adapting the curriculum to the needs of the student. Integration would be the logic that would sustain and give it form.

In recent years, an alternative approach has emerged from the integration framework. It is the approach of inclusive education, according to which there would be a third possibility that would answer the following question: 'How could we organize and propose the teaching of these contents in an alternative way'? For inclusive education, the essential question is: ''How can we create forms of school organisation that stimulate the development of practices that seek to 'reach all students'?'' (Ainscow, 2001, 145). Following Stainback and

Stainback (1992), the differences between one conception and the other can be summarised in the following aspects:

• Integration tends to place students within the categories of 'special' or 'normal'. However, inclusion involves understanding the capacities of students within a continuum.

• Integration emphasises the intervention in students labelled as 'special', while the inclusion emphasises the need to establish educational strategies that cover the whole group of students.

• Integration uses distinctive strategies for 'special' students (such as curricular adaptations for students with educational needs, or curricular flexibility for students with high abilities). The inclusion perspective restructures the curriculum and the school organisation, so that it fits all according to their needs and characteristics.

• From the teacher's point of view, integration fosters the development of specialisation and the generation of barriers that hinder cooperation among professionals (i.e. teacher, counsellor, speech therapist, psychologist, inspector). While from the inclusion approach, cooperation is promoted within the classroom space itself, by sharing resources, materials, experiences, and responsibilities, without establishing different groups, but working in cooperative ones.

The dominant perspective that underlies the educational response to the difficulties experienced by certain students implies that those who are not in conditions or seem to have a negative attitude happen to be considered deficient. Thus, attention is focused on these students individually, and on the deficits that obstruct their adequate progress in the education system. Under the individualising conception, the prior training of teachers in the field consists of those techniques and strategies that contribute to alleviating the problems of 'that' student, -always considered individually. In this way, we do not face the

central question: 'How can we improve the school so that it can respond to everyone?'

The perspective of inclusion shifts the focus from the issue of individual educational needs to a problem of improving the school. The matter is no longer how to integrate some students previously excluded, but how to give a sense of community and mutual support in a way that promotes the success of all students.

A Different School Curricula is Possible: Coeducational and Intercultural

The school can not only be a space in which meaningless academic contents are transmitted (San Fabián, 2000), learned just to pass the exams and orientated exclusively towards the labour's market needs. This school model introduces the mechanisms of management and competitiveness of the business world in its form of organisation and functioning (Díez, 2005). This type of school is focused on the academic, designed for the homogenous transmission of content, and for the uniform treatment of students. It is not the most appropriate framework to build a critical, responsible and active citizenship.

The purposes of a truly instructive education must be consistent with the basic objectives of societies that believe in democracy as a way of organising social coexistence: promoting social cohesion by guaranteeing equal opportunities and empowering the construction of the person under its own criteria, informed and corroborative to understand, make decisions and act. The educational value of the content is appreciated when knowledge emerges as still tentative and unbiased to relevant questions. That is why school must deal not only with the content of the disciplines, but especially with the real problems that affect people's lives in their current social context. This methodology will help

students to understand, act, and respond to this problematic reality that affects and interests them. In this case, the co-educational and intercultural perspective should be the pillar of the educational curricula in current societies.

To advance in social justice from the school field, it is necessary to work for a curricular model that integrates the gender and intercultural perspective. The multicultural diversity is a historical condition of the human way of life. It is fundamental to educate all the students to live with each other, whatever their culture, origin, religion, ethnicity and gender. Intercultural education is an 'antiracist' education for coexistence and peace, and that is why it is a subject of all educational centres, whether or not they have foreign students to work on these issues.

The coeducational approach, along with the intercultural perspective and inclusive education aspire to decentralise the usual perspective, which is based on the patriarchal culture in which we have been socialised to learn and look at things from a different perspective. A perspective that denounces the invisibility of women and their actions in history and sciences, the absence of learning from the tasks that traditionally corresponded to the domestic circle and the qualitatively and quantitatively inferior treatment that they receive.

On the contrary, it is our firm belief that the curricula should incorporate the vision of marginalised cultures, women, the working class, and silenced minorities. A curriculum should be based on the experiences of subaltern social groups, disassembling neoliberal hegemonic thinking, and among others aiming at the following: raising economic issues about the situation of poor people; establishing gender issues from the position of women; locating ethnic relations and territorial issues from the perspective of indigenous communities; dealing with the daily problems and urban life, while valuing the experience of people

with disabilities. All the above are prerequisites for a more comprehensive, more inclusive curriculum. This process of curricular reorganisation is about knowing the world 'from its margins', using he awareness gained from the gender perspective approach and people (Torres, 2017).

The curricular implications of this approach are several and of different depth. For the school to stop reproducing inequality, it is necessary to change the culture it transmits. Both in its written and oral form and in the values that circulate through the educational system that is often made clear only through the analysis of the 'hidden curriculum' (Torres, 1999). Among them are also the measures that uncover this inequality and values, traditionally assigned to women, care, (i.e. stuff that need be generalised to both sexes). In relation to the intercultural approach, it is necessary to modify the current educational programs in search of intercultural visions by accommodating texts from different cultures; by fostering the linguistic and artistic melting pot of any culture; and by analysing the interdependence between different environments, economic and cultural.

Together with this section, some experiences and alternatives, along with their practical contributions and bibliographic support, have been presented to contribute to the construction of a more inclusive education. On the one hand, by preventing social exclusion from the education system, an urgent matter in those minors at risk. On the other hand, through the promotion of other learning methodologies that counteract some neoliberal mandates which increase the educational and social gaps.

This double result has been pointed out by experts in the field, such as Escárdibul and Calero (2013). They confirm that 'quality' in the educational system requires two fundamental ingredients: teacher training and the

adaptation of their profile. Both approaches are aligned with the shared results in this article.

The identified experiences and strategies put on the table needed work in two parallel lines. The first line focused on the strengthening and adaptation of the teacher's profile; a more democratic and equal model connected with the territory and community networks. The actions previously mentioned as learning communities, networking or school and inclusive curricula are some examples in that direction. The second line, the promotion of student autonomy through socio-educational support resources, starts from the first years of childhood under the guidance of positive adult role models who walk alongside the students throughout their educational career. Both the experiences of parental training and social mentoring, and the promotion of participation through democratic schools are good examples of the latter.

Conclusions

The economic and political situation we are facing has a strong impact on the inclusion capacity of the education system. The impact of social exclusion in the families, strongly affected by the crisis, had also consequences in the personal and educational development of minors. Some of the survival strategies identified in recent years show less time of educational support, role model misperception and behaviour patterns at homes where several family units coexist.

The mission of a public education system that needs to break intergenerational poverty is again questioned, placing thus the minors of these families at risk of exclusion. In particular, the consequences are very serious in for young people with low educational levels, ending thus too often to school dropout serious It

goes without saying that the latter exposes young people to dangerous behaviours and social conflicts.

In the same way, austerity policies and the rise of neoliberal thinking has emerged a questioning discourse on investment in social and educational policies, aimed at the most vulnerable groups, on the pretext of individual responsibility. A discourse that promotes the reduction of public investment in social spending, allowing in that way privatising practices into becoming central pillars of the welfare state (fundamentally in education, social services, and health).

The public sector, essential for the achievement of more cohesive societies for disadvantaged groups, does not have access to the private market.
As a result, the social inequality gap and the role of the education system for the promotion of a cohesive society have to overcome important challenges. The debates on the education model, the resources, and the inclusive strategies that need to be developed occupy undoubtedly, a leading role in the political agendas.

However, the above analysis leads us to underline two strategic intervention pathways in this field. On the one hand, an urgent and short-term prevention of educational exclusion, much deteriorated due to the the economic crisis, of the precarisation of families, and of austerity policies. On the other hand, a strategic response that works for an inclusive school and will be connected with the territories. For the development of both actions, the article presents different socio-educational experiences with very good results.

The undertaken approach connects with the economic paradigms of social investment in childhood, supporting in that way the urgent need to undertake the 'educational rescue' of future Spanish generations.

The fight against the impact of the neoliberal discourse in general, and in education in particulat, is a complex space of resistance with difficult results in the short term. Public investment in education is a strategy of social and territorial cohesion. Coexistence and positive recognition of diversity promotes equal opportunities and enhances the economic and labour development of the territories. It is a source of protection and an investment in families that can prevent situations of social conflict. Therefore, it seems that the correct choice is to bet on an educational system that manages to reduce social inequalities and moves towards the construction of socially sustainable territories.

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