

# Adolescents' perceptions of education according to personal identity

## Percepciones de adolescentes sobre la educación según la identidad personal

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### Abstract

Adolescence is an important period in the process of constructing personal identity, particularly at times of educational transition. One such transition occurs at the end of compulsory secondary education and it results in an important biographical assessment of the school career that the adolescent has pursued. One factor that appears to be fundamental in this career is the dynamic of human relations. Focusing our attention on students, we have examined their perceptions of this matter, shaped by their level of personal maturity and linked to their awareness of their identity status or style. A biographical-narrative approach was used with a sample of 121 students, using quantitative and qualitative techniques and instruments (EOM-EIS-II questionnaire, autobiographical accounts, interviews and discussion groups). We have observed differences in young people's perceptions depending on their level of maturity. At the same time, by comparing their perceptions as a whole, we can see that their family (the main agent in the construction of their identity) and peer group, more

than school, are the most highly valued areas. Quality educational processes appear to require careful interpersonal relationships, regardless of the areas in which they are developed. Corroborating various deficiencies in human relationships through adolescents' perceptions alerts us to their importance. The need to find suitably contextualized models for convergence between the main areas in which our students develop is also shown. This study involves the identification of certain elements that play a role in advancing the process of achieving personal identity. These require attention if the development of personal maturity during the compulsory stages of our school system is to be improved.

**Keywords:** Secondary education, teenagers, interpersonal relationships, maturity, personal identity, compulsory education.

### Resumen

El proceso de configuración de la identidad personal encuentra un periodo significativo en la adolescencia y, particularmente,

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en momentos de transición educativa. Uno de estos se halla al término de la Educación Secundaria Obligatoria y señala un balance biográfico relevante de la trayectoria escolar realizada. Un factor que parece fundamental en dicha trayectoria está constituido por la dinámica de las relaciones humanas. Focalizando nuestra atención en los estudiantes, hemos indagado sobre sus percepciones al respecto, matizadas por su nivel de madurez personal, vinculado al conocimiento de su estatus o estilo de identidad. Se ha utilizado un enfoque biográfico-narrativo, en una muestra de 121 estudiantes, utilizando técnicas e instrumentos de carácter cuantitativo y cualitativo (cuestionario EOM-EIS-II, relatos autobiográficos, entrevistas y grupos de discusión). Constatamos diferencias en las percepciones de los jóvenes según su nivel de madurez. Al mismo tiempo, relacionando el conjunto de percepciones, la familia (principal agencia para la construcción de la identidad) y el grupo de iguales constituyen los ámbitos mejor

valorados, por encima de la escuela. Los procesos educativos de calidad parecen reclamar la existencia de cuidadosas relaciones interpersonales, independientemente de los ámbitos en los que se desarrollen. La corroboración de deficiencias diversas en las relaciones humanas, mediante las percepciones de los adolescentes, nos alertan precisamente sobre su gran relevancia. Asimismo, se revela la necesidad de hallar fórmulas de convergencia, necesariamente contextualizadas, entre los ámbitos principales donde se desenvuelven nuestros estudiantes. De este estudio se desprende la identificación de ciertos elementos que participan en el desarrollo del logro de la identidad personal, a los que conviene atender si se pretende mejorar el desarrollo de la madurez personal durante las etapas obligatorias de nuestro sistema escolar.

**Descriptor:** Educación secundaria, adolescentes, relaciones interpersonales, madurez, identidad personal, educación obligatoria.

## 1. Introduction

Educational relationships unquestionably play a lead role in shaping personal identity, especially during the early stages of life when these influences are especially significant, more so in adolescence. During this stage of life, the subject must take decisions to address society's demands and expectations, from the weakness of their incipient identity that is shaken by environmental changes and the changes typical of individual growth, incorporating values and beliefs and adopting certain social roles.

All educational relationships are ones where «something valuable» is created as

a result of the interaction. This notion has evolved in parallel with the thinking and historical reasons that have been projected in the different practices (Jover, 1991; Sánchez, Lledó, and Perandones, 2011). On this journey, a turn has occurred inspired by the increasingly central role given to the pupil.

In this research, we examine in detail the complexity of the multiple modes of educational relationship that appear in different learning environments, focussing on the suitability and influence of the immediate areas that are most significant for the development of identity in adolescence.

### 1.1. Adolescence as transition

Clearly different from childhood, in adolescence a sort of new biological and social birth is experienced. During adolescence, what can be seen as the «birth of intimacy» occurs (García Hoz, 1950) as a combination of factors, namely, the steps required for a genuine inner life. In other words, this is the clear birth of this «intimate division» of the relations with the other, with which the subject is initially confused in a symbiotic relationship of «syncretic sociability» (Wallon, 1959), or the move from a «primary consciousness of psychological community» in a state of confusion with those who surround us, in Vygotskian terms, to the abstract elaborate and individual but multiple psychic community that, ultimately, shapes our identity.

Educational systems are generally structured around different periods in the life cycle of individuals: early childhood, middle and late childhood, and adolescence. This last phase corresponds with the *secondary education* period (from the age of 12 to 16 or 18). Compulsory secondary education (CSE) ends at the age of sixteen, bringing a period of ten years of schooling to a close. This is a biographically important moment for adolescents who complete a journey in which they move from childhood to the age at which they are entitled to enter the world of work and continue with post-compulsory studies. This can be seen as an ideal moment for taking stock of what they have learnt and experienced, and evaluating their intellectual, reasoning, emotional, spiritual, and relational capacities.

### 1.2. Adolescents' perceptions of the educational relationship

These perceptions include psychological sensations of facts as well as knowledge, ideas, opinions, feelings, and judgments on things or people who inspire them. The locus of any «implicit theory» or set of perceptions is the representational system of a subject and is built through each individual's capacities, but the content of these representations reflects social norms within a cultural context. These representations are individual and are shaped by social interaction (Zacarés & Serra, 1998). Consequently, the perceptions of the adolescents themselves become a focal point for further examination by educational research.

We might state that adolescents' self-perception, in general terms, is not usually dissonant with their observable public behaviour (Bisquerra & Pérez, 2007). Anxiety behaviour and emotional instability have been linked with perceived personal dissatisfaction (Garaigordobil & Maganto, 2011), and feelings of solitude, isolation, and dissatisfaction with one's own life have been linked with aggressive behaviour (Moreno, Ramos, Martínez, & Musitu, 2010). If we compare by gender, female adolescents have frequently been associated with more attention and concern for their feelings and emotional experiences than male adolescents, as well as with sharing them (Singh-Manoux, 2000). Self-evaluatory perceptions in adolescents generally relate to self-esteem, self-efficacy, and life satisfaction (Reina, Oliva, & Parra, 2010). Enquiry into the nature of adolescence has also been complemented from a variety of perspectives, including

that of the adolescents themselves (Casco & Oliva, 2005).

On the other hand, we are also aware of research into adolescents' perceptions of the family environment: some regarding the elderly (Santamarina, 2010) and some the family social environment (Moral & Ovejero, 2013) or family relationships themselves (Domínguez & Rodríguez, 2003). Likewise, studies have been carried out on the values perceived by adolescents in the media (Sevillano, 2001).

Focussing on the field of formal education, we find works that are now seen as classics regarding adolescents' perceptions of the longitudinal changes in academic and psychological adaptation (Roeser & Eccles, 1998), and the mediating role of objectives in the school setting and their link with the behaviour of the students (Roeser, Midgely, & Urdan, 1996). Research has also been carried out into students' ideas about coexistence in educational centres (Rodríguez-Muñoz, 2007) and the quality of the education (Marchesi, Lucena, & Ferrer, 2006).

There is a considerable body of research on adolescents' perceptions with a range of settings and specific contents. Nonetheless, it appears to be necessary to go into greater depth with studies that explore the implicit theories about the educational relationship, in their various spheres and different scopes. Studying educational relationships from the perspective of the construction of personal identity reveals great complexity and a lack of available knowledge, although there are some pieces of research that have linked personal identity statuses to

educational competences and have analysed, from an autobiographical viewpoint, schooling trajectories and competences of the teachers and students (Bernal, 2014). In this research, we aim to discover the perceptions of adolescents in the final year of compulsory secondary education regarding the dynamic of the educational relationship, taking into consideration their identity status (level of maturity).

## 2. Method

Our exploratory research is qualitative, oriented towards descriptive knowledge and understanding based on the principle of social interaction (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013). The methodological focus is biographical-narrative (Bolívar, 1998), as this supplies the tools needed to uncover the meanings that develop from people's lived experiences. This focus allows us to find out how adolescents build their world view through their experiences in relevant terms (Bogdan & Bilken, 2007). Following the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmation (Bisquerra, 2004), we controlled for irrelevant elements with methodological triangulation, (purposive) theoretical sampling, detailed description of the informants and defining the context (age, gender, identity status, place), and verification of the participants (cross-checking the information with the informants).

### 2.1. Design

The methodological design (Flick, 2015) is three phase, linked to the final selection of the sample in accordance with the study's research criteria. The fieldwork

was performed in three different moments: *Time 1*, *Time 2*, and *Time 3*, corresponding, respectively, to the start of the research, the first year, and the second year.

The phases are:

- 1) *Time 1* (T1): quantitative (q) and qualitative (Q1).
- 2) *Time 2* (T2): qualitative (Q2).
- 3) *Time 3* (T3): qualitative (Q3).

The model adopted is represented as: T1 (q + Q1) → T2 (Q2) → T3 (Q3).

## 2.2. Participants

The sampling is purposive (Ruiz, 2012) and 121 students from the fourth year of compulsory secondary education from a public educational centre in Andalusia were selected. The initial sample group was progressively segregated in the different phases of the research: 121 (T1), 53 (T2), and 25 (T3).

## 2.3. Instruments and procedures

In the first phase (*Time 1*), the EOM-EIS-II questionnaire (Adams, Bennion, & Huh, 1989) was used to classify the subjects according to their personal identity status. Among the objective measures that significantly surpassed those initially created by Marcia (1966), we have used the most widespread version: the Extended Objective Measure of Ego Identity Status II, more widely known as EOM-EIS-II. We can identify different levels, statuses, forms, or styles of identity, depending on the decisions taken about whether or not there is a period of search and crisis as well as the degree of commitment adopted to particular values, to a particular ideology,

and to a specific professional plan. Consequently, four distinct statuses appear: a) *achieved identity*, the outcome of a state of crisis and searching, as well as the establishment of a commitment that is axiological, ideological, and involves a plan for the professional future; b) *identity moratorium*, characterised by the individual not yet having acquired commitments as they are actively searching, exploring, investigating; c) *identity diffusion*, characterised by having acquired commitments and, to a certain extent, by abandoning the search, without this causing great concern, resulting in the subject falling into an obvious diffusion; and d) *foreclosed identity* (*acceptance or rigidity*), distinguished by displaying a clear commitment to certain values and projects, without there having been any process of crisis or search (typical of adolescents prone to conformity and linked to certain ethnic groups, certain subcultures, or authoritarian families).

By considering the root causes of the various identity statuses or styles we can establish a correlation between them and the level of personal maturity. In this way, *identity achieved* corresponds to a mature identity (a greater level of maturity) and *identity diffused* to an amorphous identity without expectations of change (a lower level of maturity). Between these two, we find *identity in moratorium*, where a clear axiological commitment has not yet been established but the individual is in a process of identity crisis and exploration, and the *foreclosed identity*, typified by having an ideological commitment and values, but without passing through a critical period or a thorough search. It is even possible to speak of another status,

that of *moratorium* or *low profile* identity, comprising subjects situated at the level of identity in moratorium, but in a poorly defined way, sharing similarities with subjects from the foreclosed identity level. These can be seen as forming a separate group given that they display ambivalences that make it difficult to place them clearly in the other identity levels. Consequently, the different identity statuses could be grouped into two blocks (as we have done) according to the degree of maturity (Meeus, 1996): subjects with achieved and moratorium identity statuses are included in the «active» status block associated with characteristics of greater maturity, while those with foreclosed and diffuse identity statuses are in the «passive» status block associated with characteristics of a lower level of maturity.

A qualitative technique was also adopted in this first phase: autobiographical narrative. Personal narratives by the adolescent students were analysed to discover their perceptions about their social inter-

action (Fivush & Haden, 2003), principally with their family members, friends, teachers, and classmates. These autobiographical narrations had no length requirement and included brief guidelines regarding the content, with which we are interested. From the total number of participants, 102 narratives were accepted, the rest being rejected because of significant failures to follow the instructions. From these 102 narrations, 53 subjects were selected for the next phase in accordance with the identity status provided by the EOM-EIS-II (achieved, 17%; moratorium, 4%; low profile moratorium, 41 %; rigid, 36 %; diffuse, 2 %), based on balancing the sample according to the criterion of «active» subjects (Group A, GA) and «passive» subjects (Group P, GP), as shown in Table 1. Although it is a group that is usually ignored in research, we included a third one comprising subjects with *low profile moratorium* status (LPMG), as it was strongly present in the sample, in case their contributions provided any specific interest.

TABLE 1. Groups of «active», «passive» and «low profile moratorium» subjects for the second phase (Time 2).

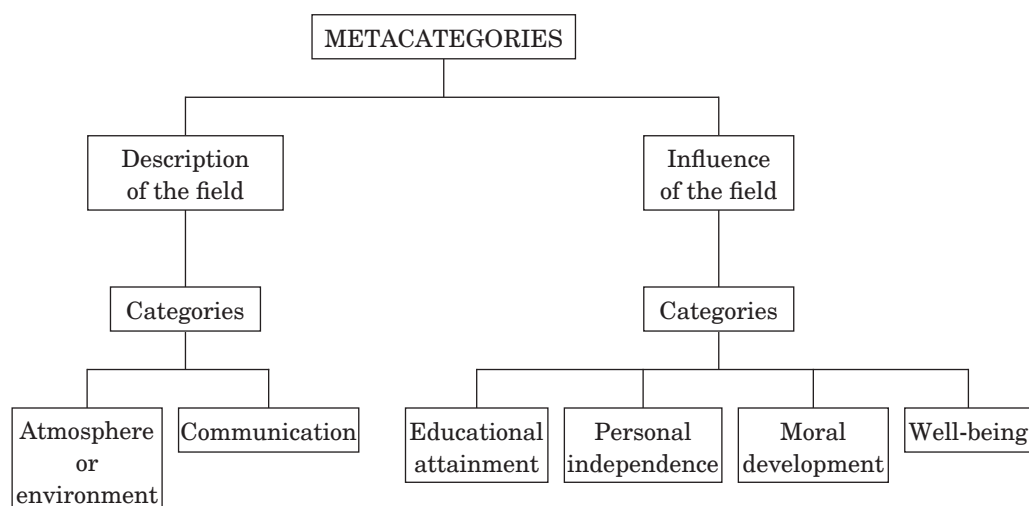
| GA                | Identification of the subject (No.)                      | GP               | Identification of the subject (No.)                                             | LPMG | Identification of the subject (No.)             |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------|-------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Achieved</b>   | 15, 18, 23, 25, 28, 29, 37, 48, 84, 97, 98, 99, 113, 119 | <b>Rigidity</b>  | 16, 38, 44, 45, 64, 66, 67, 68, 71, 76, 77, 86, 87, 90, 91, 102, 107, 120, 121. |      | 46, 59, 74, 75, 79, 83, 85, 105, 114, 115, 117. |
| <b>Moratorium</b> | 19, 54, 62, 65, 92, 96, 101, 118                         | <b>Diffusion</b> | 95                                                                              |      |                                                 |
| <b>Totals</b>     | <b>22</b>                                                |                  | <b>20</b>                                                                       |      | <b>11</b>                                       |

Source: Own elaboration.

In the second phase of the research (*Time 2*), the script for the *semistructured in-depth interview* was prepared (Witzel & Reiter, 2012) and used on selected subjects. The script's categories prepared in two ways: inductively, based on the information that came from the autobiographical narrations in *Time 1*, and deductively, based on the knowledge available from a study of the state of the question. The script was submitted to expert opinion for validation (Gómez, Rodríguez, & Ibarra, 2013). In accordance with the eight experts' contributions and recommendations regarding its design, clarity, and understanding of the script, the final version was prepared, with an expected duration of 45 minutes. The category design comprised two metacategories (see Graph 1): *description of the field* and *influence of the field* (we distinguish three fields: family, school, and peer group). The first metacategory is subdivided into

two categories: «Atmosphere or environment» and «Communication». The second comprises the categories of «Educational attainment», «Personal independence», «Moral development», and «Well-being». Each of them covers three cross-cutting dimensions, relating to the subjects' life experience: «Perceptions of life story», intended to evoke and access memories; «Current perceptions», intended to access the present; and «Projective perceptions», intended to examine the future. The information obtained was analysed using the NVivo 10 program, respecting the vertical criteria (the structural contribution of each narration) and the horizontal criteria (comparing profiles to observe similarities and differences) (Kvale, 2011). The subjects were given codes according to the group to which they belong and the number assigned to each participant (for example: subject number 101 belonging to the active group, GAS101).

FIGURE 1. Categories examined in the interview.



Source: Own elaboration.

Having completed *Time 2*, a new selection of subjects was carried out for *Time 3*. In this last phase, the *discussion group* technique was used (Barbour, 2013). Four discussion groups were established (DG1, DG2, DG3, DG4), with a total of 25 participants. The composition of the groups followed criteria of uniformity of maturity statuses and the members were selected in accordance with their commitment and the quality of the information provided in the interviews. In Table 2 the description of each group can be seen. In the sessions held, the content relating to the meta-categories involved in the interviews was

covered in depth, using a two-pronged critical perspective: the reality and ideal-ity of the educational relationship. These sessions were of over an hour in length and started with a brief motivational document provided by us to elicit interventions. The information obtained was also analysed using the NVivo 10 program to achieve the best possible scrutiny of the conversations (Rapley, 2014). The subjects were allocated codes according to their discussion group and the number assigned to each participant (for example: subject number 98 belonging to discussion group 2, DG2S98).

TABLE 2. Constituent features of the discussion groups.

| Discussion group                    | No. of subjects | Polarity by maturity status | Age                                 | Polarity by whether they are repeating the year | Polarity by family status                                        |
|-------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Discussion group no. 1 (DG1)</b> | 7               | Passive                     | 15 = 57 %<br>17 = 29 %<br>16 = 14 % | Not repeating = 57 %<br>Repeating = 43 %        | Living with both parents = 71 %<br>Living with one parent = 29 % |
| <b>Discussion group no. 2 (DG2)</b> | 6               | Active                      | 15 = 25 %<br>17 = 50 %<br>16 = 25 % | Not repeating = 75 %<br>Repeating = 25 %        | Living with both parents = 75 %<br>Living with one parent = 25 % |
| <b>Discussion group no. 3 (DG3)</b> | 6               | Passive                     | 15 = 83 %<br>17 = 14 %              | Not repeating = 83 %<br>Repeating = 14 %        | Living with both parents = 50 %<br>Living with one parent = 50 % |
| <b>Discussion group no. 4 (DG4)</b> | 6               | Balanced                    | 15 = 83 %<br>17 = 14 %              | Not repeating = 83 %<br>Repeating = 14 %        | Living with both parents = 67 %<br>Living with one parent = 33 % |

Source: Own elaboration.

### 3. Results and discussion

A series of spheres linked by an ebb and flow that jointly and concurrently act on the development of the subject would be a useful representation of the contexts that limit the shaping of personal identity, as the ecological model for explaining development has argued (Bronfenbrenner, 1987). The family and school are two characteristic *microsystems* (immediate frameworks in which the person is located and where his or her meaningful experiences occur). These are discrete, but they are not fully independent from each other. Between them, the circle of friends is another specific field and is especially interesting during adolescence. We adopt a «mesosystemic» level of analysis, relating to the connections, similarities, and differences between the microsystems.

The adolescents' perceptions reveal differences according to their identity statuses (see Table 3). Comparing the group of perceptions of these different fields, the family and the peer group are the most highly valued, above the educational institution. The active group (GA) sees the greatest capacity for educational influence in the family, just as the passive group (GP) sees an equivalent influencing power in the different fields. The subjects from the low profile moratorium group (LPMG) show erratic behaviour, as is to be expected, finding the most conducive field in their peers and. In contrast, they see the strongest capacity for formative influence in the family.

The family is perceived by adolescents as the principal agent for constructing their identities. Taking into account their

statements, aside from the identity levels, we observed that norms, values, beliefs and forms of behaviour typical of the culture to which they belong are transmitted through the family. Family socialisation has a significant effect on the development and social adjustment of identity. Likewise, this socialising process should be understood as a process which is bi-directional, dynamic, and more complex than has traditionally been believed. Particular attention should be paid to this aspect, to the socialisation that has an effect on the communication of expectations and aspirations, along with the participative commitment with the educational centre and the supervision and consolidation of academic work.

Adolescents, with nuances typical of their developmental dynamic, find a group of agents in their friends and classmates who are liable to influence their moral, cognitive, affective, and independent development. Conformity with the group usually reduces as they develop their own opinions and develop their critical sense. The danger of conformity, as well as certain levels of insecurity and risk, seem to reduce with the opportunities generated by educational activities that favour the process of creating a personality. Seen as a favourable environment for human relationships, the peer group has pedagogical possibilities that we should not ignore, through ethically regulated practices that are dialogic, cooperative, inclusive, and participatory, and it becomes a key point of intersection between the fields of school and family.

School does not have a positive image among the adolescents interviewed,

particularly among those who have a higher level of maturity or are closer to achieving it. The environment in the centres is far from ideal for arousing their interest. Trapped among practices that are frequently obsolete and have a limited degree of personalisation, the school agency, must, without forgetting

its cultural and social functions, innovate in search of pedagogical care practices that renew the ultimate purpose of education, the complete education of the personality. This is an area of research that should be explored and evaluated appropriately, looking for relevant formulas for conciliating school and family.

TABLE 3. Evaluation of adolescents' perceptions (+, positive overall assessment; -, negative overall assessment; =, ambivalent overall assessment).

| Microsystems or fields | Climate | Communication | Educational attainment | Personal independence | Moral development | Well-being | Levels of maturity |
|------------------------|---------|---------------|------------------------|-----------------------|-------------------|------------|--------------------|
| Family                 | +       | +             | +                      | +                     | +                 | +          | GA                 |
|                        | +       | -             | +                      | -                     | +                 | +          | GP                 |
|                        | =       | -             | +                      | =                     | +                 | =          | LPMG               |
| School                 | -       | =             | =                      | -                     | -                 | -          | GA                 |
|                        | =       | +             | +                      | +                     | +                 | =          | GP                 |
|                        | -       | =             | =                      | -                     | +                 | -          | LPMG               |
| Peers                  | =       | =             | =                      | =                     | =                 | +          | GA                 |
|                        | +       | +             | +                      | -                     | +                 | +          | GP                 |
|                        | +       | +             | =                      | =                     | =                 | +          | LPMG               |

Source: Own elaboration.

We will now move on to a detailed analysis of the specific fields in the study.

### 3.1. Family environment

Family relationships are generally highly valued by all of the adolescents, regardless of the maturity group to which they belong. The process of adolescence

involves an unavoidable family crisis resulting from winning independence from the attachment figures from childhood, figures who continue to be fundamental. Although new areas of confidentiality are sought with peers, with whom new desires for communication are channelled, adolescents still need the unconditional support and availability of the attachment

figures for their own security (something more evident in clear situations of vulnerability) and to be able to open themselves adequately to the broadening of new human relations.

Exerting personal independence requires efforts by the young person. Although all of the subjects, regardless of their identity status, say that they have confidence in themselves, those in GP express a lower capacity for exploration and greater doubts about their creative possibilities than those in GA. These two contrasting testimonies illustrate this: «I normally take the initiative in various activities and I am always available» (GAS29); and «I don't have any imagination and I find it hard to take the lead» (GPS45). Similarly, from an autobiographical perspective, the idea that the development of responsibility as an ethical category is more clearly favoured in the family (García, Escámez & Pérez, 2009) is apparent from the discourses, albeit with some nuances, as well as the flowering of structural relationships conducive to the unfolding of spirituality (Dowling *et al.*, 2004).

Regardless of their identity status, the interviewees believe that the main locus for the transmission of human values and the privileged area for the educational relationship is in the family (Buxarrais, 2012). This is because, in effect, its power, far from having broken down, has become consolidated in the individual biography and the collective imagination (Santos Rego, 2015). They all state that the family plays a decisive role in educational attainment. Examples of this include the following testimonies: «the edu-

cation you get depends on your family» (DG1S46); and «...communication has a big effect, and what your parents think of you» (DG2S98). Even so, the most mature subjects argue that success depends fundamentally on personal behaviour, in the words of DG2S77: «at the end of the day, the decision is yours, regardless of your setting».

Family models become key identity referents, their evaluation improving with the habitual practice of dialogue, associated with the subjects belonging to GA. The intimacy, support, and emotional security experienced in the family setting seem to create the ideal conditions for establishing satisfying personal relationships (Domínguez & Rodríguez, 2003). As has been shown in other pieces of research (Herrero, Estévez, & Musitu, 2005), the existence of open communication with parents has a positive influence on the adolescent's school self-esteem, and its absence is linked to psychological distress. Communication problems in the family context can lead to difficulties adjusting to the school environment.

### 3.2. School environment

The educational institution does not inspire enthusiasm in the adolescents, even among those who do wish to pursue post-compulsory studies. They are not just critical, but also disillusioned, and in general they call for a substantial improvement in human relations. The reasons put forward reiterate the importance of a good climate for creating emotional well-being that is favourably disposed towards study, work, and cooperation on

various tasks, as other authors have noted (Cohen, 2006; Collins & Parson, 2010). The positive youth development model (Pertegal, 2014) insists that emotional well-being is not only an active factor for promoting personal development, but can also prevent problems from arising.

There are many narrations of frustration when school experiences are mentioned. Poorly designed timetables, teachers' limited social skills, didactic styles that drain motivation, and so on: «There are subjects we do not like and that are at awkward times...» (DG1S91); «the teachers often arrive saying that they have had a tough day with other groups, but they should think about what we have done during the day... and try to motivate us» (DG1S64).

When they set out their ideas about what the school institution should be like, they mainly call for a good environment. When setting out their expectations about their classmates, GP and LPMG subjects say that they feel weighted down by bad experiences with certain classmates («I don't feel understood a lot of the time, I would like them to be closer and less brusque», said LPMGS74), certain fragilities in this regard being apparent in them. Those in GA show that they trust more in the values of dialogue and mediation, even if they do also acknowledge unedifying experiences, revealing a problem specific to this stage. In effect, tact in relations seems to be a fundamental means for establishing inclusive dynamics that are likely to contribute to the personal development processes of all of the students, in particular those lagging the most, through cooperative and signi-

ficative practices that encourage commitment, independence and responsibility (Vázquez, Escámez & García, 2012). This phenomenon includes the teachers, who are accused, on the whole, of paying insufficient attention to individual needs and not verbalising positive expectations towards students, these being rather more reactive in character and resulting from marks and good behaviour. So, DG1S64 says: «if a teacher just comes to do the class and doesn't even look at us or ask us anything...», emphasising the teachers' limited interactive skills; and DG4S114 insists: «although there are some teachers who are friendly, most of them don't pay any attention to you». They all believe that the teacher is a key figure, both for their motivation and for their academic achievements. Those in GA associate the quality of the learning with the quality of their relationship with the teachers (who should stand out because of their vocation), being less vulnerable to a low-quality or inadequate relationship than the subjects from the other groups. Listening to the subjects, the enormous power of influence of the teachers becomes apparent: «if a teacher is good and listens to us, we trust them and follow them...» (DG1S121).

When taking stock of the years spent at school, the less mature adolescents consider, with some nuances, that the education they have received might be sufficient for their appropriate moral and social integration. In contrast, the ones from GA (in particular those with identity achieved) associate their assessment with the demands that society itself establishes, expanding their expectations to include

substantial improvements that can increase educational quality (Angelides & Ainscow, 2000). Consequently, their list of educational content that should be promoted includes cultural knowledge corresponding to the different curriculum areas and the set of values that make education into a complete experience (comprehensive education), in a setting of quality human relations.

Taking responsibility in the educational process is a generalised demand among the more mature ones who call for methods that will allow them to develop their personal initiative and require a relational dynamic tending towards independent development, deploying their critical sense and the formation of their own judgement (Ibáñez-Martín, 1991). As GAS92 states: «They should let us express ourselves more and ask our opinions, there should be more debates, they should make us interact with each other...». Meanwhile, the students from LPMG insist that teaching should be based on relationships that principally promote motivation; the students from GP do not see a need for methodological changes. The least mature ones, unlike the most mature ones, tend to attribute their learning to external factors (teachers, media, etc.).

Most of them call for more participation in everyday tasks and in school life, as has been stated in other studies (Susinos & Ceballos, 2012). However, differences in their specific demands are apparent: the members of GA call for participation to develop critical thinking, creativity and the ability to take decisions («they should let us make mistakes; we shouldn't be

scared to get things wrong...», GAS18); those from the other groups link participation to teaching styles (they participate with pleasure if the teacher makes them feel good), and do not find it necessary in all cases. In the practices they recognise, in any case, an inclusive educational space that can facilitate the search for personal identity, developing individuality and cooperation between young people, and boosting the influence of peers in the participation (Simons-Morton & Chen, 2009).

## 3.3. Peer group

Although friends do not go so far as to be true attachment figures, they can fulfil some similar functions. The peer group, which is single sex at the start of adolescence but soon becomes mixed, can be a favourable or unfavourable environment for constructing identity (Molina, Inda, & Fernández, 2009). In general, participants value friendship highly and believe that it is necessary for constructing their own identities, albeit with differing nuances: the GA subjects are more confident in these links than the others, even though they display greater critical potential. This is illustrated by DG2S119: «Friends have a big influence. Before I used to get good grades, but I started to hang out with people I shouldn't have and everything went wrong, but things changed and I still have some good friends».

The ideal of friendship is linked to a long-term relationship in which confidence, solidarity, and intimacy are felt. The GP and LPMG students believe it is important for happiness. The GA students,

on the other hand, relegate friendship relations to a different level after their first experiences of dating, in accordance with patterns that are typical of adolescent development (Urbiola & Estévez, 2015). The greater the level of maturity, the more importance personal bonds relating to patterns typical of adulthood seem to present. Consequently, the most mature subjects are more open to recognising the existence of enmity.

Leisure activities make it possible to explore personal preferences, and choose them and get involved through a particular personal commitment to one or other of them, thus favouring identity development. As DG2S98 states: «My friends influence me as much as my parents or more». We observed that, for all of the statuses, studying generally displaces leisure time that is set aside for friends, something that might affect studying in a different way. A lack of motivation and family problems are recurring reasons given to explain school failure (while identity achieved subjects add that bad company along with a certain degree of immaturity are also significant causes). Peers can have a positive or negative effect on the adolescent's behaviour (Benson & Saito, 2000), as through their relationships isolated habits and behaviour patterns are transmitted, whether or not emotional support is provided. They are also a notable factor that regulates personal behaviour when interacting in the group or gang.

The new context of the network society has expanded possibilities for interaction in relation to friendship through multimedia content, the benefits of instant

communication, access to information, the opportunities to shape an online identity, and the development of specific skills relating to using a network. The adolescents with the least achieved maturity statuses have the most friends on the social networks, while those with identity achieved have the least. Cultivating friendships in real life, alongside care and education, primarily in the family environment, as can be seen in the contributions of the most mature, might be an antidote to the risks of the relationships established in the virtual world, regardless of the communicative advantages that this entails (Espinar & López, 2009).

## 4. Conclusions

The family is a vital framework for the well-being and psychosocial adjustment of adolescents who are looking to build and develop their identity. Furthermore, the existence of an appropriately functioning family seems to help prevent inappropriate and risky behaviour. Its coordination with the educational influence exercised in the school also seems to be fundamental, although there are probably no universal formulae for coordinating and implementing synergies. Consequently, a prospect of community educational demands opens up that transcends these specific areas.

A quality educational process requires good human relationships in the classroom. This is illustrated by the more mature adolescents, but is also noted in the particular needs and shortcomings expressed by those with a lower level of maturity who are more emotionally

vulnerable when faced with relationships that are not adequate or ideal.

Teachers can change lives. The least mature subjects place in them their hopes of finding sources of motivation and perseverance in their education, demanding clearly personalised attention, and the more mature subjects recognise the teachers' power to push them to do better and help them find their own path through everyday learning.

A curriculum and educational project based on caring for human relations can facilitate the development of an achieved identity. In the students' own words, this complex and difficult process requires: active participation in the life of the centre and in the classrooms; the cultivation of personal responsibility in all of the educational process; the promotion of meaningful learning which encourages dialogue as a means of communication and personal enrichment as well as for overcoming conflicts; enhancing motivational processes; and tact so that the personal character of the education is not neglected.

A refuge and source of support while attaining ever greater autonomy from family relations, the peer group is especially important during adolescence. However, relationships with peers are ambivalent; they can turn out to be appropriate or harmful, of great help for learning and for confronting events that are typical of this stage, and as negative pressure to perform inappropriate or anti-social behaviour. Peer relationships are the area of confluence between the principal microsystems (family and school), and are a field of unmistakable interest for an

educational activity directed towards facilitating personal maturity and trying to establish continuities between these microsystems.

Finally, it is worth considering and carefully experimenting with particular training strategies with a cross-curricular aim or specific to the domain, among others: associating exposure to crisis situations with teaching care practices; promoting recognition of the emotional complexity of the educational relationship and cultivating pro-social competences; and stimulating the creation and implementation of personal projects, adjusting aspirations and possibilities, that are capable of conciliating the requirements of self-realisation and social demands.

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# Service-learning in teacher training in Spanish universities

## *El aprendizaje-servicio en la formación del profesorado de las universidades españolas*

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### Abstract

A culture of training teaching staff in specific teaching skills is spreading throughout higher education in Europe and other regions. In recent years, service learning has been one of the active methodologies that has attracted the most attention in educational literature and in training practices. This piece uses an ex post facto cross-sectional study to quantify and describe service learning training provision in Spanish universities, using an information recording sheet to gather evidence from institutional websites and an unstructured questionnaire as a complementary data source. Our results support the claim that teaching training activities are growing and that there are some advances in the consolidation of this trend. However, significant limitations were identified, such as a lack of a practice-based orientation in teacher training and the lack of a coordinated plan to facilitate learning ecologies, something that is hindering the reflective, cooperative, and

transformative impact that is attributed to the service learning method. Based on this diagnosis, we suggest that training activities be incorporated into multi-year plans, and note that sociocritical and practical orientations would work better together, and that collaborative work between universities and community services should be strengthened.

**Keywords:** Service learning, teacher education, higher education, professional development, experiential learning.

### Resumen

Tanto en Europa como en otras regiones se está generalizando una cultura de la formación del profesorado universitario en competencias docentes específicas. Una de las metodologías activas a la que se viene prestando interés durante los últimos años, tanto en la literatura pedagógica como en las prácticas de formación, es el aprendizaje-

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je-servicio. Con la intención de cuantificar y caracterizar su oferta formativa en las universidades españolas, se llevó a cabo un estudio *ex post facto* de carácter transversal, basado en el registro de información publicada en las webs institucionales, así como en una encuesta no estructurada. La evidencia pone de manifiesto la tendencia ascendente en la oferta formativa de la metodología docente de ApS, al tiempo que progresa la institucionalización de la misma. No obstante, se identifican también importantes limitaciones, que alejan la orientación práctica del ámbito de la formación y no favorecen la planificación

coordinada de las ecologías del aprendizaje, lo que reduce considerablemente el impacto reflexivo, cooperativo y transformador que se le presume a esta metodología. A partir de este diagnóstico, se sugiere la inserción de las actividades formativas en planes plurianuales, la combinación de las orientaciones sociocrítica y práctica, y la potenciación del trabajo conjunto entre las universidades y las agencias comunitarias.

**Descriptores:** Aprendizaje-servicio, formación de profesorado, educación superior, desarrollo profesional, aprendizaje experiencial.

## 1. Introduction

Since the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, the European Higher Education Area has recognised teaching as a highly important professional role for which teachers require training in specific competences. A 2013 report on this subject, commissioned by the European Commission for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth and written by a group of leading experts in higher education recommended that all teaching staff in European higher education institutions have certified teacher training by 2020 (McAleese, 2013; see also McAleese, 2014). This type of guidelines is ever more present in the European agenda for modernising higher education. Their aim is to overcome the existing relationship in professional identity between research and teaching (Ruè, 2014), in order for staff to have a set of skills appropriate to their teaching role and the corresponding training.

In accordance with these regulations, the great majority of European higher education institutions have implemented initial and ongoing training programmes for their teaching staff in the last two decades, as they have started to regard teaching as a demanding and complex task. The scope of this training provision is broader in some universities, as is the case of the UK (Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015). In Spain, the Organic Universities Act (LOU) of 2001 considers teacher training to be a relevant criterion for determining the professional effectiveness of academic staff (sec. 33.3). As a result of this regulation, numerous universities started to implement training plans, spurred on by different technical proposals (for example, MEC, 2006), or aimed at fulfilling the expectations of methodological change created by the new plan for official university syllabuses (Royal Decree 1393/2007). Consequently, and despite the difficulties of the processes

for consolidating training (Zabalza, Cid, & Trillo, 2014), Amador (2012) stated that the 31 universities in his study already had continuing training activities, while 84% had started to implement specific programmes for training new teachers.

Following the launch phase, the framework of competences for teacher training has been consolidated (Triadó, Estebanell, Márquez, & del Corral, 2014), and new active methodologies and techniques have been incorporated into training plans, including service learning (SL). This study, carried out in the context of a broader research project (Ref. EDU 2013-41687-R), is intended to unveil the scope of training for university teachers in this methodology and provide a description of it.

## 2. Service learning as an active and socio-critical teaching methodology

Service learning is becoming a strategic tool in the process of consolidation of a democratic, supportive, and cooperative pedagogical culture, one which is based on coexistence and is eminently practical (Alonso & Longo, 2013; Folgueiras, Luna, & Puig, 2013; Jacoby, 2013), given that it is rooted in the solution of problems as Dewey already showed with his pedagogical pragmatism (Santos Rego, 2013).

Service learning is described as a proactive, cooperative, problematising, relational, reflexive, and transformative methodology (Martínez Usarralde, 2014; Santos Rego, Sotelino Losada, & Lorenzo Moledo, 2015), and research shows it has progressively being consolidated, both institutionally and in teaching, over

the last decade at an international level (Jacoby, 2009, 2013; Jouannet, Montalva, Ponce, & von Borries, 2015). In Spain, its institutionalisation was proposed by the Association of Vice Chancellors of Spanish Universities itself in a technical paper supporting SL as a teaching strategy, in the context of university social responsibility (CRUE, 2015).

This recognition is a result of intense expansion across all educational levels. However, the university level is a particularly important setting owing to the age range of its students; these acquire professional action competences through performing well-planned acts of solidarity, and also competences for critical reflexion as global citizens through active experiences that are planned and integrated into the curriculum in particular modules or complete courses (Gil-Gómez, Moliner-García, Chiva-Bartoll, & García-López, 2016), and even by consolidating holistic projects at a campus-wide level (Jouannet *et al.*, 2015).

Within the framework of this increasingly robust pathway, SL has been defined as a pedagogical approach aimed at searching for specific formulas for involving students in the everyday life of their communities, neighbourhoods, nearby institutions, and DNGOs (Piñeiro, 2013), internalising what it means to “take a side” and “commit” in a far more meaningful way than simply through discourses and texts (Puig, Gijón, Martín, & Rubio, 2011; Tande & Wang, 2013). Participation by the community’s different social agents is also promoted at the same time, with citizen spaces converging with professionalised educational spaces (Batllé, 2013) and joint solutions being sought

for the needs identified in the work that the students themselves have chosen (Waldner, Mcgorry, & Widener, 2012). Service learning provides opportunities for students to “go out” into the setting of their community and “research” what real needs exist (Weiler *et al.*, 2013). The concept of awareness-raising is involved here, and, along with the concept of impact, is central to some university modules such as those relating to development cooperation and education. Service learning is, therefore, integrated into experiential education (Rodríguez, 2014) and is characterised by the following features: tacitly giving the lead role to students who actively participate; examining a real need that the students themselves have identified; an evident and necessary connection with curricular objectives; completion of the service project; and, finally, reflecting on and evaluating the particular activity performed (Chen & Chang, 2013).

The expansion of SL is apparent in universities in their organizational structure. It is also important to note the emergence of SL groups and networks in Spain, such as the Red Española de Aprendizaje Servicio (Spanish Service Learning Network) and the Red Española de Aprendizaje Servicio Universitario (Spanish University Service Learning Network). The following organisations are especially noteworthy in the Autonomous Regions: the Centro Promotor de Aprendizaje-Servicio (Centre for the Promotion of Service Learning) in Barcelona, which arranges meetings on SL and universities; Ashoka and Zerbikas in the Basque Country; and ESCULCA in Santiago de Compostela. These are all examples of activism in the university sector (some also

operating in the school setting) and, among other tasks, they disseminate specialist publications (one good example is the proceedings published in 2015 by the Spanish University Service Learning Network).

Regarding SL as an object of research, the number of studies into it has increased as several elements of this methodological tool have attracted interest. Among the more general lines of research, it is worth noting SL’s potential strategic impact on teaching and learning (Alonso, Arandia, Martínez-Domínguez, Martínez-Domínguez, & Gezuraga, 2013; Fontana, Peláez, & Del Pozo, 2015), tutorial activity and its evaluation (Gezuraga & Malik, 2015), its relationship with local and community action (Aramburuzabala, 2013; Larsen, 2016; Santos Rego *et al.*, 2015), its connection to teaching civic values and civic commitment (Batllé, 2013; Lin, 2015), the acquisition of socio-professional and relational competences (Ayuste, Escofet, Obiols, & Masgrau, 2016; Ibarrola, & Artuch, 2016), its impact on students (Russo, 2013; Torío & García-Pérez, 2015), the obstacles and limitations that these projects display and their connection with teacher training (He & Prater, 2014; Morin, & Waysdorf, 2013), and the dissemination of this methodology’s acknowledged experiences in the USA, Latin America, the United Kingdom, and the rest of Europe (Folgueiras *et al.*, 2013; García López, Escámez, Martínez Martín, & Martínez Usarralde, 2008; Rodríguez, 2014; Santos Rego, 2013), and also in Asian countries (Chui & Leung, 2014; Ho & Vivien, 2012).

Teacher training for university staff would expand the SL dimensions that are amenable to research but still lack robust

studies. On these lines, the research objectives and design will depend on educational traditions. In principle, the critical or socio-critical focus (Feiman-Nemser, 1990), based on ethical and social commitment, would have a prominent role in SL (without ignoring other significant focuses, such as a practical focus based on experience as a source of knowledge), as this is the focus that generates the most pressing need to adopt training strategies linking professional development and socio-community service. However, this focus involves expanding training in spaces for non-academic community practice, suggesting a systemic relationship between training contexts when developing professional skills.

Nonetheless, there is hardly any evidence about the areas in which university teachers who apply the SL methodology are trained. So while the literature has on several occasions reported on this type of methodological experiences in Spain (for example, Alonso *et al.*, 2013; Ayuste *et al.*, 2016; Folgueiras *et al.*, 2013; Fontana *et al.*, 2015; Gezuraga, 2014; Gil-Gómez *et al.*, 2016; Ibarrola & Artuch, 2016; Rodríguez, 2014; Santos Rego *et al.*, 2015; Torío & García-Pérez, 2015), it is unusual for it to reveal how teachers in higher education have acquired the teaching competences that allow them to put SL projects into practice. On one of the rare occasions that data on training were collected, Gezuraga (2014) identified 13 SL experiences implemented in the University of the Basque Country over two academic years, then questioned the participants (11 teachers, 154 students, and 14 community partners) about whether they had received prior training, with 50.3% of them giving

an affirmative response. In the teaching sector in particular, 6 of the 11 teachers said that they had received training, 4 of whom said that the university was the institution that had offered it to them. On the other hand, 8 of the 11 teachers wanted more training to be able to approach future SL projects with greater guarantees of success. Similarly, teacher training emerged as one of the areas that, in an evaluation by international referents (people in charge of teaching management in foreign higher education institutions), was identified as an area that should be promoted as part of the element of engagement and support for teachers.

The fact that only 4 of the 11 university teachers in Gezuraga's research (2014) said that their university had offered them training suggests that other teachers might have acquired the necessary skills to use this methodology in other types of setting. However, before undertaking research into non-formal and informal training spaces, it is worth systematising the training provision provided by university institutions —formal spaces— to verify whether it is up to the job of meeting the need for pedagogic training required by the European higher education modernisation agenda. Our own research on which we rely in this article complies with this remit.

### 3. Method

#### 3.1. Design

A rationalist approach was chosen, intended to quantify empirically the presence and characteristics of the SL teaching

method in the training provision for university teachers in Spain. Starting from this paradigm, a transversal *ex post facto* design was used, based reviewing the information published on the websites of Spanish public universities and on an unstructured questionnaire sent to the people in charge of university teacher training.

Despite the transversal design, the information collected covered four years in the provision of training for university teachers. This was with the aim of allowing us to trace the recent evolution of this offer in relation to the SL methodology.

### 3.2. Sample

The study population comprised all the universities in Spain as listed on the website of the Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport (51 public and 34 private), initially making the sample coincide with the population. Nonetheless, when identifying the specific sampling units that would correspond with the services, institutions, centres, or units responsible for training university teachers, those universities that did not have this type of service at the moment of the data collection (September 2015) or that did not have a section on the institutional website were omitted. Two public universities and 15 private ones were found that were in one or other of these positions, and so 49 public and 19 private universities were included in the final sample.

### 3.3. Instruments and procedure

Two instruments were used simultaneously, one non-interactive and another

interactive, with the aim of recording the information about activities that provided SL training:

1. An information recording sheet for university teacher training activities relating to SL: this was applied to the analysis of content from the websites of the teacher training units of the 68 universities in the final sample and, where appropriate, to the content of other sites that they linked to (additional services or programmes, or centres that also offered teacher training to teaching staff), in order to record all of the training activities which have the aim of training teachers in use of the SL methodology, as well as the profile of the activities. As information on activities from before 2012 was scarce, a description was prepared of the training carried out during the 2012-2015 period.

2. An unstructured questionnaire for key informants (people in charge of training university teachers) sent by email. The objective of this questionnaire was to complement the information compiled using the sheet and so increase the degree of reliability of the evidence. An email was sent to the people in charge of training for teaching and research staff when this information was available on the websites (53 of a total of 68: 77.9% of the final sample). The email asked them to state whether any teacher training activity that included elements of the SL methodology was provided in the institute, service, or unit that they managed, or from by other university service or centre.

The information recording sheet, which was the principal technique for obtaining information, was designed in two phases:

1. An initial list of items was drawn up by an expert on university teacher training who had a position of responsibility in this area, considering the structure and procedures of the plans, programmes, and different types of teacher training activities, and the information on SL requested in a previously designed sheet (service learning experiences information recording sheet) that was adapted from Villa (2013). The general structure of this instrument, enables the identification of SL training provided by centralised services and training planned by other university centres if there was a training programme in centres or an equivalent. This first draft of the sheet contained 26 items.

2. Apparent validation of the sheet by two experts in university teacher training with positions of responsibility in this area in a university. Both experts provided critical comments that were then reviewed by the expert who had initially helped to prepare the first draft, with the aim of including the necessary improvements to the instrument. The sheet finally contained 23 items requesting the name of the university, centralised planning instruments for teacher training, the existence of university services or centres offering training associated with SL, and the elements of this methodology associated with the training activities (the teachers for whom the training was intended; the planning element in which learning was linked to serv-

ing the community; the topic of the service element of the training activities; teaching competencies that were the object of training; type of training activity and calendar year; credits and contact hours for training activities with SL components; the presence of participation by community agents; the type of community agents who participated in the training activities, where appropriate; the existence of a system of learning evaluation; and, where appropriate, types of learning evaluation techniques envisaged).

### 3.4. Data analysis

Once the data had been obtained, they were codified in an SPSS table for quantification. In this table the data collected using the information recording sheet were reorganised so that the results could subsequently be presented as clearly and concisely as possible. The analyses performed were descriptive, and inferential in the case of a contingency table that combined the two-year period in which the activities were performed with the centralised character of the planning.

For its part, the information provided by the interactive technique (unstructured questionnaire) was used, in the case of the universities that responded to the email message, to complement the descriptive results obtained from the non-interactive technique.

## 4. Results

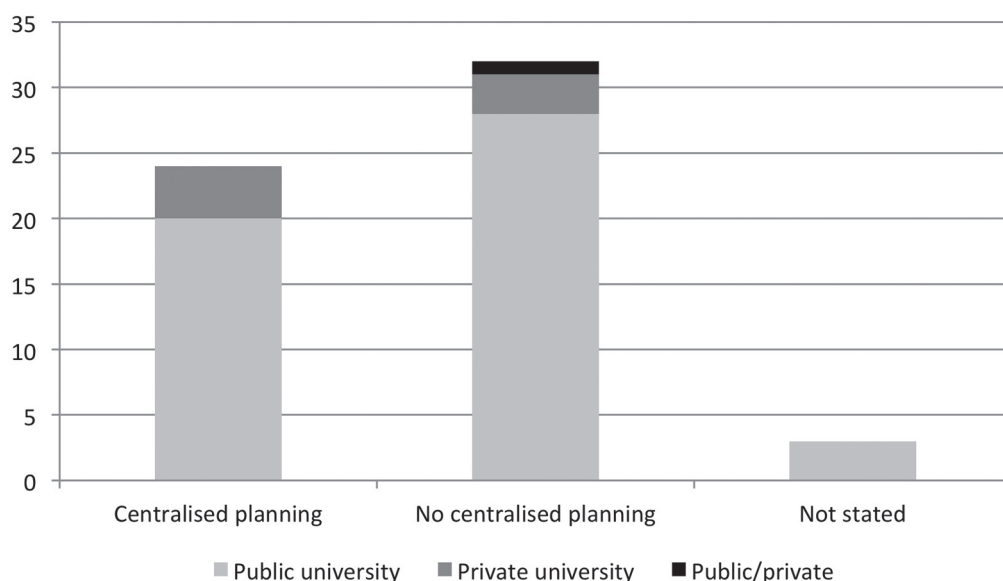
Annexe 1 summarises the evidence about teacher training provision related

to SL at the Spanish universities, as identified from the institutions' websites. The information collected with the sheet was grouped into 20 criteria (the subject of the service performed by the participants is not included because only one activity with an associated service was recorded).

In the total of 68 universities in the final sample, 59 training activities relating to SL were found, concentrated in 37 universities (30 public and 7 private). While 48 of the activities were provided by one or more universities, 11 were from a partnership of some type (university and an external agent). In contrast, a wide variety of units organised SL training activities within the universities, and

so the centralised institute or service responsible for teacher training provided a minority, albeit a significant one, of these activities (39%, increasing to 44.1% if activities jointly organised with a different unit are included). On 79.1% of occasions, the activities organised by the centralised unit formed part of a centralised plan or programme for training university teachers, although these activities represented under half of the provision (40.7%) when taking into account the group of organisational units, this being the case in 11 universities (10 public and 1 private). Graph 1 shows the absolute frequency of this type of centralised design along with that of activities without centralised planning, by the type of organising university.

FIGURE 1. Frequency of SL training activities with and without centralised planning by type of organising university.



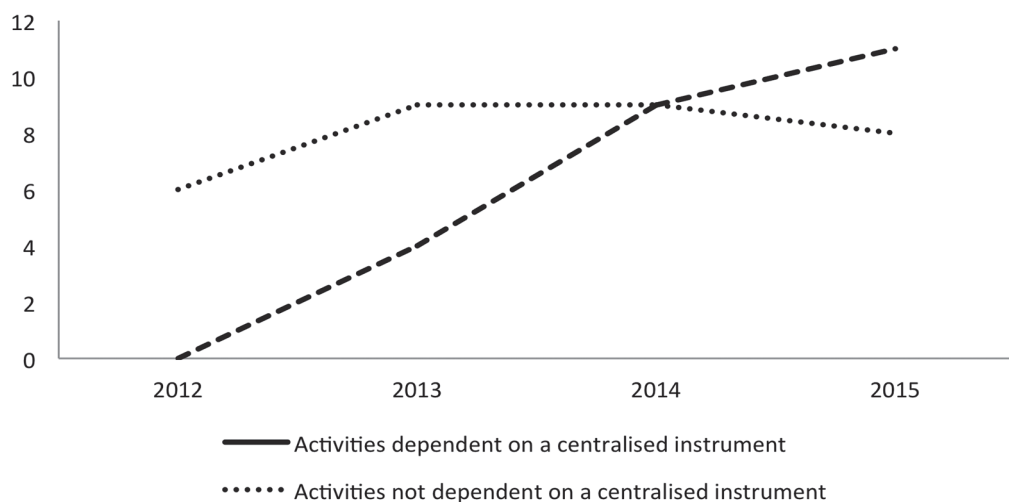
Source: Own elaboration.

An increase is visible in the training offer over the years included in the interval analysed. There was an increase from 6 activities in 2012 (10.2% of the total) to 21 in 2015 (35.6% of the total). An increase in hours was also detected. Although it was not possible to discover the duration of all of the activities, this was possible for most of them (51 of 59). Grouping these activities into two year periods to obtain a more reliable result, we can see that during 2012 and 2013, 174.1 hours of training in SL were provided, while this duration increased to 634.3 hours in the 2014-2015 period.

Alongside the simple overall quantification by two year periods, revealing a trend towards an increase in SL training activities, it is even more interesting to obtain an indicator of institutionalisation. If we treat the frequency with which training activities form part of centralised plans, programmes, and qualifications

—more stable instruments than simply organising occasional courses or workshops— as an indicator of institutionalisation, we can see that of the 56 activities that could be identified as being linked or not to a centralised instrument, the number not linked remained approximately constant (15 in the 2012-2013 period and 17 in the 2013-2014 period), but those connected to a plan, programme, or qualification increased significantly (4 in the 2012-2013 period, 20 in the 2013-2014 period). The Chi-squared test, including correction for continuity, confirms the statistical significance of the difference in frequencies over the two-year periods ( $\chi^2(1) = 4.317$ ,  $p = 0.038$ ), although the value of the contingency coefficient is of limited magnitude,  $C = 0.301$  (the result of Fisher's exact test corroborates the rejection of the null hypothesis,  $p = 0.024$ , exact two-tail significance). Graph 2 breaks down the development of centralised SL training by years.

FIGURE 2. Development of the frequency of SL training activities by their link to centralised planning instruments.



Source: Own elaboration.

As for the type of training activities, face-to-face courses and workshops were the two main formats (together representing 61% of training provision), with the remaining activities comprising a range of formats. This is a classic training structure, the significance of which has continued over time: in the 2012-2013 period, courses and workshops represented 60% of training activities, and a similar frequency (61.5%) was observed in the 2014-2015 period.

The SL training that the universities provide is intended for very varied groups, not just university teachers, although 61% of the activities are expressly directed at this group. Almost a quarter of them (23.7%) are aimed not only at teaching and research staff but also groups from outside the university. This fact is usually associated with the mixed character of the organisation of the training. Typical examples include meetings, workshops, and conferences organised by the networks in collaboration with the universities (Red Española de Aprendizaje-Servicio [Spanish Service Learning Network] and Red Universitaria Española de Aprendizaje-Servicio [Spanish University Service Learning Network]).

Surprisingly, only one activity was recorded that included a service component, this being a practice performed in a socio-educational community setting. One circumstance related to this fact is the brief duration of the training activities, averaging 15.8 hours. Specifically, 47 of the 51 activities with a quantified duration were implemented over a period of between 3 and 24 hours; only 2 of the remaining 4 activities exceeded 100 hours.

The specific activity for which the provision of a service was identified was one of these 2 long duration training activities.

Nonetheless, the number of activities in which community agents participated was of greater significance (approximately a third of those carried out: 20). Furthermore, in 75% of these 20 activities several agents participated, mainly (again, 75% of cases) from a range of socio-community bodies; professionals from 2 agencies participated in 8 activities, professionals from 3 agencies participated in 5 activities, and 4 bodies participated in 2 activities. Educational agencies displayed the greatest presence in training (11 activities from a total of 20) if we add their exclusive participation to their combined participation with other bodies, followed by foundations (participating in 8), and associations (participating in 6).

The number of sampling units that participated in the unstructured questionnaire was much smaller than the number finally included in the data collection through the websites (10 people in charge of teacher training responded by email). Consequently, the evidence collected in this second phase is complementary in nature. Furthermore, a significant part of the data overlapped with those from the institutional websites. Nonetheless, four new results should be noted:

1. Five public universities for which SL training activities had already been identified through their websites informed us of the operation of groups of teaching staff (association, network, teaching innovation groups, permanent educational innovation

groups) that worked actively and co-operatively, as a training strategy, on extending the SL methodology in teaching.

2. Two public universities informed us of 5 training activities that had not been collected by the information recording sheet. Both implemented these activities based on a centralised plan (one of these institutions did not appear in the list of 37 universities offering training in SL).

3. Two public universities were still not providing SL training to their teachers, but were already planning training strategies in this area.

4. One public university cited various programmes promoted by the Development Cooperation Office, although it did not specify whether these included a training dimension. This fact is mentioned because it supports the idea of the importance of volunteer and development cooperation units in promoting the SL methodology.

## 5. Discussion and conclusions

The evidence collected illustrates the growing trend for provision of training in the SL teaching methodology in Spanish universities, and simultaneously how its institutionalisation is progressing, as can be seen from the increase in the number of training activities connected to centralised planning instruments. These are the two most positive conclusions of the study based on collecting information from the institutions' websites. Therefore, university training policies seem to be responding to European policy guidelines on teachers' professional development,

resulting from the Declaration of Bologna and the recommendations adopted by the European Commission (McAleese, 2013, 2014), and, at a national level, from the Organic Universities Act and, in the particular case of SL methodology, from the proposal made by the Association of Vice Chancellors of Spanish Universities (CRUE, 2015) regarding the institutionalisation of SL.

The complementary information obtained through the unstructured questionnaire also confirms the expansion and institutionalisation of SL training at the same time as identifying working groups, formalised in a variety of different formats, as an important training strategy. Training in networks, broken down into various activities that were collected using the information recording sheet (workshops, meetings, conferences), is another even clearer expression of the consolidation of cooperative work by professionals, thus reflecting new forms of working and training in an inter-dependent world (Álvarez, 2007).

It is likely that a reaction to the policy guidelines is not the only phenomenon that explains the increase in training as part of the institutionalisation of SL, but that in parallel a certain change in the university teaching professionals' view of themselves as educators might be discernible, including a view of their role that goes beyond the function of simply transmitting knowledge that is closely linked to their research tasks, and includes responsibility for creating opportunities for more holistic learning and development. This would, for example, include education for community participation and for

citizenship in general (Gil-Gómez *et al.*, 2016; Hébert & Hauf, 2015; Puig *et al.*, 2011), but also other personal and social competences on which SL has shown positive effects (see the meta-analysis by Yorio & Fe, 2012). The specifically professional knowledge, in regards to which a significant improvement has also been shown when the SL methodology is used (see the meta-analyses by Novak, Markey, & Allen, 2007; and Warren, 2012), would, therefore, no longer be the only teaching focus.

Along with this changing role, it is also necessary to evaluate the motivational potential of a methodology based on experiential learning (Kolb, 1984), with its roots in the thinking of William James and John Dewey, as well as the effectiveness of critical reflection on socially contextualised action (Deeley, 2015), of which Paulo Freire is a fundamental reference. These methodological features, along with the broad range of skills whose development SL facilitates, can eventually lead to a range of benefits in terms of employability (Matthews, Dorfman, & Wu, 2015), as well as those already cited in relation with civic commitment. In this context, the ongoing expansion of SL in higher education can be better understood, as can the subsequent demand for pedagogical training that Gezuraga (2014) identifies.

However, Spanish universities are still far from featuring a consistent generalised implementation of teacher training provision in SL methodology, as has already started to be tried in some entities from other countries with the aim of ensuring its institutionalisation (Jouannet *et al.*, 2015). The format of their ac-

tivities is still very classical (face-to-face courses and workshops are predominant); very few activities with a service element are organised, thus preventing them from having truly practical training credits; and socio-community agents only participate in a third of them. Consequently, the advance of the socio-critical focus is limited and, furthermore, there is an almost complete absence of the practical paradigm, which is what can potentially stimulate an in-depth reflection on the teaching activity itself in dynamic interaction with pedagogical knowledge (Nevgi & Löfström, 2015), as well as representing the humus that favours learning ecologies (Jackson, 2013). Although ecological learning inevitably appears based on the decisions that the teachers take regarding the contexts, targets, processes, and relations with which they are involved during their professional career, planned coordination of these elements could effectively boost teachers' professional development, particularly in methodologies that are suitable for systemic inter-relationship, as is the case with SL.

In summary, at a time when large numbers of Spanish universities are starting to commit to SL in teacher training (according to the data collected by both instruments in this study, 38 institutions are doing so and 2 more are involved in planning tasks), this is perhaps the moment to take a step forwards and evaluate the provision, and so guarantee the reflexive, cooperative, and transformative impact that this methodology is assumed to have (Martínez Usarralde, 2014; Santos Rego *et al.*, 2015). With regards to this qualitative dimension, the integration of

training activities into multi-year plans instead of running them on an occasional basis might be important, deciding to combine sociocritical and practical focuses, as a minimum, and promoting cooperative and ecological learning. The need to strengthen the relationship with community agencies follows from these last two criteria, bringing these agencies to the university and taking the trainers and, in particular, trainee teachers to areas of

community service, something that would require participation in training activities by external agents, as well as the inclusion of a service element in all of the activities. When these requirements have been implemented, this would be the moment to put into operation a systemic evaluation of the transference and impact, the need for which is widely recognised (Chalmers & Gardiner, 2015; Feixas, Lagos, Fernández, & Sabaté, 2015).

ANNEXE 1. Absolute and relative frequency of university teacher training activities related to SL, according to 20 classifying criteria.

| CRITERION                                                                        | CATEGORIES                                                                                                                                                                          | <i>fa</i> | <i>fr</i> |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Providing agency                                                                 | <i>University</i> (activity organised by the body in charge of training university teachers — university staff training— or another unit within one or several universities)        | 48        | 81.4%     |
|                                                                                  | <i>Mixed</i> (an activity organised by one or several universities along with a department of the autonomous region's administration, a network, or another type of external agent) | 11        | 18.6%     |
| Type of providing university                                                     | <i>Public</i>                                                                                                                                                                       | 51        | 86.4%     |
|                                                                                  | <i>Private</i>                                                                                                                                                                      | 7         | 11.9%     |
|                                                                                  | <i>Mixed</i> (an activity co-organised by public and private universities)                                                                                                          | 1         | 1.7%      |
| Unit organizing or providing                                                     | <i>Competent university staff training body</i> (ICE [Institute for Educational Sciences], university staff training unit, section, or centre)                                      | 23        | 39.0%     |
|                                                                                  | <i>Mixed</i> (activity organised by the competent university staff training body, along with others for which it is not their remit)                                                | 3         | 5.1%      |
|                                                                                  | <i>Others</i> (Faculties) offices, teaching groups, etc., for which university staff training is not their remit)                                                                   | 33        | 55.9%     |
| The training provision is part of an instrument for training university teachers | <i>Yes</i>                                                                                                                                                                          | 24        | 40.7%     |
|                                                                                  | <i>No</i>                                                                                                                                                                           | 32        | 54.2%     |
|                                                                                  | <i>Not specified</i> (an activity organised by a university staff training centre, unit, or service, but whether it is included in a plan or programme is not specified)            | 3         | 5.1%      |

| CRITERION                                                   | CATEGORIES                                                                                | <i>fa</i> | <i>fr</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Type of instrument                                          | <i>Plan</i>                                                                               | 14        | 58.3%     |
|                                                             | <i>Programme</i>                                                                          | 5         | 20.8%     |
|                                                             | <i>Qualification</i>                                                                      | 4         | 16.7%     |
|                                                             | <i>Not specified</i>                                                                      | 1         | 4.2%      |
| Typo of activity                                            | <i>Face-to-face course</i>                                                                | 22        | 37.3%     |
|                                                             | <i>Online course</i>                                                                      | 2         | 3.4%      |
|                                                             | <i>Seminar</i>                                                                            | 3         | 5.1%      |
|                                                             | <i>Workshop</i>                                                                           | 4         | 6.8%      |
|                                                             | <i>Workshops</i>                                                                          | 14        | 23.7%     |
|                                                             | <i>Meeting</i>                                                                            | 7         | 11.9%     |
|                                                             | <i>Conference</i>                                                                         | 5         | 8.5%      |
|                                                             | <i>Conference</i>                                                                         | 2         | 3.4%      |
| Year in which this training activity was delivered          | <i>2012</i>                                                                               | 6         | 10.2%     |
|                                                             | <i>2013</i>                                                                               | 14        | 23.7%     |
|                                                             | <i>2014</i>                                                                               | 18        | 30.5%     |
|                                                             | <i>2015</i>                                                                               | 21        | 35.6%     |
| Hours of training                                           | <i>No. of hours</i>                                                                       | 808.4     |           |
| Recipients of the training activity                         | <i>Teaching and research staff</i>                                                        | 36        | 61.0%     |
|                                                             | <i>New teaching and research staff</i>                                                    | 1         | 1.7%      |
|                                                             | <i>University educational community</i>                                                   | 4         | 6.8%      |
|                                                             | <i>Education professionals</i> (any stage in the educational system)                      | 2         | 3.4%      |
|                                                             | <i>Several</i> (combination of different types of professionals, university or otherwise) | 12        | 20.3%     |
|                                                             | <i>Not specified</i>                                                                      | 4         | 6.8%      |
| Training activity that includes objectives relating to SL   | <i>Yes</i>                                                                                | 33        | 55.9%     |
|                                                             | <i>No</i>                                                                                 | 19        | 32.2%     |
|                                                             | <i>Not specified</i>                                                                      | 7         | 11.9%     |
| Training activity that includes competences related to SL   | <i>Yes</i>                                                                                | 2         | 3.4%      |
|                                                             | <i>No</i>                                                                                 | 49        | 83.1%     |
|                                                             | <i>Not specified</i>                                                                      | 8         | 13.6 %    |
| Training activity that includes content related to SL       | <i>Yes</i>                                                                                | 51        | 86.4%     |
|                                                             | <i>No</i>                                                                                 | 1         | 1.7%      |
|                                                             | <i>Not specified</i>                                                                      | 7         | 11.9%     |
| Training activity that includes a methodology related to SL | <i>Yes</i>                                                                                | 46        | 78.0%     |
|                                                             | <i>No</i>                                                                                 | 6         | 10.2%     |
|                                                             | <i>Not specified</i>                                                                      | 7         | 11.9%     |

| CRITERION                                                           | CATEGORIES                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <i>fa</i> | <i>fr</i> |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Training activity that includes an SL evaluation procedure          | <i>Yes</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 50        | 84.7%     |
|                                                                     | <i>No</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 2         | 3.4%      |
|                                                                     | <i>Not specified</i>                                                                                                                                                                                       | 7         | 11.9%     |
| How many types of evaluation does it have?                          | <i>One</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 25        | 50.0%     |
|                                                                     | <i>Several</i>                                                                                                                                                                                             | 25        | 50.0%     |
| Type of evaluation                                                  | <i>Attendance</i>                                                                                                                                                                                          | 24        | 48.0%     |
|                                                                     | <i>Participating in activities and/or submitting a report, project, or various pieces of work</i>                                                                                                          | 26        | 52.0%     |
| Participants perform a socio-community service                      | <i>Yes</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 1         | 1.7%      |
|                                                                     | <i>No</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 51        | 86.4%     |
|                                                                     | <i>Not specified</i>                                                                                                                                                                                       | 7         | 11.9%     |
| The community agents participate in the training activity           | <i>Yes</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 20        | 33.9%     |
|                                                                     | <i>No</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                  | 35        | 59.3%     |
|                                                                     | <i>Not specified</i>                                                                                                                                                                                       | 4         | 6.8%      |
| Number of community agents who participate in the training activity | <i>One</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                 | 5         | 25.0%     |
|                                                                     | <i>Several</i>                                                                                                                                                                                             | 15        | 75.0%     |
| Types of community agents who participate                           | <i>Foundation</i>                                                                                                                                                                                          | 3         | 15%       |
|                                                                     | <i>Association</i>                                                                                                                                                                                         | 1         | 5%        |
|                                                                     | <i>Educational Body</i>                                                                                                                                                                                    | 1         | 5%        |
|                                                                     | <i>Others</i> (a combination of 2 or more types of agents: NGO, foundation, association, educational institution, citizen organization, public body, political organisation, religious institutions, etc.) | 15        | 75%       |

Source: Own elaboration.

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can be found at the website [www.usc.es/apsumi](http://www.usc.es/apsumi).

It is important to note that, in the implementation phase of this study's method, the first two authors were responsible for the training of university teachers in the institutions with which they are affiliated.

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# The learning processes of students at risk of exclusion from education

## Los procesos de aprendizaje de los estudiantes en riesgo de exclusión educativa

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### Abstract

The existing operational problems in Compulsory Secondary Education require in-depth reflection about the different curricular and organisational aspects in place in this stage. This research aims to evaluate students' perceptions of the operation of the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes and compare it with their previous experience in Compulsory Secondary Education. The study was performed as a census; the questionnaire was sent to all students (N = 1045 students) from the 89 groups of students of the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes in Gipuzkoa. The response rate was 73.97%, with 773 students participating in the study. The results show that the students' scores regarding knowledge acquired in the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes are higher than those for their previous experience in Compulsory Secondary Education. Similarly, the students' evaluation of the teaching processes performed by the teachers on the Initial Professional Qualification

Programmes is more satisfactory than their experience with Compulsory Secondary Education teachers. Some of the research results are very striking. The teachers on the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes manage to promote enthusiasm and interest in the work among students attending these schools. It seems strange that teachers who, in most cases, come from vocational training and do not have any specific training in educational science, can awaken students' interest in their work and improve their levels of satisfaction in the case of students who have systematically failed in Compulsory Secondary Education.

**Keywords:** Attention to diversity, educational inclusiveness, school failure, educational and learning processes, basic professional training, secondary education.

### Resumen

Los problemas de funcionamiento existentes en la Educación Secundaria Obliga-

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toria (ESO) exigen una profunda reflexión sobre los diferentes aspectos curriculares y organizativos desarrollados en esta etapa. La investigación pretende evaluar la percepción de los estudiantes sobre el funcionamiento de los Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial (PCPI) y compararlo con su anterior experiencia en la ESO. El estudio se plantea como un censo, es decir, el cuestionario es enviado a todos los alumnos y alumnas (N=1045 estudiantes) de los de los 89 grupos de alumnos y alumnas de los Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial (PCPI) de Gipuzkoa. La tasa de respuesta se situó en un 73,97%, tomando parte en el estudio 773 estudiantes. Los resultados indican que las puntuaciones de los alumnos y alumnas sobre los conocimientos aprendidos en los Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial son superiores a su anterior experiencia en la Educación Secundaria Obligatoria. Igual-

mente, la valoración que realiza el alumnado en relación con los procesos de enseñanza que desarrolla el docente de los PCPI es más satisfactoria que su experiencia con los docentes de la ESO. Algunos de los resultados de la investigación llaman poderosamente la atención. Los profesionales de los PCPI consiguen fomentar la ilusión y el interés por el trabajo de los estudiantes que asisten a estos centros. Parece curioso que docentes que, mayoritariamente, provienen de la formación profesional, sin una formación específica en ciencias de la educación, logren despertar el interés por el trabajo y la satisfacción de alumnos y alumnas que han fracasado de forma sistemática en la ESO.

**Descriptor:** Atención a la diversidad, inclusión educativa, fracaso escolar, procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje, formación profesional básica, educación secundaria.

## 1. Introduction

The targets for European educational systems set out in the Europe 2020 strategy place great importance on preventing academic failure and on lifelong learning (MECD, 2013). One objective that is meant to be met is the rapid adaptation of the population to new economic and social situations, thus attaining better levels of well-being. Furthermore, the educational systems of the European Union act to promote strategies that encourage an interest in learning and the necessary measures to prevent academic and social exclusion.

In the case of Spain, Organic Act 8/2013, of 9 December, to Improve the Quality of Education, better known as the LOMCE,

also refers to academic failure. Specifically, in section 28, it mentions programmes for improving learning and performance that are implemented from the second year of Compulsory Secondary Education (ESO). In section 41 it sets out the characteristics of Basic Professional Training (FPB), formerly known as Initial Professional Qualification Programmes (PCPI). These are intended for students who do not attain a sufficient command of basic competences. In the case of the Basque Country, sections 37 to 44 of Decree 236/2015, of 22 December describe the measures regarding diversity in compulsory education. Educational centres must establish mechanisms for the early detection of students with specific educational support needs.

According to Pérez, Poza, and Fernández (2016), the collective of young people in social difficulties is characterised by high levels of educational failure and early school leaving. One educational stage where most effort is needed to prevent this problem is Compulsory Secondary Education. Ferrer, Valiente, and Castel (2010) emphasise the great differences existing between Spain's autonomous regions in the PISA tests. The figures for academic failure that the Spanish educational system generates at this stage are truly worrying (Aramendi & Vega, 2013). Bersani and Chappie (2007) observe that school leaving and academic failure are two factors that mark the transition from adolescence to the adult stage. The results of their research show that academic failure is a turning point for adolescents, with a negative influence on the course of their lives. They believe that it is important to overcome the concept of deficiency in compensatory education and influence the design of curriculum ideas intended for the area of potential development of all students. Inclusive practices must guarantee rights, promote equity, and avoid segregation in the school (Feito, 2010; Arnáiz & Azorín, 2014).

To do this, a more functional curriculum is needed that promotes interdisciplinarity and the integration of knowledge, as is an active methodology that is completely removed from the traditional conceptual academic style used in most secondary school classrooms. The more abstract and theoretical subjects in Compulsory Secondary Education, delivered using teacher centred methodologies, can also create processes of exclusion. Accordingly, in a

study carried out in secondary education, Domenech (2012) concludes that teacher centred teaching styles focussing on the transfer of knowledge are predominantly used at this stage. There is still a marked dependence on the teacher, little connection with knowledge relating to real life, and, frequently, school practices are treated as completed formulae. The so-called deductive approach has shaped most of the classes in secondary teaching. This model is based on the textbook and is presented to the students in a highly structured and linear fashion (Renzulli, 2010). Greater momentum must be given to inductive learning and to enquiry in schools as they give students more opportunities to apply and transfer the knowledge they learn (Tabaran, Box, Myers, Pollard, & Bowen, 2007; Vilchez & Bravo, 2015). Furthermore, consideration should be given to the fact that new pedagogical approaches are changing the aims of education. As Barba (2010) notes, knowledge has an expiry date, and memory, the most highly valued capacity at school, is progressively losing its relevance. Schools must reflect on the backlash they create in some students. They cannot fall back on the assumption that the problem of failure and leaving has its origin in the students and their families.

Educational policies and, specifically, the decisions taken by the authorities have a decisive influence on the approach to this problem (Alegre & Benito, 2012). Calero, Wasgrais and Choi de Mendizabal (2010) have performed a study presenting some of the factors that have an impact on academic failure by students. Their socioeconomic level, the percentage

of immigrant students, budgetary and staff management autonomy in the centres, the distribution and grouping of the students, the centre's resources, and counselling and prevention at a school and community level have a major impact on student failure. Also, as García, Quintanal, and Cuenca (2016) state, it is important not to forget the impact of factors such as bad company and the abuse of legal and illegal drugs.

To reduce rates of educational failure and school leaving, it is necessary to take interdisciplinary decisions. Escudero and Martínez (2012) maintain that this problem must initially be approached through political and social pacts, strengthening public education, and through in-depth review of the school curriculum, and the management of educational centres and teaching staff and their professional development. They emphasise the fundamental role played by members of management, families, the educational community and society as a whole. As Muñoz (2012) and Palomares and López (2012) state, the school's intervention must be coordinated with social support measures by various institutions. Tackling students' problems primarily involves implementing preventative actions among the various administrative bodies, schools, non-profit associations, and basic social services.

## 2. Interest in learning: a key element for tackling educational failure and school leaving

Developing basic competences in compulsory education requires implementing a change in teaching and learning pro-

cesses. Arlegui and Ibarra (2010) state that competence-based training requires the use of teaching methods that promote learning through enquiry and cooperation between students. From primary education, onwards it is necessary to encourage inductive learning processes so that students can build their own knowledge through exploration, experimentation, and discussing ideas. The teacher must achieve an appropriate connection between theory and practice, moving from a central role to one that is more peripheral but no less important for that. Andreu, Sanz, and Serrat (2009) state that an appropriate learning context must capture the students' attention and motivate them to analyse various situations from real life. Science is learnt through enquiry, observation, and solving problems.

Satisfaction with studies is strictly related to the educational attainment. Academic performance is closely linked with the teaching and learning strategies used, the role of the student, and the student's interest (Poy, 2010). Students, when they realise that they continuously fail in their various school tasks, experience a progressive deterioration in their self-esteem. Some enter a cycle of continuous failure that encourages giving up and school leaving. For this reason, the learning environment is vitally important, to ensure that students feel comfortable working in the classroom with their other classmates (Luedthe, Ribitzsch, Trautwein, & Kunter, 2009). Tsai, Ho, Lyang, & Lin (2011) analyse beliefs about the subject of science in secondary school students and their relationship with academic performance in a study. Students who regarding learning science in a

constructive way, prioritising the use of knowledge, achieve better performance levels than those who are doubtful or have high levels of uncertainty about learning science and using it in everyday life.

Tulis and Ainley (2011) analyse the emotional states of the students who pass and fail mathematics in secondary education. They conclude that encouraging a good classroom atmosphere, interaction and mutual assistance (peer tutorials) can have a positive impact on the equal participation by students in learning processes. Pérez and Poveda (2008) believe that through cooperative learning it is possible to achieve an appropriate atmosphere in the classroom, that is to say, one in which all students participate without exclusions in the learning processes and which assumes that they are capable of learning collaboratively, in a creative, interactive, and motivating way. The development of psychosocial and emotional factors is one of the advantages of cooperative learning. Accordingly, Studsrød and Bru (2011) analyse the perceptions of the classmates who act as facilitating agents for the school adjustment of secondary-school students from Norway. Their results showed that the perceptions of the classmates as agents for socialisation have a significant influence on the adolescent's adaptation to the school system.

Bonals (2007) emphasises the importance of the role of the teacher when encouraging interaction and cooperation between students in the classroom. However, in Spanish secondary education, this role has not significantly evolved towards socio-constructivist approaches. Teachers at this level cannot simply be

people who transmit knowledge. Aramendi and Vega (2011) state that the teacher profile encouraged in Compulsory Secondary Education is someone who is a specialist in the subject and who lacks the appropriate pedagogical training. Being a teacher in compulsory education requires «*educating*», in other words, responding to the right of all students to achieve a basic training to pursue their studies and integrate themselves into society. In this regard, Solís, Porlán, Rivero, and Martín (2012) state, starting from constructivist postulates, that the teaching method must take into account the diversity of learning styles, the conceptual starting point of the students, and the classroom atmosphere. It seems important to note aspects such as cooperation, participation, self-regulation of learning (Dignath & Buettner, 2008) and the socio-emotional and emotional elements (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011).

### 3. Method

This research aims to evaluate students' perceptions of the functioning of the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes (currently called Basic Professional Training) and compare them with their earlier experience of Compulsory Secondary Education. It is intended to analyse different aspects of the curriculum and educational organisation and focus.

The following specific objectives have been set for this research:

- Describing the characteristics of the students who participate in the study.

– Analysing the students' view of the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes with regards to their learning activities (*what they learn*) and comparing them with their earlier experience in Compulsory Secondary Education.

– Discovering how the students on the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes feel and have felt in the classroom and compare their perceptions with their experiences in Compulsory Secondary Education.

– Analysing the students' evaluation of the methodology and teaching processes that the teacher implements (*how the teacher teaches*) on Initial Professional Qualification Programmes and in Compulsory Secondary Education.

– Analysing how the students consulted like to learn and compare the scores obtained by gender.

### 3.1. Sample

According to the data from the Schools Council of the Basque Country (2014), in the Gipuzkoa area there are 89 Initial Professional Qualification Programme groups with a total of 1045 students. The study is performed as a census and so the questionnaire is sent to all the students of the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes in Gipuzkoa. A total of 773 completed questionnaires were received, a response rate of 73.97%.

The students consulted are aged 16 (37.1%), 17 (40%), 18 (21.4%) and 19 (1.5%). Their mean age is 16.8. Of the students consulted, 70% are male and 30% fe-

male. 81.4% speak Spanish at home, 17.1% speak Basque, and 1.5% speak another language. Of the students consulted, 4.3% had previously been late-joining students. That is to say, they joined the centre when the academic year had already started. The centre the students attend is public in 62.9% of cases and private in 37.1%. 31.8% of the students are of immigrant origin and 68.2% were born in the Basque Country. The parents' levels of study are low-intermediate (84.3%) and intermediate-high (15.7%). 30.9% of the students say that their parents are separated and 69.1% say that they live together. The average number of members of friendship groups is 12 people. They are generally large groups. Of these, an average of almost 5.4 friends has repeated a year.

### 3.2. Instruments

The questionnaire was prepared in the first phase of the study. To this end, a review of the literature related to the topic was performed (Biggs, 1993; Alonso, Gallego, & Honey, 1994 & 2012; Díez, 1999; Gimeno & Gallego, 2007; Martínez, 2007; Huber, 2008; Benarroch & Marín (2011); Aramendi & Vega, 2013). These authors, among others, have analysed the correspondence between the teachers' pedagogical practices and the students' learning styles. Martínez (2007) describes the teaching tasks implemented by the teachers and the students' learning styles. The author identifies four learning styles: active (tendency to activity), reflexive (impact on the depth and coherence of thoughts), theoretical (use of well-structured content), and pragmatic (prioritises practical activities). According

to Domenech (2012), in secondary education, each learning style of the students generally adapts to the teaching behaviours of the teachers.

After reviewing the literature, six exploratory interviews with teachers (three women and three men) from secondary education were performed to establish their views on the topic. To select the categories a mixed (inductive and deductive) process was used. A series of categories based on the literature review and on the researchers' experience (deductive procedure) was initially proposed and, the categories were subsequently adjusted in light of the information collected in the study (inductive procedure).

The pilot test was administered to 4 male students and 4 female students from two centres in Vizcaya that did not participate in this study. Students were selected according to their year and gender. The wording of 15 items was modified and various aspects of the instructions for the test were modified. This was validated by experts from the University of the Basque Country and professionals from the Department of Education who do research on this topic.

The final questionnaire contains 128 items. In them, the level of agreement is stated using a Likert scale (1: disagree completely; 4: agree completely).

The main research variables were grouped into the following areas:

- General details of the sample: age, sex, profession, and their parents' studies, friends, use of videogames, internet... (items 1 to 22).

- Learning in Compulsory Secondary Education and Initial Professional Qualification Programmes: respect for the rules for coexistence, relationship with others, usefulness of the subjects, conflict solving, healthy lifestyle... (items 23 to 40), giving a total of 18 variables (Likert scale), as this was consulted differently for Compulsory Secondary Education and the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes.

- How have you felt in Compulsory Secondary Education and Initial Professional Qualification Programmes: classroom atmosphere, help from the teacher, satisfaction... (item 41 to 56), giving a total of 16 variables (Likert scale), as this was consulted differently for Compulsory Secondary Education and the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes.

- How teachers teach on Compulsory Secondary Education and Initial Professional Qualification Programmes: problem-based learning, practical activities, participation in the classroom, reviews... (items 57 to 88), giving a total of 32 variables (Likert scale), as this was consulted differently for both levels.

- How you like to learn at school: comprising 39 items on a Likert scale, regarding learning in general, resolving situations and problems, managing information, and emotional aspects of learning (items 89-128).

The questionnaire's reliability is 0.886 (Cronbach's alpha). When the data collection was complete, intensive data analysis was undertaken using the following procedure (Lukas & Santiago, 2009):

- Data reduction: selecting the data, identifying the objectives of the analysis, establishing a system of categories, studying the system of categories and codification.

- Organising the compiled information.

- Analysis and interpretation of the results obtained.

The questionnaire was administered between the months of May and November of 2015. The test was administered by a coordinator of the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes teachers, following the guidance of a member of the research team who had been designated for this purpose. Informed consent was obtained from families in advance.

### 3.3. Procedure

The research design is essentially descriptive and comparative. The study process was carried out in various phases:

- Initial exploration phase: 6 interviews were initially carried out with teachers from the Initial Professional Qualification Programme to adapt the theoretical approaches to the reality of the life of the centres and draw up the questionnaire.

- Extensive phase: information was collected through a questionnaire administered to the students.

- Integrative and propositive phase: the information from the earlier phases was integrated and proposals for improving Professional Qualification Programmes and Compulsory Secondary Education were made.

The data from the quantitative part were processed using the SPSS 22.0 and

ITEMAN software packages, carrying out various statistical analyses (averages, standard deviations, percentages, analysis of variance of means –Kruskal-Wallis and the Mann-Whitney U test– and Pearson correlations).

There were some problems in the execution of the study. The coordination between the researchers and the teachers who administered the tests did not function appropriately, mainly when acquiring informed consent from the families. Also, the dates on which the questionnaire was administered were not the most appropriate taking into account the school calendar.

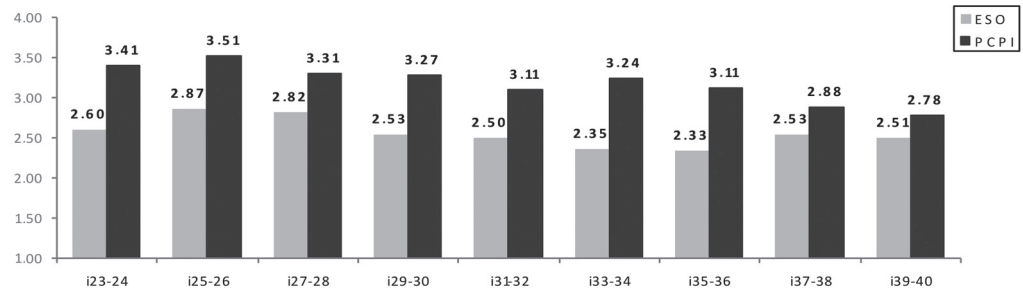
## 4. Results

The scores given by the students to the different items concerning their educational experience in Compulsory Secondary Education and Initial Professional Qualification Programmes are shown below. As can be seen, the average scores and the differences in means between the items regarding teaching and learning in both stages are listed. The differences between the values for Compulsory Secondary Education and the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes were analysed using the Wilcoxon test, a non-parametric test for related samples. This test was chosen because of the non-compliance with the normality hypothesis.

### What have you learnt in Initial Professional Qualification Programmes and Compulsory Secondary Education?

Students state that their learning experience has been very different in Compulsory Secondary Education and Initial Professional Qualification Programmes.

FIGURE 1. Learning in Initial Professional Qualification Programmes and Compulsory Secondary Education.



Source: Own elaboration.

TABLE 1. What have you learnt in Initial Professional Qualification Programmes and Compulsory Secondary Education?

| Item                                                     | Compulsory Secondary Education average | Initial Professional Qualification Programmes Average | Z       | Asymptot. sig. (two tail) |
|----------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------|
| 23-24. To respect the centre's rules for coexistence     | 2.60                                   | 3.41                                                  | -10.037 | 0.000                     |
| 25-26. To respect other classmates and teachers          | 2.87                                   | 3.51                                                  | -8.794  | 0.000                     |
| 27-28. How to relate to others appropriately             | 2.82                                   | 3.31                                                  | -7.904  | 0.000                     |
| 29-30. To know my rights and obligations as a citizen    | 2.53                                   | 3.27                                                  | -9.291  | 0.000                     |
| 31-32. Subjects that are useful for learning how to live | 2.50                                   | 3.11                                                  | -8.605  | 0.000                     |
| 33-34. How to feel comfortable with myself               | 2.35                                   | 3.24                                                  | -9.659  | 0.000                     |
| 35-36. How to resolve conflicts                          | 2.33                                   | 3.11                                                  | -10.285 | 0.000                     |
| 37-38. To respect nature and the environment             | 2.53                                   | 2.88                                                  | -5.820  | 0.000                     |
| 39-40. To live healthily, to take care of myself         | 2.51                                   | 2.78                                                  | -5.007  | 0.000                     |

Source: Own elaboration.

The average scores for the learning processes carried out in Initial Professional Qualification Programmes are higher than those for Compulsory Secondary Education. According to the students, they learn knowledge relating to respect-

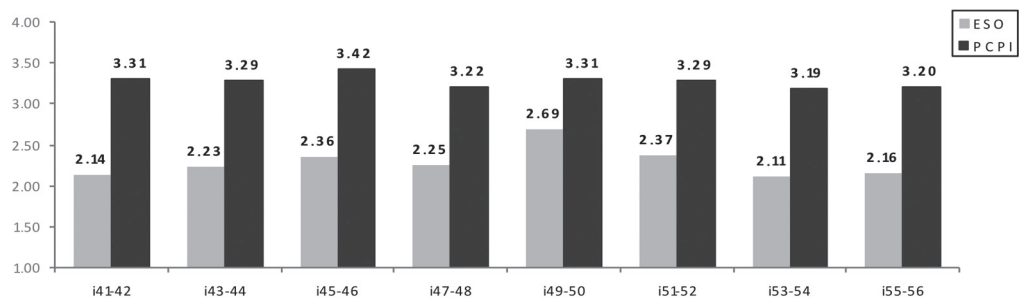
ing rules for coexistence, respecting classmates and teachers, relating with others, knowing their rights and obligations as a citizen, resolving conflicts, respecting nature and the environment, and taking care of themselves and healthy living.

They also believe that the subjects studied are useful in life and feel comfortable with themselves. The Wilcoxon test reveals statistically significant differences for all of the items proposed ( $\text{sig} < 0.05$ ) with consistently higher values in the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes.

How do you feel and how did you feel in the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes and Compulsory Secondary Education?

The scores indicate that the students have felt better during their period in Initial Professional Qualification Programmes than in Compulsory Secondary Education.

FIGURE 2. Satisfaction in Initial Professional Qualification Programmes and in Compulsory Secondary Education.



Source: Own elaboration.

TABLE 2. How do you feel and how did you feel in the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes and Compulsory Secondary Education?

| Item                                                                            | Compulsory Secondary Education average | Initial Professional Qualification Programmes Average | Z       | Asymptot. sig. (two tail) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------|---------|---------------------------|
| 41-42. The teachers make me feel comfortable and motivated                      | 2.14                                   | 3.31                                                  | -11.570 | 0.000                     |
| 43-44. The teachers encourage a good atmosphere in the work                     | 2.23                                   | 3.29                                                  | -11.458 | 0.000                     |
| 45-46. The teacher helps me and gives guidance to prepare for my future         | 2.36                                   | 3.42                                                  | -11.094 | 0.000                     |
| 47-48. The teachers are dedicated to teaching me things that are useful in life | 2.25                                   | 3.22                                                  | -10.936 | 0.000                     |
| 49-50. The teachers know how to teach                                           | 2.69                                   | 3.31                                                  | -8.206  | 0.000                     |

| Item                                             | Compulsory<br>Secondary<br>Education average | Initial Professional<br>Qualification<br>Programmes Average | Z       | Asymptot. sig.<br>(two tail) |
|--------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------------------------------|
| 51-52. The teachers have helped me to learn      | 2.37                                         | 3.29                                                        | -10.353 | 0.000                        |
| 53-54. I feel comfortable and motivated in class | 2.11                                         | 3.19                                                        | -10.589 | 0.000                        |
| 55-56. I feel like part of this centre           | 2.16                                         | 3.20                                                        | -10.890 | 0.000                        |

Source: Own elaboration.

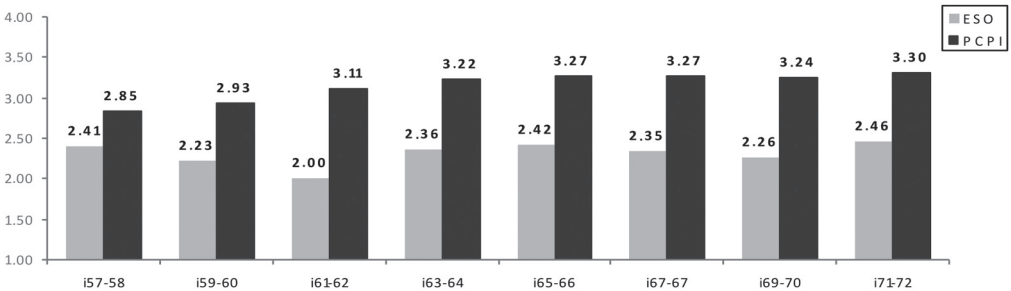
The average scores for students on Initial Professional Qualification Programmes are higher than those from students in Compulsory Secondary Education. Initial Professional Qualification Programme students say their teachers make them feel comfortable and motivated. The teachers encourage a good working atmosphere, help, and guide students to prepare for the future, teach knowledge that is useful for life, know how to teach, and encourage learning. Students are also comfortable in class and feel like part of the centre. The Wilcoxon test statisti-

cally shows statistically significant differences for all of the items ( $\text{sig} < 0.05$ ), with consistently higher values in the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes.

### How do Initial Professional Qualification Programme and Compulsory Secondary Education teachers teach?

The scores for the teaching style of the Initial Professional Qualification Programme teachers are higher for many items than those from Compulsory Secondary Education, according to the students' perceptions.

FIGURE 3. Teaching in Initial Professional Qualification Programmes and Compulsory Secondary Education.



Source: Own elaboration.

TABLE 3. How do Initial Professional Qualification Programmes and Compulsory Secondary Education teachers teach?

| Item                                                                       | Compulsory<br>Secondary<br>Education average | Initial Professional<br>Qualification<br>Programmes Average | Z       | Asymptot. sig.<br>(two tail) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|---------|------------------------------|
| 57-58. The activities carried out are creative (visits, original tasks...) | 2.41                                         | 2.85                                                        | -6.167  | 0.000                        |
| 59-60. We work in teams to create new ideas                                | 2.23                                         | 2.93                                                        | -8.728  | 0.000                        |
| 61-62. We improvise some ways of working, we do things freely              | 2.00                                         | 3.11                                                        | -11.619 | 0.000                        |
| 63-64. The teacher encourages us to improve our work                       | 2.36                                         | 3.22                                                        | -11.194 | 0.000                        |
| 65-66. We do a lot of practical exercises in class                         | 2.42                                         | 3.27                                                        | -9.516  | 0.000                        |
| 67-68. We work on useful ideas and techniques                              | 2.35                                         | 3.27                                                        | -10.934 | 0.000                        |
| 69-70. What we learn is related to everyday life                           | 2.26                                         | 3.24                                                        | -11.191 | 0.000                        |
| 71-72. The teacher tells us the purpose of what we learn                   | 2.46                                         | 3.30                                                        | -10.528 | 0.000                        |
| 73-74. We correct our exercises to find out if we did them correctly       | 3.14                                         | 3.48                                                        | -5.927  | 0.000                        |
| 75-76. We plan the task we are going to do in advance                      | 2.53                                         | 3.10                                                        | -7.981  | 0.000                        |
| 77-78. We analyse problems and case studies in detail                      | 2.40                                         | 3.11                                                        | -8.852  | 0.000                        |
| 79-80. The teacher makes us revise what we have learnt                     | 2.64                                         | 3.12                                                        | -7.118  | 0.000                        |
| 81-72. The students are silent in class                                    | 2.10                                         | 2.28                                                        | -1.981  | 0.048                        |
| 83-84. The teacher spends a lot of time explaining theoretical content     | 2.85                                         | 2.96                                                        | -1.505  | 0.132                        |
| 85-86. We spend a lot of time sitting down in class                        | 3.30                                         | 2.93                                                        | -4.324  | 0.000                        |
| 87-88. What we are taught in class is very theoretical                     | 3.13                                         | 2.96                                                        | -2.727  | 0.006                        |

Source: Own elaboration.

The scores for Initial Professional Qualification Programmes are higher than those for Compulsory Secondary Education for all items except one: «We spend a lot of time sitting down in class». Students state that in Initial Professional

Qualification Programmes the activities they carry out in the classroom are more creative, they work more in teams, they do activities with freedom, the teacher encourages them to improve their tasks, they do a lot of practical exercises in class, they

work on useful techniques and activities, what they learn relates to everyday life, the teacher tells them the purpose of what they have learnt, they correct the exercises so that they know whether they have been done correctly, they plan the task to be done in advance, they analyse problems and case studies in detail, they revise what they have learnt, the students are in silence in class and the teacher spends a lot of time explaining theoretical content. The Wilcoxon test shows statistically significant differences for all items ( $\text{sig} < 0.05$ ) except for «*The teacher spends a lot of time explaining theoretical content*».

### How do you like to learn in class?

In this section students' scores for learning strategies will be analysed and

compared by gender. To analyse the differences between the different items we will use non-parametric tests owing to the non-compliance with the normality hypothesis. The Mann-Whitney U test is used as it is a binary variable. There are statistically significant differences for various items. *Boys* score higher on items 92 (*I like to use technological machines and devices to learn*), 103 (*I like to analyse a news story and think about how to solve it*), and 119 (*I like to present work orally*). *Girls* score higher on items 110 (*I like reading books*), 111 (*I like to write texts on a computer*), 112 (*I like to underline what is important in a text*), 115 (*I like it when they ask my opinion in class*) and 118 (*I like to present written work*).

TABLE 4. How do you like to learn in class?

| Item                                                                                                                        | Average Boy | Average girl | Mann-Whitney U | Z      | Asymptot. sig. (two tail) |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------|----------------|--------|---------------------------|
| 89. I like to move around in class while I work, being free to move in class                                                | 3.26        | 3.18         | 9702           | -1.711 | 0.087                     |
| 90. I like to work on real things, from real life                                                                           | 3.51        | 3.62         | 10718          | -0.735 | 0.463                     |
| 91. I like to talk to my classmates while I work and communicate with them                                                  | 3.47        | 3.42         | 10780          | -0.628 | 0.530                     |
| 92. I like to use technological machines and devices (computers, appliances...) to learn                                    | 3.42        | 3.16         | 9026           | -2.827 | 0.005                     |
| 93. There are students who get almost everything wrong and so you have to help them and encourage them more than the others | 3.16        | 3.10         | 10526          | -0.359 | 0.720                     |

| Item                                                                                                    | Average<br>Boy | Average<br>girl | Mann-Whitney<br>U | Z      | Asymptot.<br>sig.<br>(two tail) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------|---------------------------------|
| 94. To learn better, we should know about things that happen in real life                               | 3.44           | 3.50            | 10504             | -1.030 | 0.303                           |
| 95. I like to know about problems that happen in the outside world                                      | 3.18           | 3.31            | 10140             | -1.175 | 0.240                           |
| 96. I like watching documentaries where they analyse things that happen in the world                    | 2.96           | 2.98            | 10900             | -0.272 | 0.785                           |
| 97. I like working in a team more than on my own                                                        | 3.21           | 3.06            | 10472             | -1.008 | 0.314                           |
| 98. When you work in a team, you have more freedom to speak, move around... than when you work alone    | 3.28           | 3.26            | 10820             | -0.399 | 0.690                           |
| 99. I prefer working too quickly to working too slowly                                                  | 2.66           | 2.48            | 9816              | -1.610 | 0.107                           |
| 100. I like helping classmates who do not understand something in class                                 | 3.26           | 3.34            | 10948             | -0.215 | 0.830                           |
| 101. I like to know about the news in the media                                                         | 2.49           | 2.61            | 9948              | -1.021 | 0.307                           |
| 102. The more you know in school, the more you know in life                                             | 2.65           | 2.82            | 9886              | -1.224 | 0.221                           |
| 103. I like to analyse a news story and think about how to solve it                                     | 2.65           | 2.40            | 9518              | -2.256 | 0.024                           |
| 104. I like to analyse why things happen                                                                | 2.84           | 2.74            | 10390             | -0.968 | 0.333                           |
| 105. I like to work out what might happen when I have a problem in the street, at home, with my friends | 2.98           | 2.94            | 10944             | -0.212 | 0.832                           |
| 106. I like doing summaries and outlines (in writing) of what I read                                    | 2.06           | 2.22            | 9934              | -1.699 | 0.089                           |
| 107. I like to classify my text files on the computer                                                   | 2.22           | 2.10            | 10212             | -0.915 | 0.360                           |
| 108. I like looking for information online                                                              | 3.01           | 2.98            | 10848             | -0.477 | 0.634                           |
| 109. I like reading comics, magazines                                                                   | 2.27           | 2.26            | 11184             | -0.021 | 0.983                           |

## The learning processes of students at risk of exclusion from education

| Item                                                                                  | Average<br>Boy | Average<br>girl | Mann-Whitney<br>U | Z      | Asymptot.<br>sig.<br>(two tail) |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------|---------------------------------|
| 110. I like reading books                                                             | 2.07           | 2.56            | 8270              | -3.807 | 0.000                           |
| 111. I like to write texts on a computer                                              | 2.09           | 2.46            | 9088              | -2.823 | 0.005                           |
| 112. I like to underline what is important in a text                                  | 2.43           | 2.76            | 9432              | -2.348 | 0.019                           |
| 113. I like to decide what I should do in class                                       | 2.71           | 2.68            | 10874             | -0.309 | 0.757                           |
| 114. I like to debate a topic in class                                                | 2.89           | 3.02            | 10326             | -1.052 | 0.293                           |
| 115. I like it when they ask my opinion in class                                      | 2.75           | 3.00            | 9252              | -2.113 | 0.035                           |
| 116. I like it when the teacher asks me questions                                     | 2.47           | 2.37            | 10260             | -0.840 | 0.401                           |
| 117. I like it when the teacher listens to me                                         | 3.25           | 3.26            | 10714             | -0.405 | 0.686                           |
| 118. I like to present written work                                                   | 2.67           | 3.02            | 9078              | -2.488 | 0.013                           |
| 119. I like to present work orally                                                    | 2.34           | 1.86            | 8378              | -3.453 | 0.001                           |
| 120. I like to get good marks in class                                                | 3.59           | 3.54            | 10612             | -0.895 | 0.371                           |
| 121. I would like to be one of the best students in class                             | 3.18           | 3.14            | 10684             | -0.711 | 0.477                           |
| 122. You learn more when there is more of a bond between teacher and student          | 3.25           | 3.42            | 10070             | -1.467 | 0.143                           |
| 123. You learn more and better when the teachers are warm, caring                     | 3.14           | 3.38            | 9962              | -1.592 | 0.111                           |
| 124. I like revising things                                                           | 2.60           | 2.62            | 10962             | -0.186 | 0.852                           |
| 125. I like to evaluate myself and don't like being evaluated by others               | 2.73           | 2.56            | 10136             | .1.296 | 0.195                           |
| 126. I like to be congratulated when I do things well                                 | 3.25           | 3.39            | 10312             | -0.818 | 0.413                           |
| 127. Humour is necessary for learning comfortably                                     | 3.47           | 3.50            | 10784             | -0.463 | 0.643                           |
| 128. Evaluation helps you to improve, the more you are evaluated the more you improve | 3.16           | 3.32            | 10470             | -0.880 | 0.379                           |

Source: Own elaboration.

## 5. Conclusions and discussion

In summary, the principal conclusions are collected below in accordance with the objectives raised in the research.

— Regarding the study's first objective (*Describe the characteristics of the students participating in the study*), students participating in the research have an average age of 16.8 years, most of them are boys, one third are of immigrant origin, and their parents have intermediate and basic level education.

— Regarding the second objective (*Analyse the students' perception of the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes regarding their learning activities – what they learn – and compare it with their previous experience in Compulsory Secondary Education*), students state that their experience in Compulsory Secondary Education and Initial Professional Qualification Programmes was very different. The average scores for what they have learnt on the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes are somewhat higher than for Compulsory Secondary Education. There are statistically significant differences for all of the items, with consistently higher values for the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes.

— Regarding the third objective (*Finding out how the students on the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes feel and have felt in the classroom and compare their perceptions with their experiences of Compulsory Secondary Education*), the students feel better in the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes than in Compulsory Secondary Education and,

also, feel comfortable with and motivated by the teachers. The Wilcoxon test displays statistically significant differences for all of the items, with consistently higher values in the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes.

— Regarding the fourth objective (*Analyse the students' evaluation of the teaching methodology and processes that the teacher uses – how the teacher teaches – on the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes and in Compulsory Secondary Education*), the students' evaluation of the teaching processes used by the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes teachers is more satisfactory than their experience with the Compulsory Secondary Education teachers.

— Regarding the fifth objective (*Analyse how the consulted students like to learn and compare the scores by sex*), statistically significant differences are detected in various items. Girls value reading, writing and the emotional aspects of learning more highly and boys solving case studies and problems and using technology to learn.

Some of the results of the research strongly attract our attention. The Initial Professional Qualification Programmes professionals manage to encourage enthusiasm and interest in work from the students who attend these centres. It seems strange that teachers who, mainly come from professional training, without having specific training in educational sciences, manage to awaken the interest in work and the satisfaction of students who have continuously failed in Compulsory Secondary Education. The importance of

dedication, personal support, and the encouragement of the affective and emotional aspects in the teaching and learning processes are of great relevance for students (Reschly, Huebner, Appleton, & Antaramian, 2008; Greenberg, et. al., 2010).

Evidently, the affective and emotional component in education must be accompanied by an appropriate design of the teaching and learning processes (Suazo, 2013). Students consulted in this study state that the teachers of the Initial Professional Qualification Programmes opt for developing teaching strategies that encourage team work, approaching case studies and solving practical problems related to situations from everyday life. When students can see the purpose, usefulness and practical validity of the knowledge they learn in class, their motivation and interest in learning increase considerably (Lee, Johanson, & Tsai, 2008).

The evaluation by the students taking part in the research require an in-depth reflection on the teaching and learning processes developed in Compulsory Secondary Education, especially, with regards to teacher training, the role of the teacher and the student's participation in the classroom (Santos Rego & Lorenzo, 2015). The limited impact of the master's degree in secondary education on the skills of the teachers in this stage is also worrying (Benarroch & Marín, 2011). It is quite surprising that the Initial Professional Qualification Programme teachers, are apparently, with limited pedagogical training, rather more highly rated by students than their counterparts in Compulsory Secondary Education. The causes of this phenomenon should be analysed in future studies.

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# The priority of method in pedagogical research

## *La prioridad del método en la investigación pedagógica*

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### Abstract

This article considers the importance of the method in educational research. The method is necessary for achieving the aims of research. We present methodological complementarity and complexity and the firm correspondence between them as principles of educational research since science and research are, without any question, primarily based on the method. The field of education is an area of reality that can be known in various ways and that requires a global approach that might not be limited to knowledge of education as this provides only a partial position. Depending on the type of educational problems under consideration, knowledge of education will be required and the form of knowledge that is most appropriate to the object of study will be applied as it corresponds to the proper use of methodological complementarity as a principle of pedagogical research. The text concludes with a reflection on our situation as educators and researchers.

**Keywords:** Research methodology, educational research, methodological pluralism, empirical research.

### Resumen

El artículo aborda la importancia del método en la investigación educativa. El método es necesario para llegar al fin de la investigación. Presentamos la complementariedad y complejidad metodológica y la correspondencia objetual como principios de investigación pedagógica. Porque la ciencia y la investigación descansan fundamentalmente y sin ningún género de discusión sobre el método. El campo educación es un ámbito de realidad susceptible de ser conocido de diversas formas y reclama una respuesta amplia que no puede ser restringida al conocimiento de la educación que proporcione una posición parcial. Según el tipo de problemas educativos que estemos planteando necesitaremos conocimiento de la educación y aplicaremos la forma de conocimiento más adecuada al objeto de estudio tal como corresponde al uso adecuado de la complementariedad metodológica como principio de investigación pedagógica. El texto termina con una reflexión en torno a nuestra situación de educadores y la investigación.

**Descriptores:** Metodología de investigación, investigación educativa, pluralismo metodológico, investigación empírica.

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# 1. Statement of the problem

The criteria for scientific rigour in pedagogical research have evolved from positions linked to positivist approaches, passing through the establishment of qualitative, philosophical, and hermeneutic criteria, to the current situation where these criteria are based on integration. This is primarily integration of methods, although there is an ongoing debate about epistemological questions.

The different positions relating to the production of scientific pedagogical knowledge are based on two basic questions that Eisner (1998) calls *ontological objectivity* and *procedural objectivity*. Ontological objectivity refers to the fact that people who do research into education wish to perceive, understand, and verify the reality that actually exists, eliminating subjectivist perceptions, beliefs, fantasy, ideology, or the researcher's desires. Procedural objectivity refers to a form of objectivity attained through «the development and use of a method that eliminates, or aspires to eliminate, the scope for personal judgment in the description and appraisal of a state of affairs» (p. 60). The author accepts and underlines that pristine objectivity and pure subjectivity are both impossible. In other words, the production of scientific knowledge in education must navigate between the Scylla of objectivity and the Charybdis of subjectivity, knowing that the former will never be absolute, and the latter will never be entirely pure.

If we pause to consider procedural objectivity in research through the development and use of the method, we find that it is true that the method is associated

with the development of scientific knowledge. Reflection on the method is a result of scientific progress, and this progress in methodological procedures leads to improved reliability of theories, thus revealing more truth about the world. And, «what the tool of method does not achieve must —and really can— be achieved by a discipline of questioning and inquiring that guarantees truth» (Gadamer, 2012, p. 585). This refers to the rigour of the rational dynamism that is common to the method. Consequently, the method must allow for the construction of ever more rigorous and profound knowledge of reality, as well as defining theories that allow no room for contradiction. To which we could add that it is important to overcome the worship of the method as ideological, political, and moral questions permeate its development (Orden & Mafokozi, 1999), an idea we will develop in the section on methodological scepticism. In other words, it is important to avoid the oppressive appeal of methodology as something that should be worshipped for having resolved all scientific problems. This is not the case (Khun, 1982).

The connecting thread that links all of this article describes how the scientific method is the result of a very particular attitude by the scientific researcher towards the object being examined. This attitude involves, among other things, objectivity as an aspiration, clarity, rigour, and honour as an imperative, impersonal curiosity, distrust of prevailing opinion and a sensitivity towards the new (Bunge, 2000).

Methodological procedures form something that has been called the «scientific method». They are one of the basic

elements that is built by specialised scientific research and can be applied to various areas of human activity. «The main overlap between the scientific method and the method in general is the existence of an ordered way of proceeding» (González, 1988, p. 54). At the same time, the method unites the possibilities of science and epistemological principles (Kaplan, 1964). The method is the path that makes it possible to meet our intended objectives, allowing us to proceed directly to the objective that is known in advance, as the archer aims at the target before letting the arrow fly. And all of this is carried out in pedagogical research.

Every year there are conferences, seminars, and other events where all types of claims are made about education. And yet how many of these questions have been examined using a precise methodology? Similarly, journals are published that specialise in education, theory of education, and pedagogy. How many articles set out the methodological rigour with which they have reached their conclusions?

Some basic principles are set out below regarding methodology that should be considered and must be used in pedagogical research with their corresponding arguments:

1. The power of pedagogical knowledge resides in the method.
2. The Fundamental Principle of Methodology: correspondence of the object to the methodology as a general methodological condition.
3. Methodological pluralism.
4. Methodological scepticism when examining the reality of education.

We start by noting that the method comes first in pedagogical research. In these pages, we intend to reflect on the importance of maintaining the correspondence between the object and methodology as a basic general condition and methodological complementarity as a principle of pedagogical research. This is because science is based on the method, and in science and research the method is almost everything: the method as a set of techniques or specific procedures used in a science; the method as epistemology or a theory of knowledge; the method as intellectual willingness, a way of thinking, a way of reacting, or a way of acting; as an attitude for separating what is a matter of opinion from what is true, establishing itself in thoughts without prejudice and are open to control and self-control of findings in the sciences; the method as description, explanation, and justification for methods in general, and more particularly, for the scientific method, understood as a general research procedure in the field of science (Kaplan, 1964).

## 2. The power of pedagogical knowledge derives from the method

When speaking about the method, we refer to a way of asking questions and suggesting answers. The scientific method fulfils this role as it enables us to clarify the sense and meaning of a theory, allowing a greater and more profound knowledge of reality. As Zubiri notes (1983), when we ask ourselves about theory, we should ask ourselves about reality. By so doing we avoid making the error of reducing science to our own thinking, to mere subjective appreciation, and we embrace

what characterises scientific knowledge: objectivity. We also prevent any one science —biology, physics, mathematics— from being able to or attempting to monopolise the scientific method. This can include other sciences, such as social and human sciences.

There is no doubt that the method was of crucial importance for establishing the scientific mentality in the Modern Age. Over time, the method has become the backbone of science. One of the major concerns of the period of the Scientific Revolution from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries onwards was the question of the method. The literature on this topic reflects the conscience of the new era, when it was believed that the solid principles and procedures that typified the method were more important for the advancement of knowledge than intuition and the intellect.

According to Cohen (1989), «the seventeenth-century treatises generally start with a discussion about method or conclude with a methodological declaration» (p. 140). Even, a work such as Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* (1637) was written and published as an introduction to three scientific works. The same can be said of Newton's piece on methodology, the «*General Scholium*» (1713), in which the nature of explication and role of the hypothesis are analysed.

The method-based critique of knowledge and wisdom using the criterion of authority was to be the starting point of modern thought. This is the era of the rise of empirical research into nature. As Cohen observes (1989), «in previous eras

knowledge was sanctioned by the schools, the councils, the wise men, and the authority of the saints, revelation, and Holy Scripture; in contrast, in the seventeenth century it was argued that science was based on empirical foundations» (p. 140). By using the method, anyone who understood the art of performing experiments —formulating hypotheses, explaining them— could test scientific truths. The method appeared as the factor that introduced a basic difference between this new science and traditional knowledge. With the scientific method, knowledge was no longer the preserve of the guru, shaman, or visionary of the moment.

In addition, the method was easy to learn and made it possible to perform experiments, make discoveries, or find new truths, something that introduced a fundamental difference between the new science and traditional knowledge. Furthermore, for Cohen, it was one of the most powerful democratising forces in the history of civilisation: «discovering the truth had ceased to be a grace conceded to a few men and women with singular spiritual or mental gifts» (Cohen, 1989, p. 140). Descartes himself (1993) in the introduction to his method stated: «I have never presumed that my mind was in any respect more perfect than anyone else's» (p. 41). Therefore, no aspect of science has been as revolutionary as the method and its consequences. In science, the method is almost everything; without the method there is no science. And so we want it to be our companion in the field of scientific pedagogical research.

Science is fundamentally, and without any question, based on the method. The

method assures us of the validity and reliability of the conclusions of scientific and pedagogical research because the method is what gives science efficacy and security to meet the aim that is the characteristic and the desire of all people of science. The method is, in general, the path that thought follows to acquire the truth. By seeking to reach the truth using the method, we must simply follow its need to adapt itself to the conditions under which the truth is made available to us, and when this is not just any truth, but *scientific* truth, the method must be adapted to the conditions that make science possible and real.

In the case of empirical educational research, we, as thinkers about phenomena in the field of education (Bueno, 1995), wish to attain a theoretical knowledge that is suitable for understanding and governing the field of education. This is something we currently lack. This is undoubtedly because of the complexity of precisely defining education as an object of knowledge and the difficulties that are intrinsic and extrinsic to it. As Touriñán and Sáez Alonso state (2015),

Developing a conceptual representation of education that explains educational events and elaborates appropriate intervention strategies for producing changes in educational status requires us to act guided by some special conditions that the *methodology* must justify in the disciplinary field of competence. The form of researching is inscribed in the specific setting of each science. The theory dictates in each science how research must be done. (Touriñán & Sáez Alonso, 2015, p. XVIII).

And research must be linked to a theory, in such a way that the theory is a phase in it. As the sciences advance and mature, they tend to take an ever-greater interest in theory, and, from a certain perspective, the level of development of most sciences can be inferred from the extent to which they take an interest in theory.

What is stated above leads us to believe that science has had great success in developing theories. These evolve, changing over time, and making possible an ongoing progress of knowledge about the functioning of the world, in our case the world of education. This means that it is important to demarcate the object and the method of the theory of education as an area of knowledge to create pedagogical knowledge using the current scientific method. The methodological question has an important role in the changes that it is hoped to experience in the theory of education.

The field of knowledge, education, is the «object intellectual concern that with functional autonomy creates its own concepts and proofs» (Touriñán, 2016, p. 18). Similarly, we know that the field of education is surprisingly short of simple explanations. And, despite this, educators «must build their own *education* principles and theories that apply to humans (...) and they must seek to construct principles and theories that have wide-ranging power and relevance to educational events» (Novak, 1998).

Education is a field that can be known in various ways, obtaining valid knowledge to explain, understand, and transform the conditions of things, events, and educational actions, and to create principles

for educational and pedagogical intervention. This is the purpose of pedagogical research. Any form of research with education as the area of reality that can be known must present its method. Philosophical, psychological, and sociological theories, practical theories, and applied research are currently used to acquire knowledge of education. Each branch has a specific ability to solve educational problems. But the methodology used must be stated. We sometimes encounter very strong conclusive statements on education and the question that arises is: what methodology was used to reach this conclusion?

We are aware of the difficulties of knowledge and the tendencies towards error and illusion that affect scientific human knowledge (Bunge, 2000; Echeverría, 1999; Lakatos, 1974; Morin, 2014). We are familiar with the permanent risks of error and illusion that continuously plague the researcher (Popper, 1980; Feyerabend, 1981; Khun, 1982). Therefore, it is necessary to introduce and develop an appropriate methodology for each case. As Morin states (2015):

There is a major and always unknown problem: namely promoting a knowledge that can comprehend fundamental global problems and inscribe partial local knowledges in them.

The dominance of a knowledge that is fragmented along disciplinary lines often makes it impossible to operationalise the connection between the parts and the whole and it must surrender its place to a form of knowledge that can grasp its objectives in their contexts, in their complexities, in their groupings.

It is necessary to teach *methods* (the emphasis is ours) that make it possible to capture the mutual relationship and influence between the parts and the whole in a complex world. (Morin, 2015, p. 77).

The sciences have enabled us to acquire many certainties, and during the twentieth century also revealed innumerable areas of uncertainty or error to us (Degos, 2013). By recognising errors, we can overcome them. Even so, error is inseparable from human knowledge. The risk of error is inherent to knowledge. Therefore, the theory of education, which is not a doctrine, a mantra or a dogma, enables us to refute, analyse, explain, interpret, and discover the elements of new knowledge by and with empirical research.

If these arguments are correct, we choose to research political decisions or educational decisions and the field-object of education in general and demand all types of study, using the forms of knowledge that are most appropriate, so that we can describe, explain, understand, interpret, and transform education to create specific concepts with meaning that is intrinsic to the field of education. We start to do this by developing the principle of correspondence between the object and the methodology as a general methodological condition.

### 3. The Fundamental Principle of Methodology: Correspondence between the object and the methodology as a general methodological condition

Education has research methods. Here we are interested in showing the potential

of the research method as a fundamental component for meeting education's theoretical, technological, and practical problems from Pedagogy.

To do this we rely on the fundamental principle of methodology. González Álvarez states (1947, p. 10): «Every science, as the human product that it is, relies on two basic factors: *the object* which it is about and *the subject* that elaborates it. This implies a fundamental truth: the method of a discipline must be coherent with the noetic structure of the object that it investigates and adapted to the cognitive contexture of the subject that receives it».

This definition provides support for the method being a guide to the study of reality, of actuality, of the empirical, of empirical research, of philosophical research, of the perspectives and possibilities we wish to know about and the type of question posed. In other words, the correspondence of the object to the methodology is the general methodological condition for all research.

The basic principle of methodology affirms that the method depends on the object or the aspect of reality that we wish to know, whether this be in the field of educational research, the subjectivity of the agent and what is understood by educational truth, specific educational judgment, education as action, or education as an object of analysis and research. This means that not just any method can be use in any piece of empirical or philosophical research.

If this is the case, we can, on the one hand, confirm that not every method is suitable for all research and, on the other,

the need to adapt to the conditions under which the (educational) truth is offered to us. This was noted by Colbert (1969) for whom the correspondence of the object to the methodology must be a methodological condition that is present in every methodological action, as between method, subject, and object, a dependence relationship is established: «The method depends on the object or on the aspect of reality that we wish to know, in other words, the method cannot be formulated before appreciating the study of the object, because a method described 'a priori' will often be inadequate for the object. And neither can we go far in the study of the object without acquiring a method, because this study will proceed in a disorganized manner» (Colbert, 1969, p. 667).

In other words, we can state that the more precise our knowledge of the object we wish to know, the better we can define the appropriate method for studying it. And this is true for both empirical research and philosophical research. Therefore, the better we know the noetic type of the corresponding science, the more easily a methodology can be developed. The inverse is also apparent: where the knowledge of the structure of a science is still not perfect, the methodology will proceed by fumbling and more or less successful approximations, seeking out the method with which it is definitively established (González Álvarez, 1947).

Therefore, there is neither priority nor parity between the philosophy of education and empirical educational research, for example, but instead analysis of the method used in both fields of knowledge will guide us in affirming whether the method

used is coherent with the noetic structure of the object of research and whether it is adapted to the cognitive contexture of the subject that receives it. This methodological guide will confirm whether the results of the research, rather than the research, are acceptable or should be rejected.

We sometimes read articles with arguments that are antagonistic to empirical research in pedagogy. What does this line of thinking have against empirical scientific educational research? Does empirical statistical scientific educational research not have a thinking that is discursive, argumentative, and committed to education? We are educators who are aware of what empirical scientific educational research, among other sciences, offers us. And we operate as such, with these areas of knowledge.

We can state, without any doubt, that scientific methods are indispensable for attaining knowledge of reality, understood even in the essential sense as a path for seeking and acquiring the truth. So, we can recall Spinoza (1971), for whom the method is the way of following a path that will lead us to this destination we long to reach: the Truth.

The fundamental principle of methodology therefore requires all pedagogical research to advance by accepting the correspondence of the object to the methodology as a fundamental condition of methodology, in other words, the method must be suited to the objects that it investigates. As is stated above, the method depends on the object or the aspect of reality that we wish to know. We are methodologically obliged by the principle of correspondence

between the object and the methodology to advance in the theoretical development of the object of research, to focus pedagogical research on the object *education*.

It should even be supposed that there are as many methods as there are ways of thinking and acting, but the fundamental principle of methodology does not lead to this conclusion. Instead, a consequence is derived from this principle that today defines the methodology of scientific and, therefore, pedagogical research: methodological pluralism, the pluralism of methods in science. The new position in science is to accept a pluralism of methods, as we describe below.

#### 4. Methodological pluralism

From what was stated in the previous point about the methodological principle of correspondence between the object and the methodology, we now direct our attention to pedagogical research on the object of knowledge —education— and we deduce that methodological complementarity is also a principle of pedagogical research. It is a principle that is adapted to functional autonomy, to disciplinary dependence and, also, to the complexity of the object of knowledge *education* (Touriñán, 2015). Education should be researched with methods of action and methods of thought and reflection. The two are interrelated, as the action performed will be inspire new reflections and thought has a profound influence on action. Similarly, we can add general methods (phenomenological, semiotic, axiomatic, or reductive methods) and particular methods (Bochenski, 1981).

Education as a field of reality can be known in various ways, for example, through speculative, systematic, and positive philosophy, among others (Ferraris, 2013, p. 179). Each of these ways is applied to obtaining the best possible knowledge of education. This reminds us of Dewey's statement that «all of the methods and all of the facts or principles of any matter that make it possible to address the problems of education and instruction in a better way are relevant to it» (Dewey, 1929, pp. 51-52).

Research, in any area of the human sciences, has become not only a theoretical aspiration but a practical need, performed by professionals who practise educational methods with focuses that are supported by scientific results based on research. Therefore, the community of people who work in the field of education, in any area of it, aims to produce a corpus of reliable research that not only seeks to prove things to which the researchers are already committed, but also uses research to refine and develop beyond educational theory and practice.

Science has been described as the systematic process of creating and testing theories, in which these theories are evaluated (Böhm & Schiefelbein, 2004). Many scientists deny that there is a clear scientific method in the processes of science, claiming instead that what scientists really work with is an approach to science, in other words, they work with a critical attitude towards the findings of their work and maintain an expectation and perspective about their scientific explanations as though they were only tentative stages in a never-ending process of successive ap-

proximations. However, research always creates theories, tests hypotheses, formulates laws and models discovered in the empirical findings, discovers mathematical relationships between variables, and clarifies scientific concepts, and the explanatory power of the hypotheses that are under consideration. Scientists evaluate the consistency of laws and examine arguments in depth. Conceptual analysis increases the conceptual clarity of a theory. This is all thanks to the methodological pluralism employed.

The methods used in the scientific process are based on key principles of brevity, consideration of plausible and alternative hypotheses, replication, and care and precision in thought. The method in a process such as this includes various principles, procedures, practices, and techniques related to the behaviour under investigation.

If arguments about, or more accurately understanding of, the conceptual debates of one science over another persist and are not based on correspondence of the object to the methodology and methodological pluralism in pedagogical research, we can end up building walls that are more like fundamentalist bastions than pillars supporting the opening that always accompanies research methodology. Therefore, from these walls the method makes it possible to advise educators that the data their empirical studies provide must be interpreted in light of the methodology used. This gives them certainty and significance for educating.

Nowadays we have well-founded works that explain the difference between

knowing, teaching, and educating, between educational design and instructional design, teaching function and educating function, accepting that in their full sense the laws of education establish and are defined by educational objectives, not just teaching objectives (we speak of primary, secondary, professional education, not just primary, etc. teaching). Following the same line of thinking, the philosophy of education cannot be confused with theory of education, and the truth is that there is much interest in conflating the philosophical sense of education with the pedagogical sense that establishes features typical to all education because they are inherent to its meaning. People who are dedicated to the theoretical study of education feel no anxiety when using research methods to understand the educational problems of the moment. On the contrary, empirical scientific data do not give them absolute certainties about what it means to educate, but rather a critical clarification of educational questions for the humanising development of people.

The theory of education has contributed to the development of the field of pedagogy, teaching, social education. And it must continue to do so, creatively adapting itself to the spirit of the present times. This means that research must be done that allows it to take its place in the list of focuses that are empirically, scientifically, and robustly validated, providing a new respect for this area of knowledge.

Perhaps the time has come for a new generation of specialists dedicated to the field of educational research in the area of knowledge of theory of education so that this perspective is not left behind by other

sciences where support for research is increasing. Doctors operate on humanists and liberals, socialists, democrats, and republicans, and education must similarly prepare its educationalists so that students can learn to decide, empowering them to choose *THEIR* meaning of life. This is the key to the ability to resolve problems that correspond to the significance of knowledge about education.

Consequently, we repeat and rely on what we have stated in these pages. The method is the path that science follows, «The method is the manner of proceeding in any field, that is of organizing activity and of coordinating its objectives» (Bochenski, 1981, p. 28). The method is a path, a means that is related to and refers to the objective. Science rests fully on the method. In science, the method is almost everything. Without method, there is neither science nor research. As Gaviria states (2015): «Therefore science is incontrovertibly based on the method. The method allows us to be sure that auxiliary assumptions are acceptable in a given context and, therefore, the research conclusions are valid. In science, the method is almost everything. Without method, there is no science. Statistical inference is no more than a form of causal inference for a given type of phenomenon, but it is not an alternative to science as such» (Gaviria, 2015, p. 502).

The method is required to attain this objective, but it lacks meaning in itself. It is not self-contained. The method's reason of being is not within itself. It is a way of channelling processes of thought and action. As we stated above, proceeding in an orderly and coherent way, establishing

the objective to be pursued in advance, or acting and passing through a set of stages established in a process are all inherent to the method.

Therefore, in philosophical, scientific, and pedagogical research, the method is valid insofar as it is useful and helps to achieve the proposed objective. The method is directed towards achieving this objective. The objective is, therefore, the limit sought for the method with which it should not be confused. Nonetheless, it can be the case that the objective is never attained absolutely, and then we should speak of successive ever more refined attempts to achieve it. In this sense, there are a series of partial realisations of the objective.

In accordance with what is set out above, we note that we sometimes speak of the scientific method in singular and other times about scientific methods in the plural. In our concept of the methodology of science, and in the field of pedagogy, there must be room for a plurality of methods in science for research into and knowledge of educational reality.

Speaking of methodological pluralism in a science, in this case pedagogy, means accepting that the realities that the science in question considers can be approached from different angles or perspectives for carrying out research in the field of education. This pluralism originates in the complex nature of the field of study, in the type of questions or problems raised when researching it, and the various concepts on which the methods are based and justified (M.E.C., 1989; Touriñán & Sáez Alonso, 2015).

Allowing for methodological pluralism means accepting that the realities of the object of study can be approached by different methods that are, to some extent, independent. A plurality of methods is not incompatible with the existence of certain constants that appear in all scientific methods (Popper, 1980).

Listing the methods mentioned –and others that can be added in accordance with the temporal dimension or of the form of research– does not mean settling into separate compartments; there is usually an overlap between some methods and others. In other words, it is hard for us to talk of pure methods (Bunge, 2012; Chalmers, 2000; Gómez Rodríguez, 2003).

In conclusion, adopting this position means distancing ourselves from reductionism, for example, the reductionism of naïve inductivism or logical positivism, that identified physical science as the model of knowledge, applying a methodological monism to all of the sciences (Monserrat, 1992; Blanco, 2001; Kimberly, 2014). Each type of knowledge of the complexity of the object *education* not only has its own forms of proof regarding the truth and validity of its propositions, but they make reality the principle of correspondence of the object to the methodology as a methodological condition and the principle of methodological complementarity as a principle of pedagogical research. Each method is valid for resolving a particular type of problem, and all of them contribute to achieving the best evidence and basis for what we state.

Finally, to protect us from any type of exclusionary dogmatism, in the next

point we will reflect on the need to adopt a certain methodological scepticism when performing empirical research in the field of education.

## 5. Methodological scepticism when researching the reality of education

The principles of pedagogical research methodology are also defended from methodological scepticism for researching the reality of education.

How much, therefore, would adopting and practicing Descartes' famous method of doubt help us to develop scientific clarity, rigour, and honour? This comprises the four precepts that must govern his method and that appear in his *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and for Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, written in 1636 and published in 1637, and which Bunge describes thus: «It is an initial mistrust with regards to extraordinary perceptions, information, and thought. This does not mean that sceptics close their minds to strange events, but that, before admitting that such events are real, they wish to monitor them through new experiences or arguments» (Bunge, 2010, p. 101).

Sceptics do not naively accept the first thing they perceive or think. They are not credulous, but neither are they neophobes; they are merely critical. Before believing, they want to see proof. And, as stated above, the methods specific to the acquisition of knowledge are an essential component of each science. The major scientific advances have gone hand in hand with major changes and advances in methodology. In other words, there is a positive correlation between science and method.

The method of doubt is the nucleus of methodological scepticism (Descartes, 1993). My doubt does not concern the possibility of knowing educational reality, but rather it includes many educational statements and suggestions. Mine is a *methodological* or scientific scepticism, based on methodic but not systematic doubt. As Bunge so astutely puts it: «Methodological scepticism is both a methodological position and a practical and moral one. In effect, those who adopt it believe that it is foolish, imprudent, and morally erroneous to affirm, practice, or advocate important ideas that have not been tested or, worse still, that have conclusively proven to be totally false, inefficient, or harmful» (Bunge, 2010, p. 103).

Sceptics of this sort (methodological sceptics) are not credulous, but nor do they question all arguments at the same time. They believe what has been proven or has been shown to have a strong empirical support, but they mistrust anything that clashes with logic or with the bulk of scientific knowledge and its underlying philosophical hypotheses. For Bunge:

Theirs is a nuanced scepticism, not an indiscriminate one. Methodological sceptics uphold numerous principles and, above all, trust that humans will progress further in knowledge of reality. Their faith is critical, not blind; it is the faith of the explorer, not that of the believer. In the absence of relevant proof, they do not believe anything, but they are willing to explore new and audacious ideas if they find grounds to suspect that they have some possibility (...). They are open-minded people, not empty-minded people; and they are quick to filter out intellectual rubbish. (Bunge, 2010, p. 128).

This is what adopting the famous method of doubt of Descartes and methodological scepticism means. It does not mean doubting the possibility of knowledge and research. In contrast, it trusts in these. It doubts claims, principles, and content regarding things that are not verifiable.

To clarify concepts, we should note that the method of doubt is the nucleus of *methodological scepticism*. And we must distinguish between this class of scepticism and *systematic scepticism*. The systematic sceptic denies the possibility of knowing and the possibility of any knowledge, supposing, therefore, that the truth is inaccessible and the search for it is in vain.

Bunge goes on to say that sceptics of both types «critique naivety and dogmatism, but while methodological scepticism encourages research, systematic scepticism is an obstacle to research and, so, leads to the same results as dogmatism» (Bunge, 2010, p. 102).

### 6. Final considerations: Each method is valid for resolving a particular type of problem

We have provided a conceptual approach to the priority of the method for investigating the reality of education where education is an area of reality that involves knowledge and action. Once the methodological principle of correspondence between the object and the methodology has been established, the explanation, understanding, description, interpretation, and transformation of the states of things, events, and educational actions can be understood better.

As education is an area of reality that can be known and an activity that is performed through the educational relationship, methods of thought and methods of action are both applicable to it.

This dual condition shapes the complexity of the «education» object for pedagogical knowledge that always derives from study of the theory-practice relationship. And each form of knowledge has its peculiarities, its own forms of proof regarding the truth and validity of its propositions according to their methodological level. Each method is valid for solving a particular type of problem and, depending on which problem it is, we use one or another; all of them contribute to achieving the best evidence and basis for what we state.

The method offers us guidelines derived from the methodological conditions for opening, prescriptiveness, correspondence of the object to the methodology, and methodological pluralism that meet the needs of pedagogical research. The object «education» therefore requires all types of studies to improve and increase the use, construction, and development of the «education» area of reality that is the objective and goal of the pedagogical endeavour.

The current epistemological pluralism described and specified in the paradigms leads to a methodological pluralism where complementarity and synergy are the most productive pathway for research into educational realities. There is not one reason for disregarding empirical educational research.

We know that the reality of education is not simple, neither as reality, nor

as practice, nor as theory. We therefore maintain that it must be approached from the complexity of the human being and of all of the elements that comprise it: people, intelligence, emotions, and values, elements that cannot be considered in isolation or in sealed compartments, but instead as an overall integrated structure.

Therefore, the pluralism of paradigms, methods and techniques specified in empirical research prevent us from adopting the simplistic position of affirming that one paradigm, one method, or one technique are valid for researching all of the field of education or should be a priority. As we have maintained throughout these pages, no discipline is prioritised over any other. This is not the correct approach.

No paradigm can fully explain educational reality. It is insufficient, even though it has its necessary weight and role, and these need to be present. It is insufficient, as each piece of research studies a particular reality, education, but they do not see the same things, or, more accurately, they do not see them in the same way. This places us before the indispensable task of going into greater depth in the methodological description of each research situation, of a powerful and comprehensive conceptual framework of reference that is empirically based, sufficiently complex and, at the same time, sufficiently flexible and objective, from which the areas of education can be reflected on and researched as a limited and partial approximation to the real.

Performing scientific educational research that explains educational events, compels us to act in accordance with some

particular conditions according to the fields of study that methodology must justify. The methods are what allow us to be sure of the validity and reliability of research conclusions, opening up a range of possibilities to us. The opposite gives messages that are gloomy, dangerous, and dark, about the empirical disciplines in educational research. If this happens, it is usually the result of the misuse of the tools, of the methods.

We are educators. All research is necessary and helps us to function as educators. And the more the measurement in one piece research is refined, the more the others will be illuminated. We use research to develop and refine educational theory and practice. All of this is incontrovertibly based on the method, the procedure or set of procedures that are a tool for achieving the objectives of the research.

Empirical educational research is, therefore, a great educational ally; it has a specific importance for approaching and understanding the phenomenon of education. And we know that it will not attribute dogmatic certainties to pedagogy; its role will depend on the methodology and the methods on which it is based. Its presence offers a new stronghold from which to create pedagogical knowledge.

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# Single-sex schooling and coeducation: the continuation of the debate and the defence of science

## *Educación diferenciada y coeducación: continuar el debate y proteger la ciencia*

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### Abstract

In the context of the current debate regarding the best school setting (single-sex schooling v. coeducation) several advocates of coeducation have published emblematic papers that implicitly suggest that the debate should be considered as finished and that further research regarding this topic is not needed. This essay aims to refute the combined arguments of those articles using methodological and empirical facts, and show that the debate about this question and research into it should not be seen as complete, but instead should be promoted. At the same time, the essay identifies certain features in the aforementioned articles that present a risk of distorting science by moving towards arguments of an ideological nature, and it underlines the problem this represents for the debate itself and for science in general. The article does not seek to defend single-sex education, only the need for further research into it.

**Keywords:** Coeducation, single-sex schooling, educational research, outcomes of education, school organization.

### Resumen

En el contexto del debate actual sobre la superioridad de un modo de agrupación escolar frente a otro (educación diferenciada vs. coeducación) han aparecido algunos artículos científicos emblemáticos, de parte de defensores de la educación mixta, que implícitamente han llevado a proponer que la discusión debería ser cerrada, y la investigación al respecto, concluida. El presente trabajo busca rebatir la argumentación conjunta de dichos artículos desde consideraciones metodológicas y empíricas, y demostrar que el debate y la investigación no deben darse por concluidos sino, al contrario, impulsarse. Al mismo tiempo, el ensayo identifica ciertas características en los artículos mencionados que conllevan el riesgo de desnaturalizar la ciencia al acercarla a argumentos de carácter ideológico, destacando el problema que esto representa para el debate mismo y para la ciencia en general. El artículo no busca defender la educación diferenciada; únicamente, la necesidad de más investigación al respecto.

**Descriptores:** Coeducación, educación diferenciada, investigación educativa, resultados educativos, organización escolar

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In recent decades the debate over whether single sex schooling or co-education is superior has gained momentum in the field of education.<sup>1</sup> This debate has spilled over from the areas concerning those involved in the world of education and has entered the public arena (Aréchaga, 2013; Rodríguez-Borlado, 2011), becoming highly polarised (Bigler, Hayes, & Liben, 2014). This is worrying as it is common for arguments that are ideological and subject to a number of strong opinions to reach the general public before scientific evidence does (Riordan, 2011). With regards to the topic that concerns us here, the likelihood of this happening is greater, not just because the debate is still shaped very little by science and rather more by political, religious, and other types of opinion (Mael, Alonso, Gibson, Rogers, & Smith, 2005), but also because even the academic research that does examine it has started to take on characteristics more closely linked to ideology than science, as we will see below.

In this context, the debate has seen the appearance of four academic articles that have tried to become something of a milestone that marks the proximity of its endpoint. I refer to the following ones (in order of appearance):

– The article published by Diane Halpern and her colleagues (Halpern *et al.*, 2011) called “The Pseudoscience of Single-Sex Schooling”. After a very brief literature review, the authors conclude that single-sex schooling has not been able to demonstrate positive educational effects. This text is significant as it appeared in *Science*, one of the world’s most important journals,

and because it is written by the founders and directors of the American Council for CoEducational Schooling, a non-profit organisation from the USA that supports coeducation.

– The study by Margaret Signorella and her colleagues (Signorella, Hayes, & Li, 2013), that reproduces the influential systematic review by Mael *et al.* (2005) –which concluded that there is a small advantage to single-sex schools based on a vote-counting method.<sup>2</sup> The Signorella *et al.* study not only uncovers grave errors in the Mael *et al.* investigation but also shows by using a meta-analysis that it is possible to find different results.<sup>3</sup>

– The meta-analysis by Erin Pahlke and her colleagues (Pahlke, Hyde, & Allison, 2014), that after processing information from 184 studies from all around the world, covering over 1.6 million students, concludes that single-sex schooling is shown to have “little or no advantage” over coeducation (Pahlke *et al.*, 2014, p. 1065).

– The meticulous essay by Rebecca Bigler and her colleagues (Bigler *et al.*, 2014), who review almost all of the arguments, scientific and otherwise, put forward by supporters of single-sex schooling and disprove them one by one using the empirical and theoretical evidence currently available.

Some specialists have started to interpret the appearance of these works as the end of the debate (see Trahtemberg, 2014). It is reasonable to suppose that if this is the impression of specialists, the reaction of the general public might be less ordered. This is worrying when we consider

that there are those of us who do not think that the articles mentioned are enough to signal the end of the debate; indeed, they make clear the need for more research.

The aim of this article is to demonstrate that the debate about and research into the advantages of one type of grouping over the other should not be regarded as closed, and that the reasons put forward in these works are not sufficient to put an end to the debate and research into this area. To do so, I will review what I consider the two main ideas that can be drawn from reading these articles together, and I will attempt to refute them using methodological and empirical reflections. By doing this, it will become clear that certain types of argument in some of the statements are a looming threat to the scientific world, against which I also intend to sound an alarm.

## 1. "Single-sex schooling has not been able to prove its advantage"

It is true that single-sex schooling has not been able to prove conclusively its potential advantage over coeducation (Mael *et al.*, 2005; Pahlke *et al.*, 2014; Riordan, 2011). However, the fact that it has not *yet* done so does not mean that it does not have such an advantage; it simply means that it has not been possible to demonstrate it at the present time. There are several reasons for this.

One of these reasons —indeed one of the main criticisms made of single-sex schooling— has to do with the lack of rationales to explain its supposed effectivity (Bigler *et al.*, 2014; Signorella *et al.*, 2013). Nonetheless, it is only partly true

that single-sex schooling lacks theoretical rationales; these do exist. As far back as 1994 Cornelius Riordan —one of the scholars who has examined this topic in most depth— proposed 8 sociological arguments to explain the advantage of single-sex schooling in certain contexts (Riordan, 1994a), a list that he would later increase to 12 (Riordan, 1998). Based on his work and the available evidence, he now proposes a list of 10 (Riordan, 2015). The ideas proposed by some regarding differing teaching strategies applied in the classroom, in other words, the teacher's work in this area, can also be seen as arguments to explain its possible advantage (James, 2014; Sax, 2014). In particular, I think that the teacher's efforts, strategies, style, and personality, might be important moderator variables in research work on this topic, and they have been neglected in the literature (Bedoya, 2006; Camps Bansell, 2015; Camps Bansell & Vidal Rodá, 2015; McNamara & Jolly, 1994).

As to the author of this paper, taking into account specific findings such as the higher level of disruptive behaviour in co-educational classrooms (Gordillo, 2013), or rationales regarding differences in adolescent self-esteem in both settings (Gordillo, Cahuana Cuentas, & Rivera, 2016), rationales based on empirical and theoretical evidence have also been proposed.

Nevertheless, there is no doubt that these rationales have not been appropriately tested using proper and specifically designed studies to evaluate theories (see Riordan, 2011). What has happened is that results from some pieces of empirical research have been taken and used to argue for or against certain theoretical

postulates, and while this does help to boost their prestige or give them a certain degree of solidity, it lacks solid probative value.

Indeed, one of the main reasons for which these theoretical arguments have not been satisfactorily proven is the methodological difficulties that a study of this nature imposes. Experts agree that to obtain high quality evidence, an experimental or quasi-experimental, longitudinal, multicentre, randomised, and blind design is necessary, or, in its absence, one that controls for extraneous variables (Estol, 2009; Halpern *et al.*, 2011; Mael *et al.*, 2005; Pahlke *et al.*, 2014; Riordan, 2011). Obviously, in the world of education this is difficult for practical, financial, and even ethical reasons, although it has occasionally taken place (Riordan, 2015).

Even so, there are studies that meet several of the proposed requirements and that present results that favour single-sex schooling, but they are not usually taken into consideration in the debate. Among Korean students, for example, Park and his colleagues found evidence to support single-sex schooling (Park, Behrman, & Choi, 2013). These results are significant as from 1974 to 2009 Korea allocated its middle and secondary school students randomly to various educational centres, whether public or private, single-sex or coeducational. Apart from the relevant ethical considerations, the study carried out on this population is a natural, randomised, and multicentre experiment and so its results can be regarded as reliable, particularly when comparing them with the country's performance in the PISA tests from 2006 and 2009 (as cited in Riordan, 2011). While this study was con-

sidered by Pahlke and her team in their meta-analysis, it was not considered by Halpern and her colleagues in their essay (see Park, Behrman, & Choi, 2012). Nonetheless, we should note that the study by Park and his colleagues should be compared with the one carried out by Pahlke, Hyde, and Mertz (2013), also in Korea, where they conclude that there is no difference in performance in science and mathematics of year-eight students in one type of grouping or the other.

Another study with similar characteristics is the natural experiment carried out in Switzerland by Eisenkopf and his colleagues (Eisenkopf, Hessami, Fischbacher, & Ursprung, 2015). This randomised longitudinal study found advantages for single-sex schooling regarding the performance of adolescent girls in mathematics and in their self-confidence in their own performance, albeit with a relatively small ( $n = 808$ ) and non-representative sample. This study was also not considered, perhaps because of its novelty.<sup>4</sup>

We ourselves in 2008, carried out studies in Callao and Arequipa (Peru), in which we attempted to compare the levels of disruptive behaviour in class and self-esteem of secondary-school students from both types of school grouping (Gordillo, 2013; Gordillo *et al.*, 2016). The design of these studies included statistical and methodological control of extraneous variables, and they were performed in public schools, a population that is rarely studied on this topic (Riordan, 2007a). In the first of these studies, we found evidence strongly supporting single-sex schooling, although in the second we found no difference between the groups compared.

Nonetheless, the authors of the studies described as emblematic at the start of this work maintain that despite them not having an ideal number of high quality studies to obtain valid and representative conclusions, there are still enough to draw conclusions (Pahlke *et al.*, 2014, p. 1064; Signorella *et al.*, 2013), and that the first conclusion that can be obtained is that the effects supporting single-sex schooling are non-existent or excessively weak (Pahlke *et al.*, 2014; Signorella *et al.*, 2013).

That the effects of school interventions are usually limited is not news (Hattie, 2015). The Coleman Report (Coleman, 1966, as cited in as cited in Murillo Torrecilla & Román Carrasco, 2011) stated that the effects of school on academic results will always be small, especially when considering effects from covariates of origin such as the socioeconomic level of the parents or their educational level. In Latin America, for example, it has been calculated that the effects of school can explain, on average, just 19.95% of students' results (Murillo Torrecilla & Román Carrasco, 2011).

In particular, in the case of the studies that compare the effects of single-sex schooling with those of coeducation, some experts claim that the results will always give an effect size that is too close to zero –sometimes called *null*– for each type of grouping (Riordan, 2009, 2015). Riordan states that this happens for conceptual, methodological, and mathematical reasons:

1. Apparently, single-sex schooling only benefits some students, particularly those at a social disadvantage and who belong to minorities (Ferrara, 2010; Riordan, 2007b, 2011). In

a classroom, we can find students for whom this modality has a strong positive effect alongside others for whom it does not; when the effect that both groups receive is averaged, a mathematically low result will be obtained (Riordan, 2015).

2. The independent variable (school grouping) is necessarily dichotomous (coeducation v. single-sex schooling). This leads to low mathematical variability, as the standard deviation of a dichotomous variable will always be small, something that has an impact on the calculation of the effect size (Riordan, 2011).

3. When random assignment is impossible, control of extraneous variables is an appropriate method for avoiding spurious conclusion in a study that measures the impact of an intervention (Riordan, 2015). Education researchers will tend to control for all variables (socioeconomic status, previous ability, etc.) that might affect the relationship that interests them. The paradox is that the more covariates are controlled, the more the size of the resulting effect will be reduced. In addition, the challenge is to distinguish –conceptually, but above all mathematically– the variables that could potentially produce spurious results from the same outcomes of single-sex schooling that the researcher is trying to measure (Riordan, 2009).

4. Most of the research that calculates effect sizes for the different types of grouping are cross-sectional studies (i.e. not longitudinal), and so the effects they obtain will always be small (see Riordan, 1994b, 2015).

When people say that research shows that the effects of single-sex schooling are of little significance or null, they are not really saying anything different from what current evidence shows regarding other interventions commonly regarded as successful (Riordan, 2009), such as reducing class size, problem-based learning, or teacher training (see Hattie, 2015). For this reason, Riordan considers that the null results of research comparing single-sex schooling with coeducation are not necessarily such; in fact, he believes that if most studies in a work like that by Mael *et al.* supported single-sex education, and there were a lot of null results, these results should be added to the number of studies that support it because of the considerations mentioned regarding the constraints that will always make the effect size of this modality low under these circumstances (Riordan, 2011, p. 10).

This phenomenon is precisely what can be seen in the systematic review by Mael and his team of the 40 studies that they managed to collect and process (Mael *et al.*, 2005). The conclusion that they reached in it can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1 should be read with certain precautions, noted by the researchers themselves: the studies included were not of sufficient quality for a meta-analysis and so the aim of performing one was abandoned; after lowering the quality standard used, the number of studies finally included (40 quantitative and 4 qualitative<sup>5</sup>) was quite small (Mael *et al.*, 2005). With this in mind, we can appreciate that the results show a small advantage for single-sex schooling over coeducation. If we add the null results to the “pro SS” ones—in line with Riordan’s idea described above— this support increases.

TABLE 1. Summary of the findings of Mael *et al.*, 2005.

| Types of outcome <sup>a</sup> considered                           | Total outcomes | Number and percentage of outcomes |     |                     |     |      |     |                    |     |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|-----------------------------------|-----|---------------------|-----|------|-----|--------------------|-----|
|                                                                    |                | Pro-SS <sup>d</sup>               |     | Pro-CE <sup>e</sup> |     | Null |     | Mixed <sup>f</sup> |     |
|                                                                    |                | N                                 | %   | N                   | %   | N    | %   | N                  | %   |
| Concurrent Academic Accomplishment <sup>b</sup>                    | 43             | 15                                | 35% | 1                   | 2%  | 23   | 53% | 4                  | 10% |
| Concurrent adaptation and Socio-Emotional Development <sup>c</sup> | 49             | 22                                | 45% | 5                   | 10% | 19   | 39% | 3                  | 6%  |
| Total                                                              | 92             |                                   |     |                     |     |      |     |                    |     |

<sup>a</sup> An outcome is a specific educational result. The table should be read as follows: for the «Concurrent Academic Accomplishment» category of outcomes there were 43 results from the 40 quantitative studies included (a single study might contain more than one result, for example, if an outcome is analysed in students from different levels or if more than one outcome was analysed); of these results, 35% unambiguously supported single-sex schooling in comparison with coeducation with regards to academic performance; 2% unambiguously supported coeducational schools in comparison with single-sex ones; 53% of the results did not find significant differences between the two settings; and 10% showed results that supported both one type and the other (see note f).

<sup>b</sup> This includes outcomes such as: results in mathematics tests, results in science tests, results in verbal tests, general average grades, results in social science tests.

- <sup>c</sup> This includes outcomes such as self-concept, self-esteem, locus of control, educational aspirations, attitudes towards school, etc.
- <sup>d</sup> SS = single-sex schooling.
- <sup>e</sup> CE = coeducation.
- <sup>f</sup> Results were classified as mixed if they partially supported single-sex schooling and partially supported coeducation (for example, a study could find that single-sex schooling supported boys' performance in mathematics, but had a negative impact on girls in the same outcome).

Source: Adapted from Riordan, 2011, using data from Mael *et al.*, 2005.

As has already been mentioned, this study was analysed by Signorella and her colleagues, who found such serious methodological errors<sup>6</sup> that they ended up «drawing into question the validity of their conclusions» (Signorella *et al.*, 2013, p. 438). The researchers start from a critique of the method used by Mael and his team: for Signorella and her colleagues, a narrative interpretation of the results (such as the vote-counting method) is un-

reliable in itself and in comparison with a meta-analysis. For this reason, after acquiring the set of studies from the original work, correcting the methodological errors, and calculating effect sizes for the studies that required it, they carried out meta-analyses of just three of the outcomes that the original review considered, as it turned out to be impossible for them to do it with the others. The results of these meta-analyses are shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Result of the works processed by Signorella *et al.*, 2013.

| Outcomes measured                         | ES <sup>a</sup> for SS <sup>b</sup> according to meta-analysis | Total of effects calculated | Number and percentage of effects |     |                     |     |      |     |
|-------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------|----------------------------------|-----|---------------------|-----|------|-----|
|                                           |                                                                |                             | Pro-SS <sup>b</sup>              |     | Pro-CE <sup>c</sup> |     | Null |     |
|                                           |                                                                |                             | N                                | %   | N                   | %   | N    | %   |
| Concurrent Mathematics Accomplishment     | $g = 0.03^e$                                                   | 24                          | 4                                | 17% | 2                   | 8%  | 18   | 75% |
| Verbal achievement                        | $g = 0.18^f$                                                   | 13                          | 6                                | 46% | 0                   | 0%  | 7    | 54% |
| Self-esteem and self-concept <sup>d</sup> | $g = -0.02^h$                                                  | 17                          | 5                                | 29% | 5                   | 29% | 7    | 41% |
| Total                                     |                                                                | 54                          | 15                               | 28% | 7                   | 13% | 32   | 59% |

- <sup>a</sup> ES = effect size. Positive values support single-sex schooling, negative ones support coeducation.
- <sup>b</sup> SS = single-sex schooling.
- <sup>c</sup> CE = coeducation.
- <sup>d</sup> Both variables were grouped into a single one by Signorella *et al.*, 2013.
- <sup>e</sup> 95% CI = -0.03 to 0.09,  $p = 0.32$
- <sup>f</sup> 95% CI = 0.10 to 0.26
- <sup>h</sup> 95% CI = -0.12 to 0.08

Source: Adapted from Signorella *et al.*, 2013.

As can be seen, two of the meta-analyses (concerning performance in mathematics and self-esteem/self-concept) show null effects for both types of grouping, although the third (on verbal skills) shows a small but significant effect ( $g = 0.18$ ) in support of single-sex schooling.

In my opinion it is questionable whether the researchers carried out meta-analyses of studies in which the original authors —despite their mistakes— concluded that it was “nearly impossible” (Mael *et al.*, 2005, p. xvii). Indeed, the mathematical complexity that the experts had to rely on in their attempt to perform them is striking, and could lead us to question, to some extent, the accuracy of their results.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, I felt it was advisable —once the data had been cleaned up by the authors— to perform a new vote count for the three outcomes that they had managed to clarify. To do this, I started from the results presented by them in their Tables 1, 2, and 3 (Signorella *et al.*, 2013, pp. 432-433; 435; and 436-437 respectively) and I recorded how many of the calculated effects<sup>8</sup> supported single-sex schooling, how many supported coeducation, and how many studies showed null results. These results can also be seen in Table 2, and show clear results in support of single-sex schooling in two of the three outcomes considered; in the third there is something of a draw. However, it is important to consider the caveat expressed by the authors themselves about how the correlations between the effects obtained and the covariates of origin (socioeconomic status, previous academic achievement, etc.)

were quite high in most cases (Signorella *et al.*, 2013). This precaution is even more important when dealing with uncontrolled studies.

For its part, the meta-analysis by Pahlke and her colleagues (Pahlke *et al.*, 2014) is, logically, a fairly comprehensive study. These researchers were able to process 184 studies, all of them apparently of an appropriate quality, whereas just 7 years earlier<sup>9</sup> Mael and his team could find only 40, although we should recall the serious errors Mael *et al.* made, even in the selection process<sup>10</sup> (Signorella *et al.*, 2013). The selected studies involved a sample of over 1.6 million students from all around the world.

They concluded that there were virtually no significant differences in support of single-sex schooling when the best studies are considered (those that in one way or another meet the standards described above), and that the few differences supporting this type are very small and non-significant. These results are, naturally, not surprising given what is stated above.

Their results for gender stereotypes are particularly interesting, as they contradict one of their theoretical assumptions (see Pahlke *et al.*, 2014, p. 1065), and both the samples from the USA and those from the rest of the world give results that support single-sex schooling (Pahlke *et al.*, 2014, see Table 2 on p. 1058; Table 3 on p. 1059).

In conclusion, from the proposed perspective, it is possible to conclude that

the systematic review by Mael *et al.*, which has been described by experts as one of the most comprehensive studies of the literature on single-sex v. coeducation (Bigler *et al.*, 2014), and even as the best (Riordan, 2011, p. 18; 2015, p. 36 and *passim*), continues to show —despite the criticisms, and after correcting its errors— a small advantage for single-sex schooling that should be read within the methodological and scientific context described above. Regarding the meta-analysis by Pahlke *et al.* (2014), another of the most comprehensive studies (Bigler *et al.*, 2014), it is my opinion that it could also be interpreted under the same criteria: the effects found are small and close to the null hypothesis; in line with Riordan's thesis, they also, to some extent, argue in favour of single-sex schooling. Therefore, it is not entirely true that single-sex schooling lacks supporting evidence.

## 2. «It is better to stick with coeducation»

This argument appears explicitly —supported by a variety of arguments— in more than one of the works identified (Bigler *et al.*, 2014; Halpern *et al.*, 2011). Nonetheless, it is important to note that, while single-sex schooling has not yet been able to prove its advantage, neither has coeducation (Riordan, 2011). As far back as 1998, Mael identified very few effects for it that were superior to those of single-sex schooling, unlike those mentioned in the opposite direction (Mael, 1998), and seven years later his systematic review (Mael *et al.*,

2005), which has also been corrected by Signorella and her colleagues (2013), did not provide many more (see Tables 1 and 2). The most recent and best available review, the meta-analysis by Pahlke *et al.*, also does not offer favourable results (2014).

Despite this, coeducation seems to enjoy not just majority sympathy and support (among specialised and non-specialised audiences), but, in the view of some, it is surrounded by a sort of «protective halo» (Riordan, 2009, p. 102) that gives it uncritical legitimacy. Consequently, it has entered politically correct discourse in contemporary society in such a way that questioning its premises or consequences is felt to go against the democratic system, against advances in favour of the rights of women, and against the ideal of equality of sexes or genders (Altarejos, 2006; Ibáñez-Martín, 2007; Riordan, 2007b; Salomone, 2006). Nonetheless, the emergence and entrenchment of coeducation as something like a universal format nowadays (Riordan, 2011) is due to practical and economic reasons, and its popularity is due to sociological, political, and ideological reasons (Ibáñez-Martín, 2007); in other words, reasons that are not based on scientific and empirical observations (Bigler *et al.*, 2014; Riordan, 2011). We believe that this lack of empirical support in its origin and entrenchment legitimately justifies submitting it to an academic debate (Gordillo, 2015).

Some supporters of coeducation seem to have perceived this shortcoming, and

have abandoned the practice of defending coeducation for non-scientific reasons to —as we have seen— highlight the lack of positive effects of the other option. In this sense, some people admit the lack of proven effects of both types of grouping (Pahlke *et al.*, 2014), but they argue that it is better to remain with coeducation (the most widespread mode), again for practical reasons; it is very expensive to implement single-sex schooling in a mainly coeducational system<sup>11</sup> (Bigler *et al.*, 2014, p. 226; Pahlke *et al.*, 2014, p. 1043), as well as being difficult and disruptive<sup>12</sup> (Signorella *et al.*, 2013, p. 423). This way, they implicitly characterise single-sex schooling as an intervention that is not profitable in cost-benefit terms.

We believe that this line of argument has two flaws. The first is to consider that educational interventions should be evaluated in accordance with economic criteria, understanding *economic* here in a broad sense. As education deals directly with human beings, it is clear that there are interventions or policies that should be implemented even if they are expensive or unprofitable. I am not arguing that single-sex schooling is one of them, but I do uphold that instilling a mentality that does not take this fact into account could distort education itself.

Alongside this, seeing single-sex schooling as unprofitable because it is stated that its effects are *indistinguishable* from coeducation —and, consequently, are equivalent— is also a distorted approach to reality. In effect,

it is not entirely true that single-sex education and coeducation are equivalent and indistinguishable in their effects, as the literature has found negative effects for the latter. For example, as a result of their own study, Pahlke *et al.* find an average weighted effect ( $g_w = -0.57$ ) that has a negative impact on girls in coeducational schools in terms of gender stereotypes: the probability of maintaining gender stereotypes is higher in female students from coeducational schools than in those from single-sex schools. They found this result after processing the best studies from their meta-analysis (controlling for confounding variables and weighting them); however, they warn that it is necessary to be cautious with the figure, as the unweighted effect size is, paradoxically, non-significant, even though it supports coeducation (Pahlke *et al.*, 2014). Another study performed using a quite large sample ( $n = 3450$ ) finds a positive correlation between the number of classmates of the student's own gender and various academic and non-academic outcomes for a student, as well as a negative correlation between the number of classmates of the opposite sex and these outcomes (Martin, 2009, as cited in Riordan, 2011). While it is true that this finding is not a result of specific research into coeducational v. single-sex schooling, it is reasonable to suppose that the mixed grouping could be the right atmosphere for the second correlation to appear. Halpern and her colleagues presented evidence to the contrary: according to some studies, boys who spend time with other boys tend to behave more aggressively and have

more behavioural problems, while girls who spend time with other girls tend to fit into gender stereotypes more (Martin & Fabes, 2001; Fabes, 1997, as cited in Halpern *et al.*, 2011). Nonetheless, some experts have stated that these pieces of research were carried out with small samples, and so are not representative (Park *et al.*, 2012).

The second problem with the argument presented is the ideological nature of the debate: coeducation was implemented in the Western world for non-scientific reasons (Gordillo, 2015), and it appears that nowadays people are attempting to defend it for the same reasons. This failure to use empirical evidence to support the benefits of a system is characteristic of beliefs that are not scientific in nature and are more typical of the phenomenon of ideology (Doig, 1991).

We fear that these approaches have entered the debate, and will strip it of the scientific nature which several people have complained it lacks (Mael *et al.*, 2005), and that has required so much effort to give to it. In this sense, not only is the somewhat offensive title of the article by Halpern *et al.* worrying (it describes single-sex schooling or its premises as *pseudoscience*), but so are some of its arguments, such as where it states that combating sexism through gender segregation is akin to using racial segregation to combat racism —ergo, in some way identifying the evil of racism with single-sex schooling, as one observer notes (Ford, 2012)— or like when a commentator notes that the claims of the authors

about how it is impossible to judge the effectiveness of single-sex schooling without randomised, blind studies (Halpern *et al.*, 2011, p. 1706) are similar to those used by tobacco companies, which for years claimed that without causal studies it was impossible to prove the belief that smoking cigarettes is bad for one's health (Kalkus, 2012). Halpern, and all of the signatories of the article in *Science*, conclude by calling on the government of the USA to rescind the new regulations for «Title IX» of 1972 (Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance [NBSE], 2006). This would lead to public funding for single-sex schooling again being prohibited in the United States (see appendix). In countries like the USA, it is common for academic research to be closely linked with political decision making. Nonetheless, attitudes such as those identified are still surprising, and they are worrying in a context where they could prejudice not only single-sex schooling but also science in general.

### 3. Conclusion

I hope that I have been able to show that there are insufficient grounds —among those proposed by certain influential academic works— to claim that the academic debate surrounding the advantage of one or other type of school grouping and research into it is finished. It is not true that there is a lack of empirical and theoretical evidence supporting single-sex schooling. Neither is it true that coeducation has proven its superiority

or that it should be the canonical model for education in the Western world for non-scientific reasons.

Finally, I would like to make it clear that in no way am I trying to claim that single-sex schooling is superior to co-education. Indeed, as I believe has been sufficiently set out, a consistent volume of literature has found significantly null results or ones very close to zero when comparing its effects with those of co-education (Bigler *et al.*, 2014; Gordillo *et al.*, 2016; Gordillo, Rivera, & Gamero, 2014; Pahlke *et al.*, 2014; Riordan, 2011; Signorella *et al.*, 2013). My only intention with this work is to provide methodological and empirical arguments that contradict many people's assumption that the debate is finished or is no longer necessary; on the contrary, I agree with the leading experts in that we still know very little about this topic, and that research into it is still in its infancy (Riordan, 2011).

## Appendix. Single-sex public education in the USA and the impact of the systematic literature review by Mael *et al.*, 2005

Until before the first decade of the 21st century, there were virtually no single-sex public schools in the USA (Dee, 2006). The reason for this is related to Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which prohibited discrimination against people based on their gender in participation in any educational program that received federal funding (Title IX of the Education Amendments, 1972). The document's apparent objective was to combat discrim-

ination against female staff in teaching positions in higher education (Sandler, 2000). The standard interpretation of the document was, for several decades, based on the regulations issued in 1975 by the then Department of Health, Education, and Welfare that prohibited single-sex public education.

This interpretation lasted until January 2002, when President George W. Bush passed a new education act (No Child Left Behind, 2002), Chapter V of which (drawn up by the senators Hillary Clinton, Democrat, and Kay Bailey Hutchinson, Republican) proposed releasing federal funding for single-sex schools or classes (Cable & Spradlin, 2008). This innovation compared with the previous position created enthusiasm in a section of public opinion, to the extent that in May of that year, the Office for Civil Rights, of the Department of Education, found itself obliged to draw up guidelines for this possibility in the public sector (Single-Sex Classes and Schools: Guidelines on Title IX Requirements, 2002), at the same time as holding a national public consultation about the features these regulations should have in a «complex and sensitive» topic (Nondiscrimination on the Basis of Sex in Education Programs or Activities Receiving Federal Financial Assistance; Proposed Rule [Notice of Intent to Regulate], 2002, p. 31 098). This led to the appearance of some experiments with public single-sex schooling, as well as a fierce debate.

The following year, the US Government, through the Department of

Education, requested, according to Arms (2007), a descriptive study of the new experiments in public single-sex schooling that had recently appeared (a study that finally saw the light of day in the work by Riordan *et al.*, 2008), and (as the authors of the work itself note) a meta-analysis of the comparative studies on single-sex and coeducation (that would finally become the study by Mael *et al.*, 2005). Apparently, these works were to act as input for drawing up the new regulations for the aforementioned «Title IX».

Mael and his colleagues could not produce a meta-analysis because of the lack of quality research (Mael *et al.*, 2005, p. xvii). Instead, they opted for a vote-counting method with the collected studies, from which they concluded that there was a slight advantage for single-sex schooling in some of the educational outcomes examined. Even so, given the context in which this research appeared —significant national interest in the matter with numerous articles and books published and over 5000 comments collected in the public consultation (Arms, 2007)— it became of great importance and was extensively cited by supporters of single-sex schooling.

The following year, the Office for Civil Rights published the new regulations for «Title IX», this time containing an interpretation that was favourable to public funding for single-sex programmes under certain conditions (NBSE, 2006). As a result of this, a so-called «boom» in this type of schooling has occurred (Pahlke *et al.*, 2014, p. 3).

Eight years later, Signorella, Hayes, & Li (2013) reproduced this emblematic work using the same set of studies, and they attempted the meta-analysis that the earlier piece had been unable to perform. The impact of this new study is not only because their meta-analysis led the authors to reject the conclusions of the original work, but also because they demonstrated the numerous and serious errors in it, casting significant doubts on its validity.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> In this piece we treat the terms *coeducation* and *mixed education* as synonyms, even though some specialists believe there are differences between them (see Bartolomé, 1980; Breuse, 1972).
- <sup>2</sup> The vote-counting method consists of counting how many studies supporting or opposing a particular intervention are found in a selected corpus of pieces of research.
- <sup>3</sup> See the appendix for a description of the social and political context in which the review by Mael *et al.* appeared, to understand better its importance, as well as that of the work on which we are commenting.
- <sup>4</sup> The article was published in July 2015, although it was available online in some databases, as a document in press, from August 2014.
- <sup>5</sup> Table 1 only shows the results of the quantitative studies.
- <sup>6</sup> These flaws included inadvertently processing repeated studies, using the same data set —and therefore the same sample— in studies that were considered different but that measured the same outcomes, errors of judgement when interpreting the nature of the pieces of research processed (i.e. they classified a piece of research as a comparison of single-sex schooling v. coeducation when it was not one), unjustified exclusion of some studies that met the required standards, etc. (Signorella *et al.*, 2013).
- <sup>7</sup> In any case, Signorella and her team do not state the reasons for which they thought that this was advisable and possible.

- <sup>8</sup> These are effects of uncontrolled studies; Signorella and her team make it clear that, owing to the circumstances, they preferred to work with these instead of controlled ones (Signorella *et al.*, 2013, p. 431). A single study could produce various effects; for example, if it gave results independently for boys and girls, there would be two effects. I did not take into consideration mixed results, as was done in the original study by Mael *et al.*, because individual effects were calculated and not studies (that could include various effects), and because Signorella and her colleagues did not do so either.
- <sup>9</sup> Mael *et al.* searched for pieces of research that covered from 1988 “to the present” (Mael *et al.*, 2005, p. 3) (we should take into account that their systematic review was published in 2005); meanwhile, Pahlke *et al.* searched for studies up to 2012, including those by Mael and his team (Pahlke *et al.*, 2014, p. 4).
- <sup>10</sup> This is reasonably possible given that, with the described explosion in single-sex schools, a wide variety of studies into this also appeared (see Pahlke *et al.*, 2014).
- <sup>11</sup> This is perhaps only the case in some countries such as the USA. In others, such as Peru, for example, single-sex schooling is relatively common, even in public schooling (see Gordillo, 2013; Gordillo *et al.*, 2016).

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# Analysing the integration process of migrant youth in Catalonia: a socio-educative approach

## *Reflexiones sobre el proceso de integración de la juventud extranjera en Cataluña: un enfoque socioeducativo*

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### Abstract

This paper presents an analysis of the process of integration among migrant young people in Catalonia aged from 14 to 18. For this purpose, a study was made, using a survey and four discussion groups probing the points of view of both the migrant and native youth. Results are organised around a model of integration based on four core dimensions: structural, cognitive-cultural, social and of identity; and confirm that a society which is plural in its beliefs, convictions and forms should be reflected in democratic systems and social and educational policies based on a concept of integration as reciprocity and understood as a fundamental principle in the management of diversity.

**Keywords:** Integration, youth, immigration, racism, diversity.

### Resumen

Este artículo presenta un diagnóstico del proceso de integración de la juventud migrada de entre 14 y 18 años en Cataluña. Para ello se ha realizado un estudio por encuesta y las aportaciones de cuatro grupos de discusión desde la doble perspectiva de los extranjeros y del resto de jóvenes. Los resultados obtenidos fundamentan un modelo de integración basado en cuatro dimensiones básicas: estructural, cognitiva-cultural, social y de identidad. Estos resultados nos confirman la necesidad de que una sociedad plural en sus creencias, en sus convicciones y en sus manifestaciones debe quedar reflejada en los sistemas democráticos y en unas políticas sociales y educativas basadas en un concepto de integración como reciprocidad y las bases de la integración entendida como principio fundamental para la gestión de la diversidad.

**Descriptores:** Integración, jóvenes, inmigración, racismo, diversidad.

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## 1. Introduction

This paper<sup>1</sup> aims to address the need to understand further the integration process of young Maghrebi migrating to Barcelona. Due to its location on the European Mediterranean, the city and its wider geographical area (Catalonia and the Spanish State) are a field of both contact and rupture (Nair, 2006) with a wide variety of migrants, especially those from the African continent (Idescat. *Padrón municipal de habitantes en Cataluña*, Catalan Municipal Residents' Register, 2015).

The growth of migration and mobility in the last fifty years has wrought a structural transformation in our societies, which are now economically advanced, socially complex, diverse, and currently immersed in a deep political-ideological identity crisis. Unfortunately, it would be inaccurate to assert that this change has brought with it the best possible form of integration for migrants, or legislation in accordance with the principles and basic values of human rights (Cachón, 2009; Essomba, 2012).

In this context, and in line with the Common Basic Principles for Immigration Integration Policy (BCPI) agreed by the Council of the European Union (Council of Europe, 2004 and 2009), this paper is grounded in a theoretical basis which positively links migration, development and citizenship with the aim of achieving successful management of migration from a standpoint of intercultural dialogue and exchange (Aparicio & Tornos, 2000; Favell, 2001; Borgström *et al.*, 2002; Torres, 2002; Palou, 2011a & Portes, Celaya, Vickstrom & Aparicio,

2011; Essomba, 2012; Pérez & Sarrate, 2013).

The recent increase of migratory flows has coincided with a profound shift in the criteria according to which European societies define their own cohesion. Neo-liberal globalization has brought decisive changes in this area: the state has lost a large part of its control over labour markets (Beck, 2002; Sassen, 2001) and this has led to a fundamental change in our societies' criteria for cohesion, with the commitment to civic values emerging as a key factor for social cohesion and for channelling political participation, at least in the regulatory field. An integration policy of this type starts from an idea of who we are, what binds us together and as a consequence what any new prospective citizen should share with us for their integration to be successful (Innerarity, 2016, p. 41). This favours the development of integration policies based primarily on an intercultural model, aiming to surpass both the cultural monism of assimilationism and the absence of dialogue of a ghettoised multiculturalism (Council or Europe, 2008).

Spain is no exception, and there is growing interest in regulations of this type for managing cultural diversity. Thus recently we have seen the emergence of two sets of public policy designed to address the integration of the migrant population, one for the whole of Spain (the 2<sup>nd</sup> Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration 2011-14) and the other more specifically for Catalonia (the 5<sup>th</sup> Four-Year Plan for Citizenship and Migrations: Horizon 2016). These plans have in common the challenge of promoting a "concept of

citizenship which embraces the non-national population,” thus reinforcing human capital and equal opportunities in public initiatives in order to enhance human rights and social cohesion. As the most recent *Report on Migrant Integration in Catalonia 2015* (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2016) states, the goal is to embrace a logic of diversity in these services, not only in order to boost co-existence and social participation, but also to make sure that new arrivals can identify with the country’s project for the future, and to make this viable.

These recent sets of regulations, arriving at both European and individual state levels, are driven by a view of integration which we share, since we see it as a voluntary process requiring equal opportunities accompanied by real access to a common public culture where “the other” is recognized in her/his difference and in her/his equality in order to contribute to and enrich society as a whole (Bilbeny, 2010; Samper, Moreno, & Alcalde, 2006; Torres, 2002): “Democratic integration is the process through which individuals and ethnic-cultural groups voluntarily become part of a society with equal opportunities and real access to rights and duties, goods and services, responsibilities and positions; in such a society these individuals and groups can participate, equally and reciprocally, in a common public culture, and receive recognition of and support for their own particular demands” (Bilbeny, 2010, p. 77).

Rather than passively being part of a society, this implies actively becoming part of a greater whole; and this in turn involves participating in conditions of

reciprocity and sharing goods and services, rights and duties, and obligations and responsibilities, in a context of mutual respect, recognition and support in cultural diversity. Integration is not solely incorporation into a state; neither is it merely identification with one particular cultural tradition. We integrate to the extent that we take part in and feel part of a single society which includes us and which at the same time we construct with our own contribution and respect for the common rules of work and coexistence.

In the current state of social flux, interpretation of the “immigration issue” in Spain and the EU since the end of 2008 has had to address new risks brought by the economic crisis, with its effects (above all) on employment, its dangers of social exclusion and its (relatively) new discourses on immigration, all wrapped in a “climate of fear” (to borrow Wole Soyinka’s expression) which brings in its wake new challenges for political approaches to integration policies in host societies (Cachón, 2009). As Essomba (2012, p. 139) warns, there is currently a “gap” between discourse and reality: “a tension between policies of inclusion aimed at immigrants —when these policies exist— and the social practices of citizens in general, since the local majority which directly undergoes the impact of the arrival of new residents (normally from low-to-middle social classes) feels the subjective threat of loss of rights and wellbeing.”

Given this social conjuncture, and bearing in mind the socio-educational perspective from which we have approached this paper, here we set out to develop an

analysis aimed at advancing policy in general and socio-educational policy in particular, on the basis of data obtained from a study of young migrants' integration in Catalonia. For this purpose we see Martínez (2006) multidimensional model as especially interesting, as it structures successful integration around four key elements, each with a set of concrete factors for practical application:

The *structural dimension*, referring to equal opportunities in the individual's participation in professional activities and social and political institutions. The concrete variables of this dimension are: legal status (citizenship and residency); position in the education and training system and the labour market; economic resources; and access to housing and welfare. The *Report on Migrant Integration in Catalonia 2015* (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2016) also considers the employment, economic and political aspects of the issue when assessing the state of integration in Catalonia, and concludes that among the most important factors favouring this process employment is key, since most immigrants come to the country for work and economic reasons, and therefore access to employment is fundamental as it affords the basic resources for integration to get under way.

The *cognitive-cultural dimension*, encompassing the learning of necessary cognitive skills and familiarity with the host society's culture. The concrete variables in this case are: knowledge of the language/s; political values; cultural values and rules; and religious beliefs and lifestyles. The *Report on Migrant Integration*

*in Catalonia 2015* (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2016) states that in building an integration-oriented society, mastery of the social language and the lingua franca (Catalan and Spanish) is the first step towards integration.

The *social dimension*, referring to the individual's social relations within and outside her/his community and her/his access to means of integration. The variables of this dimension are: the extent and type of family relationships; contact with members of the individual's own community; contacts with local residents; friendships; and connections with civil society associations and bodies. The social dimension, as a way of looking at the positive effects of sociability, stresses the most common function attributed to social capital as the source of benefits mediated by a network spreading beyond the immediate family (Bourdieu, 1980). In the process of integration social relationships acquire a central role, together with learning the language and work. Thus the *Report on Migrant Integration in Catalonia 2015* states that: "Connecting with mixed social networks which enable the individual to develop relationships with the local population favours integration; while it is also true that access to these networks is not easy for migrants" (Generalitat de Catalunya, 2016, p. 126).

The *identity dimension*, which includes the subjective factors of belonging and personal identification with the community. The variables of this group are: the subjective perception of belonging (national or cultural); attitudes of immigrants towards the host society and

vice-versa; the type and degree of identification with it; and the orientation of the host society towards intercultural relations (Martínez, 2006). For integration to be effective and for immigrants to feel that they really form part of the host society it is essential for them to feel valued and recognized in their original identities also (Esteve *et al.*, 2008).

From the standpoint of this model and in the field of socio-educational management, the challenge is to rebuild a public, shared discourse which sees diversity as part of our cultural capital, to be valued and promoted by means of a range of responses which would be: open, taking different cultural models into account and making them visible; inclusive, making equality between all citizens possible; and democratic, easing civic participation for all citizens in building the whole society (Bartolomé & Cabrera, 2003).

The scenario we have outlined, with positive European and state policies for integration, urgently requires effective means of solving the problems currently found in educational and community actions. Our analysis provides insights into the present and future, primarily from the socio-educational field; insights which may be of use in complementing the indicators and dimensions identified above, for a realistic assessment of the current state of integration and to bridge the gap between public policy and administrative practice on the state and regional levels (European Commission, 2013 and Council of Europe, 1997). One can never stress enough the fundamental role of schools as a vehicle for the social and cultural integration of immigrants.

## 2. Method

The main purpose of this study is to uncover insights which can help to make advances in this challenge, on the basis of an analysis of young migrants' integration process in Catalonia, specifically among young people between 14 and 18. This overall aim is articulated into two more specific objectives:

1. To identify the key factors in the integration of young migrants in Catalonia by means of a survey taken from two points of view: that of the young migrants and that of locally-born young people.

2. To investigate the factors favouring and hindering integration and the specific features of the integration process of young people in Catalonia through the optic of the key dimensions of integration (Martínez, 2006, and Palou, 2011b).

In order to address these objectives a single methodological approach would not have been sufficient. According to Sabariego (2004), new issues in education and social studies are creating new ways of doing research which bring together different research traditions. Thus for this descriptive-analytical study, we combined work on qualitative and quantitative data to suit the object studied and so that one might complement the other (Bericat, 1998).

To address the first objective an intentional sample of Catalan schools was made, since this is a privileged context where young people between 14 and 18 congregate naturally, and represents a heterogeneous arena with a wide

diversity of personalities, characters, cultures, tendencies, etc. An extensive sample (3,830 young people) was needed, calculated according to the population frequencies for the specific group of young people this study focuses on. Thus in the sample the proportions of young people in terms of their origins reproduced the proportions of each group in the general population.

An in-depth diagnostic study was essential in order to identify the key aspects of the current state of integration of young migrants in Catalonia; and this enabled us to define the fundamental factors and specific features of their integration process from the viewpoints of both

the migrant youth and the rest of the group.

In order to achieve the second objective we set up four discussion groups aiming to analyse in depth how participants experienced the integration process and what they saw as the key factors favouring their integration.

Below we explain the process of data collection and the conditions deriving from the study design:

— For the purposes of the survey we administered the Social Cohesion among Young People Questionnaire (Palou, 2010) to a sample with the following features:

TABLE 1. General breakdown of the sample.

| Elements                      | Total                                                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| N. of surveys administered    | 3,830                                                                                                                                          |
| Age                           | 14-18                                                                                                                                          |
| Schools and education centres | 52<br>— ESO (compulsory high school) 72%<br>— Bachillerato (pre-university studies) 24% <sup>2</sup>                                           |
| Student origins               | — Catalonia 73%<br>— Maghreb 10%<br>— Latin America 9%<br>— Other parts of Europe, Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa 3%<br>— Other parts of Spain 3% |

Source: Own elaboration.

The questionnaire was validated by judges and its internal and content validity confirmed. The instrument had 41 items addressing the most important

variables in the study, which includes the Knowledge of Cultural Diversity Scale, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.715. Due to the nature of the variables Chi-squared

contrast tests were carried out, in addition to non-parametric contrast tests for the Scale.

— The discussion groups were held in four of the most relevant educational institutions for their mix of social and intercultural relationships between migrant adolescents and local youth: two high schools (offering both compulsory secondary education and pre-university studies) and two non-formal education centres. The sample was intentional and the discussion groups were facilitated by two members of the research team (one chairperson and another researcher responsible for recording exactly what was said).

In this empirical context the study was carried out in three main stages:

First stage: selection of information sources and gaining access to them.

Second stage: data collection through the surveys and discussion groups.

Third stage: analysis of data collected and development of conclusions as a basis for making recommendations in favour of coexistence and social cohesion.

With respect to the scientific rigor of the study, in the design we presented the elements of the descriptive-analytical diagnostic study in order, and we justified its multimethod approach, with the complementary combination of quantitative and qualitative data, which also enabled the triangulation of the results (presented in the following section).

### 3. Results

Here the results of the study are presented under four headings corresponding to the four dimensions of Martínez' model (2006) in order to describe the social integration process of young migrants in Catalonia: the structural, cognitive/cultural, social and identity dimensions.

#### 3.1. Structural dimension

The regulatory aspects of integration were approached according to participants' views on who may be seen as a citizen. Thus 31.3% were of the opinion that a citizen was a person with their "papers in order," followed by 30.8% who saw this as a person "living and working here." This concept of citizenship linked to "legalized" administrative status was accompanied by a shared image of migrants as a social category especially associated with the current context of economic-financial crisis. Biased social representations and negative views, images and attitudes towards immigration were confirmed, conforming to a logic of excessive differentiation (Delgado, 1998) which problematizes those who were seen as different on two levels:

Firstly the *discourse of social alarmism*. Almost half the people born in Catalonia/Spain, when asked about what they thought of migrants and what they thought society's opinion was, said that they were seen as thieves, criminals, troublesome, problematic, bad, violent, causing fights, bringing problems, lacking in respect and making coexistence more difficult: "I don't care if they come here

(...) what I don't like is (...) that the ones who come here come to rob...' "And what we don't realise is that (...) you've got all kinds everywhere (...) yes, normally it's true that immigration is associated with vandalism, in general..." (native student, 1<sup>st</sup> year of *Bachillerato*).

Apart from this, the migrant youth confirmed this socially constructed perception of immigration linking it to poverty and lack of education and culture, under a vision which is both uniform (seeing all immigrants as the same) and stereotyped: "This one's Colombian, so he's a low-life type, that one's Chinese, so he's quiet and shy and you can do anything you like with him –that's how people see it..." (student of Uruguayan origin, 1<sup>st</sup> year of *Bachillerato*).

Secondly the *discourse of competition*: immigration is associated with the loss of resources (housing, work and access to social services), and this exacerbates rejection of migratory flows. Thus most of the young locally-born people affirmed that society responds more favourably to immigrants (they are offered social assistance, subsidies and grants; they receive more aid than others; work and housing is found for them, etc.). This critical attitude towards the supposed favourable treatment of immigrants (positive discrimination) is one of the factors that most hinders their integration.

Regarding *migratory projects*, it was notable that both native and migrant youth, whilst providing evidence of a stereotyped perception of immigration, concurred in recognising the same factors as

motives for migration: one of the main reasons given for migrating was the opportunity to improve quality of life (economic advancement through better-paid work): "Here you have a lot of things you don't have in our countries: social services, health, work..." (Maghrebi student, Open Centre); "They're people who emigrate to another country for different reasons. For a better future for example." (Native student, 3<sup>rd</sup> year of *ESO*).

### 3.2. Social dimension

This dimension refers to young people's social relationships, the development of these within and outside their communities, and the possibility of playing an active role in two specific contexts: the school or educational centre and the public sphere. The data collected via the survey and discussion groups yielded the following results for the two contexts:

#### 3.2.1. School or educational centre

Native young people participated more in activities within the school or education centre, including those conferring responsibility, while foreign-born young people were more involved in neighbourhood activities. 32% of the young people had been school year delegates, 31% had taken part in school committees, and 24% in activities organized outside the centre and various types of solidarity initiatives. However, the young migrants were more active in all activities outside the school/centre ( $X^2=10.02$ ,  $p=0.007$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ) and

took part less as year delegates ( $X^2=10.6$ ,  $p=0.005$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ) and on school committees ( $X^2=62.4$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ). In general the participants did not see school as the best place for integration and felt more comfortable in out-of-school activities, which were more oriented towards leisure and play and addressed their needs more closely, thus confirming the outcomes of previous studies (Palou, Rodríguez, & Vilà, 2013). Among the most typical community activities favouring intercultural coexistence were theatre ( $X^2=17.4$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ) and dance groups ( $X^2=121.4$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ) for the girls and sports groups ( $X^2=450.4$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ) for the boys.

## 3.2.2. The public sphere

Turning to intercultural coexistence in the public sphere, 53% of participants stated that “I don’t mind if people from different cultures live in my area as long

as they mind their own business.” This evidences acceptance of cultural diversity and migration from the standpoint of passive tolerance but without the positive recognition that would represent a step towards real coexistence; this latter was only accepted by 17% of the sample. At the same time, a worrying 13% stated that “I don’t like people with a different culture living in my area.”

In order to study in greater depth the acceptance and recognition of migration, it was necessary to analyse opinions on coexistence with specific ethnic-cultural groups. Thus, while 80% of the sample accepted having Spanish residents in their area, only 22% accepted Roma neighbours, as Table 2 shows. In order of frequency, from the most acceptable to the least, we found: non-Catalan Spanish people<sup>3</sup>, Catalans, Europeans, Latin Americans, Asians, Eastern Europeans, Maghrebis, Africans and Roma<sup>4</sup>.

TABLE 2. Acceptance and recognition of migration.

|                            | % ACCEPTANCE |           |       |                 |
|----------------------------|--------------|-----------|-------|-----------------|
|                            | TOTAL        | Catalonia | Spain | Other Countries |
| Latin Americans            | 39.8%        | 37.2%     | 36.5% | 49.1%           |
| Eastern Europeans          | 26.3%        | 24.7%     | 23.8% | 31.5%           |
| Europeans                  | 66.1%        | 68.0%     | 63.5% | 60.8%           |
| Catalans                   | 77.9%        | 84.4%     | 68.3% | 59.4%           |
| Non-Catalan Spanish people | 80.4%        | 85.0%     | 88.9% | 65.4%           |
| Maghrebis                  | 25.8%        | 19.2%     | 27.0% | 46.1%           |
| Asians                     | 28.8%        | 27.2%     | 30.2% | 33.9%           |
| Africans                   | 25.6%        | 24.7%     | 26.2% | 28.7%           |
| Roma                       | 21.7%        | 22.3%     | 28.6% | 19.3%           |

Source: Own elaboration.

Paradoxically, the perception of social rejection in multicultural spaces was only expressed by the young migrants. In the discussion groups they told stories of lack of respect and problems in participating on equal terms: "Well I think that it's different and I go round with Asian people, because I had a Spanish friend, but she always laughed at me, so since then I didn't want to have any more Spanish friends, because I couldn't speak Spanish properly, so she laughed at me and I didn't like it. So I stopped going round with her and since then I've always had Asian friends" (Bangladeshi student, 1<sup>st</sup> year of *Bachillerato*).

Regarding social relationships, although the participants as a whole stated that they had quite diverse relationships, their responses show statistically significant differences according to their place of birth. Thus, while Catalan youth and those from other Spanish provinces had more relationships with natives (a certain cultural endogamy was noticeable), the young migrants had more varied friendships and fewer relationships with natives. This pattern is common to friendships in the school/education centre ( $X^2=562.2$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ) and the local area ( $X^2=869.8$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ).

Thus one factor which hinders integration from both migrant and native sides is a lack of affective social networks (lack of social capital) and the ghettoization of people from the same community, stemming from primary processes of socialization and ethnocentric, monocultural educational centres.

These are factors proper to the social dimension of integration, and the lack of them favours neither social relationships nor participation with other members of the community, as this student remarks: "If you come here and you don't know anyone you can't get ahead. Because if you find that sometime there's no one to help you because you don't know anyone..." (Cameroonian student, Open Centre).

It's best if close relationships and the opportunity to choose role models are able to exercise a strong influence on young people's orientations and aspirations for the future (Portes, Vickstrom, & Aparicio, 2011). Beyond these contextual factors, the migrant youth indicated that personal qualities (respect, openness, empathy, sociability, extraversion) favour integration in the current social context: "Being yourself. First change yourself and it then it depends. If you don't want racism to exist in the world or with the Spanish, you're the first person who has to be non-racist" (Ecuadorian student, informal education centre).

Native youth also recognised the need for the reciprocal closeness and empathy required for integration: the recognition of the "other" starts with an interest in and acceptance of their difference, thus confirming the two-way, voluntary, dynamic nature of the process: "I think that it doesn't depend on any kind of politics or anything. It depends on our way of thinking and theirs. We can't impose their way of thinking on people here, and we can't force people coming here to adapt either" (native student, 3<sup>rd</sup> year of *ESO*).

### 3.3. Cognitive-cultural dimension

This dimension encompasses factors relating to learning and the use of a common language, knowledge of the environment, understanding of and critical thinking on public problems and issues, and adopting social rules. Participants' linguistic status did not coincide with the bilingualism prevalent in Catalonia. The majority spoke only Spanish both at home and with their friends (48% spoke Spanish at home and 7% both Catalan and Spanish with friends).

Concerning the linguistic situation at school, the tendency was rather different to these contexts. The most frequent was the indistinct use of Catalan and Spanish (47%), followed by 28% who stated that they only used Catalan as the *lingua franca* at school, and 21% who spoke only in Spanish.

Language, and more specifically, learning the language of the host country, is the factor that all participants agreed was the most important for integration in the host society: "I think that you have to speak the language, because it's not the same if you come from Latin America, where people speak different types of Spanish, and we understand each other because it's still Spanish. So it's much easier to arrive here and start relating to people because they understand you. But if someone comes from another country where the language isn't anything like Spanish it's going to be much more difficult for them, and actually it seems the ones who adapt best are the South American people" (native student, 1<sup>st</sup> year of *Bachillerato*).

Also they were of the opinion that lack of competence in cognitive skills and knowledge of the host country's culture (basically, not speaking the language) was a barrier to integration: "My parents still have problems because they don't speak or understand Catalan" (Maghrebi student, 3<sup>rd</sup> year of *ESO*).

Thus migrant reception management (in terms of willingness and effort on the part of the local population) and setting up initiatives in education (in the reception class, in tutorials and in subjects such as "Education for Citizenship") and socio-education (in open centres and social services) is what the education centres themselves see as essential for easing *contact, relationships and in the long term the integration of young migrants*: "Well, if you're studying, the way the teachers speak to you as well, you know, if they say, 'If you have any questions just ask me' and so on, also makes you feel better and that you can talk to them and ask things and... integrate into the class, for example" (native student, 1<sup>st</sup> year of *Bachillerato*).

Another important variable in this dimension is young people's understanding of and critical thinking on public issues. Our analysis revealed that they were rather passive when faced with problems affecting their surroundings, but that their involvement had a positive correlation with the closeness and meaningfulness of the context. Thus 53% would only take part in resolving issues involving their school/centre if they were asked, while 28% stated that they always took part in these. In the classroom context,

closer and more meaningful to them, the opposite tendency was found: 66% said that they always got involved, compared to 31% who had to be asked.

In these contexts, in contrast, knowledge and observance of the shared rules of coexistence takes on special relevance for the integration process. This is a key variable that almost half those taking part in the survey saw as very important and highly unfavourable if not adhered to.

### 3.4. Identity dimension

This dimension refers to the subjective factors of the feeling of belonging and personal identification with the community. In terms of belonging, the majority (49%) felt Catalan, 17% Spanish, 16% from their home country, and 10% both Catalan and Spanish.

However, the young migrants still valued two key factors reaffirming their ethnic-cultural identity: religion and food. Specifically, 76% stated that they were in agreement with the majority religious beliefs of their home country, and 72% also stated that they ate the typical food of their home country. Celebrations, music and the romantic partner were also important for their identity. In contrast, 77% of young migrants preferred the host country's clothes.

This data can be read differently when we take into account the time of residence in Catalonia. Thus 60% of young migrants living for less than a year in the country gave more importance to following the rules and behaviours of

their home countries, compared with those with longer residency (only 31% of those living here for between five and ten years were of the same opinion:  $X^2=19.6$ ,  $p=0.003$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ).

Time is key factor favouring integration in the host country. Young migrants with more than five years residence were those who most frequently valued the lifestyles of both home and host countries equally, while almost half those with less than five years in the country valued that of the home country more ( $X^2=20.1$ ,  $p=0.002$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ). These more expressive cultural factors (the home country's cuisine in contrast to its style of dress and music) lost weight as foundations of identity with the passing of time.

Finally, for most of the young people the feeling of civic belonging (where they saw themselves as citizens) was linked to the place where they lived. Thus 71% of young people born in Catalonia felt themselves to belong to the place where they lived, while only 37% of the migrant youth felt that they were from their place of residence ( $X^2=335.6$ ,  $p=0.000$ ,  $\alpha=0.05$ ).

## 4. Conclusions and discussion

These results, set out according to the four dimensions of integration, confirm that a society which is plural in its beliefs, convictions and forms should be reflected in democratic systems and social and educational policies based on reciprocity and equipped to manage diversity.

The integration of migrants is a reciprocal social process which makes

demands on both the host society and the migrants themselves. This reminds us of Maalouf's (1999) idea that the host society is a place in construction. It is important to adapt, to prepare, to get used to specific new conditions: learn the language, the history and the politics of the host country. But adapting in this way does not mean adopting wholesale or giving up being yourself. Thus for their part, and in line with the principle of reciprocity, the native population (adults and young people) should not only tolerate but also positively recognise the practices of the immigrant population's traditions and customs in order to build an authentically democratic coexistence within a new intercultural social framework (Bartolomé 2002; Siguán 2003; Chaib, 2005). Interculturality signifies a project of coexistence, of realization: going beyond that which already exists (cultural pluralism) to build and share a social and political project characterized by equality and the justice of its practices in a context of diversity.

In this paper we wished to analyse in depth young people's integration process in the educational and community contexts closest to them (the local neighbourhood and town or city), responding to these fundamental challenges:

a) Taking formal education as the privileged social field for building arenas favourable to intercultural coexistence, modular social processes and transferable forms of relationships. This is an ideal context for facilitating an approach to and understanding of the host society, reducing prejudice and teaching people to be

autonomous and critical, to live together rejecting all forms of discrimination, and to participate in public life in a free and cooperative way.

This exercise of citizenship demands specific types of knowledge and above all skills, values and attitudes which constitute a way of acting in accordance with the challenges facing our society today.

Education in these values and for exercising citizenship is, therefore, a central concern for education professionals, a concern which represents and no doubt should represent a vital part of educational policy for a significant part of their work of providing education to all students without exception.

b) In the community we need to consolidate existing initiatives and promote new ones which will help us to give shape to a new form of coexistence on the basis of:

1) Real and effective equity in rights and duties for participating on equal terms in a common project (the political dimension). As our results have shown, the local neighbourhood and the town or city are highly advantageous and important contexts of participation for favouring the meeting of people and cultures and the real social construction of shared spaces, and these, together with residents' and business associations, carry out essential work in facilitating participation and coexistence (Chaib, 2005).

2) Equal social treatment for all and the permanent struggle against

all forms of discrimination (the socio-economic dimension). Although cultural diversity is a natural and legitimate social reality, immigration is still a stigmatised social category, fixed in the collective mind in the form of biased images and negative views and attitudes, as we found in this study. The persistence of these presents a twofold challenge: to eradicate ideologies of exclusion (Delgado, 1998) and to favour the process of social integration.

3) The right to difference, from the standpoint of the acceptance and recognition of cultural diversity (the cultural dimension). All citizens should be able to freely live their culture, as long as they respect others and their surroundings and show openness to the host society.

4) The creation of unity in diversity, of coexistence in multicultural contexts, which involves building social cohesion from the standpoint of equal participation in a shared public culture, involving all sectors (immigrant groups; local civil society; local, regional, national and European governments; businesses; schools; social actors and religious organizations), and taking this challenge on voluntarily (with solidarity in practice as a key value).

Both the integration policies put forward in the Spanish central government's *Second Strategic Plan for Citizenship and Integration, 2011-14* (Secretary of State for Immigration and Emigration) and the Catalan regional administration's fifth

four-year plan, the *Citizenship and Migrations Plan: Horizon 2016* put forward a route map which is favourable to the management of cultural diversity and social participation from the standpoint of these principles and more in line with human rights.

The increasing complexity and plurality of our societies requires us to build a social model of integration which will be capable of promulgating the idea of a common public culture based on plurality as a foundation stone for a social, political and cultural project which is aware of and caters for differences.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The results presented here form part of the research project titled "An In-Depth Analysis of the Integration of Young Migrants in Catalonia between the Ages of 14 and 18," funded by the Generalitat de Catalunya in the 2010 funding round for aid to promote applied research and university education on the subject of immigration in Catalonia (ARAFI), in which the authors were the leading researchers.
- <sup>2</sup> The rest of the young people were in vocational training and informal education.
- <sup>3</sup> The "non-Catalan Spanish" group comprises all participants born elsewhere in the Spanish State.
- <sup>4</sup> The Roma group is included in the study because it is a cultural group traditionally present in our context, still the traditional object of "exclusion".

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# Successful practices in developing cross-curricular competences in vocational training centres in the Basque Country

## *Prácticas de éxito en el desarrollo de competencias transversales en centros de Formación Profesional del País Vasco*

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### Abstract

At present, competence-based approaches are gradually becoming the main axis of the European Union's general education policies and of pedagogical practice at several educational levels. Nonetheless, it is important to analyse how the various general prescriptive directions that can easily be identified at the normative level are being put into practice in order to establish an in-depth understanding of them. This study presents the results of a research project with the aim of analysing and describing successful practices in the development of Cross-curricular Competences (CCC) in VET centres in the Basque Country. The methodology used is case studies in which a quantitative approach (a questionnaire for teachers) is used, followed by a qualitative approach comprising interviews and focus groups with management teams, students, and teachers. Analysis of the results reveals three typical cases relating to the forms and

modes of institutionalization of CCCs: at the level of individual teachers where the development of CCCs is in the hands of teachers in an isolated and diffused way; at the cycle level where the teachers of a cycle as a group direct the process within a context of methodological change; and at the centre level where the development of CCC becomes an institutional feature involving all of the centre's teachers. Each of these cases results in a particular understanding of the concept of CCCs as well as diverse ways of materializing them in teaching-learning processes. The results provide key information that enables critical reflection on the shift from individual experiences to more collaborative institutional and teaching models for developing CCCs in vocational training.

**Keywords:** Cross-curricular competences, basic skills, employability, vocational education and training, Basque Country.

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## Resumen

En la actualidad los enfoques basados en competencias se están convirtiendo paulatinamente en el eje orientador de las políticas generales de educación de la Unión Europea así como de la práctica educativa en los diversos niveles de enseñanza. Sin embargo es necesario analizar y comprender en profundidad cómo se están materializando en la práctica todas las orientaciones prescriptivas generales que fácilmente identificamos en el nivel normativo. Este estudio presenta los resultados de una investigación cuyo objetivo ha sido analizar y caracterizar las prácticas de éxito en el desarrollo de las Competencias Transversales en los centros de FP del País Vasco. Se ha trabajado metodológicamente desde el estudio de caso en el que se ha llevado a cabo una aproximación cuantitativa (cuestionario al profesorado) y, posteriormente, un acercamiento cualitativo a través de entrevistas y grupos de discusión a equipos directivos, alumnado y profesorado. El análisis de los resultados reve-

la tres casos tipo basados en las formas y modos de institucionalización de las CT: a nivel de profesorado individual, donde el desarrollo de las CT está en manos del profesorado de forma aislada y difusa; a nivel de ciclo, donde el profesorado de ciclo en conjunto es quien dirige el proceso dentro de un contexto de cambio metodológico; a nivel de centro, donde el desarrollo de las CT se convierte en una característica institucional que implica a todo el profesorado del centro. Cada uno de ellos produce una comprensión particular del concepto mismo de CT así como maneras diversas de materializarlas en los procesos de enseñanza-aprendizaje. Los resultados aportan claves que posibilitan la reflexión crítica sobre la transición de experiencias individuales a modelos más colegiados de trabajo institucional y docente para el desarrollo de las CT en la Formación Profesional.

**Descriptor:** Competencias transversales, competencias básicas, empleabilidad, educación, formación profesional, País Vasco.

## 1. Introduction

Since European institutions adopted the concept of “functional literacy” (UNESCO, 1970), the need to reconsider the levels of training that are sufficient to enable people to have appropriate socialisation in a setting of rapid global change has become apparent. This reconsideration has come hand in hand with the emergence of the concept of competences and the establishment of a series of key and cross-curricular or generic competences (Perrenoud, 2004; Gimeno-Sacristán, 2008; Monereo, 2009; Poblete, Bezanilla, Fernández-Nogueira, Campo, 2016;

Villardón, 2015). These have gradually become the guiding principle for educational practice across the different levels (Bolívar, 2008) and for the general education policies of the European Union (Delors Report, 1996; OECD DeSeCo project, 2005; European Commission, 2012).

Key and cross-curricular competences involve integrating the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that a person brings into play in a given situation, proving that he or she is capable of resolving it. Despite the ambiguous nature of their conceptualisation (Van der Klink, Boon, & Schlusmans, 2007), competences have

become established as a useful concept for examining the space between academic education and the educational requirements of the labour market (Prahalad & Hamel, 1990; Mulder, 2007; Rué, 2009). In turn, they are seen as a major foundation stone on which to base a new type of education-training that makes social change possible in the knowledge society (Hargreaves, 2003). The newer concept of employability supports this idea, presupposing that individuals who have developed this type of competence will be more capable and better prepared to meet the needs of a changing and somewhat unpredictable labour market (Knight and Yorke, 2003; Rodríguez, 2012).

The concept of competence also has a notable presence in the field of vocational education and training (VET). In the monographic issue of the *Revista Europea de Formación Profesional* dedicated to competence-based vocational education and training, Peter Grootings (1994) concludes that the competence-based paradigm has emerged from the new ways of organising work, and so it is necessary to integrate this focus into vocational education and training programmes. Similarly, Antonio Arguelles and Andrew Gronczi (2000) state that this perspective has become the model to follow to resolve the problems of vocational education and training in more and more countries. Competence-based VET has also become one of the central areas of work for CEDEFOP (Descy and Tessaring, 2001). Since 2000, the Education and Competence Studies Group of the University of Wageningen (Netherlands) has noted in its comparative analysis of countries

such as the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and the Netherlands that, with differing focuses and emphases, the system has spread and become the axis of vocational education and training policies (Mulder 2014).

This new direction reached Spain in 1999 with the creation of the Instituto Nacional de la Cualificaciones (National Qualifications Institute-INCUAL). This initiative was accompanied by regulatory frameworks with the Qualifications and Professional Training Organic Act 5/2002 and after that the Sustainable Economy Act 2/2011. Both these laws aim to develop regulated, occupational, and ongoing training and map out career paths for workers, enabling recognition of the competences acquired and facilitating mobility in training and employment.

Competences-based VET has seen significant growth in the Basque Country, encouraged by the policies implemented by the Instituto Vasco de las Cualificaciones y Formación Profesional (Basque Institute for Qualifications and Professional Training, Decree 119/1998, of 23 June) and the Agencia Vasca para la Evaluación de la Competencia y de la Calidad de la Formación Profesional (Basque Agency for Evaluating Competences and the Quality of Professional Training, Decree 62/2001, of 3 April). In 2005 Tknika<sup>1</sup> was launched, a centre for innovation in vocational education and training and lifelong learning that plays a fundamental role in galvanising methodological innovation with special attention on developing cross-curricular competences. Its contribution therefore joins that of the Asociación de Centros de Formación Profesional

(Association of Professional Training Centres, HETEL, 2008) that defined ten basic competences when developing training cycles, providing guidelines for their methodological development and evaluation. Confebask, the Basque Business Federation (2010), identified thirteen key competences in Basque workers, reinforcing this idea and highlighting the importance of involving economic stakeholders in shaping this process (Weigel, Mulder, & Collins, 2007).

However, as well as the positive views of competence-based focuses, there are also those who emphasise the risks involved in implementing them, as several national and international critical voices have noted (Gimeno-Sacristán, 2008; Barnett, 2001; Coll, 2007). The loss of knowledge and acquisition of skills, the risk of decontextualized use of competences without consideration of the more socio-cultural aspects, and the difficulties relating to evaluation are just some of the problems that have been identified and that must be confronted.

The competence-based focus must, therefore, question curriculum content and the teaching-learning process, thus underlining the need for pedagogical innovations to facilitate this process (Eurydice Report, 2012). Learning tasks are particularly important as they must integrate knowledge, skills, and attitudes, and have an authentic character; in other words, they must be relevant, reflect the complexity of reality, and interconnect with larger tasks. In this way, new (active) methodological proposals appear, often interdisciplinary in nature, in which students are the centre of the educational

process, and so going beyond the traditional discipline-based teaching system (Imbernon & Medina, 2006; Moya, 2008).

Consequently, designing and implementing a form of VET based on competences seems like a complex task which involves overcoming obstacles such as: diversity in the perception of the concept of competences; an excessive trend towards standardisation; the difficult relationship between schools and businesses; traditional styles of design and implementation; evaluation; the new role of teachers; and redesigning the organisation and management of centres (Biemans, Wesselink, Gulikers, Schaafsma, Versteegen, & Mulder, 2009).

From this, we can infer that the competences-based model has become a trend but that it stills lacks guidelines, instructions, and examples to help understand the key elements underpinning the most effective and successful practices. The obstacles that its practical implementation present are the tip of an iceberg that requires indepth research so that policies, programmes, and practices can be based on more solid and scientific foundations.

This framework raises the questions that shape this research: What is happening with cross-curricular competences (CCC) in VET centres? To what extent are teachers and Basque centres implementing practices in which CCCs are developed appropriately? What are these practices like and what lessons can we extract from them?

The Gaitasunez research project<sup>2</sup> had as its objective the in-depth analysis and understanding of how the general

prescriptive CCC guidelines of international, state, and/or autonomous region frameworks are really being put into practice in the Basque Country's VET centres.

Between 2012-2015 a detailed analysis of good practices detected in the case study of Basque VET was carried out with an open perspective, and an awareness of the complex and multidimensional character of the term "good practice" itself (Escudero, 2009). Taking into account the fact that practices will be interpreted and reconstructed by people in their contexts and that they are not implemented in a linear fashion, much less imposed by decree, three typical cases were distinguished that provide a model for best practice to help teachers to situate their own context, reflect, and propose processes for change and improvement. The specific objective of this article is to present the general pedagogical characteristics that define the three typical cases identified.

## **2. Methodology**

The methodology focused on designing a strategy to enable detailed analysis of the Basque Country's network of VET centres. A case study was selected to make possible an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon in its natural settings (Stake, 1998; Vázquez & Angulo, 2003) and a detailed understanding of the different educational realities (Yin, 2003) and their specific characteristics. The case, therefore, comprises all of the specific processes for developing cross-curricular competences that are implemented in the Basque Country's VET centres.

This examination of the context and successful practices was initially done using quantitative techniques to prepare a road map that would help to identify the centres that work on CCCs systematically. Based on this initial approach, qualitative techniques were then used, carefully listening to the voices of the protagonists (teachers and students) and capturing the elements that help with both the detection, and the profiling and interpretation of successful practices.

### **2.1. Research subjects**

The selection of centres and research participants varied according to the phases of the project. In the first phase of identifying centres, 473 teachers participated from 48 of the 61 FP centres (from a finite population of 5500 teachers) who completed an online questionnaire about the CCCs covered in their educational centres.

In phase two, 177 students from 16 previously selected centres, as well as their respective management teams, and 21 teachers (from a smaller group of 7 centres) took part in discussion groups, group interviews, and narrative accounts. These techniques made it possible to record their experiences and opinions of the development of CCCs at the centre, family, cycle, field, and subject-area levels. The students represented covered a total of 33 training cycles (intermediate and higher levels, first and second year) from almost all of the professional pathways. Care was also taken to maintain gender diversity in the constitution of the groups.

## 2.2. Project phases and data collection and analysis techniques

The research phases developed from the need to identify successful practices and locate the practices which were regarded as successful. The initial population (all of the VET teachers in the Basque Country) was reduced to a much smaller number of teachers who, according to the contrasting sources (management teams and students), were felt to be involved in successful practices.

The first phase combined a literature review with empirical research through an online questionnaire (*google.docs*). This questionnaire featured 36 questions, some closed and others open-ended, relating to training received in relation to CCCs, the level to which these competences are developed with students, the use of active methodologies and evaluation techniques, and the relationship with educational innovation processes. The quantitative data were analysed using SPSS for Windows (version 21). A frequency analysis was performed in which all of the questions relating to the themes and objectives of the research were examined to identify the teachers with whom there has been systematic development of CCCs as well as the levels and groups of students with which this is the case.

The second phase examined in greater depth the identification and description of successful practices using qualitative techniques. In particular:

- Group interviews with the management teams of the centres being studied that were initially selected

(Bisquerra, 2012) to compare the results from the questionnaire and identify each centre's institutional approach to CCCs.

- Discussion groups with the teachers from the centres where work on CCCs has an institutional and pedagogical support framework, either at the cycle level or the centre level. A group discussion was carried out in which different trends and repeating patterns in opinions on the development of CCCs (Krueger, 1991) could be identified, compared, and debated.

- In-depth interviews with teachers whose practices were considered successful (by themselves, by management teams, and by students) but that did not have a more comprehensive institutional framework. These were reflective accounts that served both to identify elements of the past and present as well as future expectations for the object of study (Gómez, Latorre, Sánchez, & Flecha, 2007).

Between the two phases discussion groups were held with the students to validate the data derived from the questionnaire (and eliminate centres where the views of the teachers and students did not match) and also to interpret the qualitative data produced in the profiling of the successful practices.

Some general aspects were established to guide the interviews and discussion groups, with a specific semi-structured script being prepared for each group including questions relating to ways of viewing and defining CCCs, ways of conceiving the teaching, relationships with

the students, difficulties when working on CCCs, key elements and factors for success, etc. The “NVivo” (version 10) program was used to codify and analyse the data. This program facilitated the processing and organisation of qualitative data (Sánchez Gómez & García Valcárcel, 2001), and the construction of the category system. Node matrices were prepared for each of the dimensions based on the participants’ attributes.

Credibility, transferability, confirmability, and ethical criteria were used (Guba & Lincoln, 1985). Ethical issues were managed through an informed consent protocol with all participants in which the purpose of the research and the subsequent processing of the data were explained in accordance with Spain’s Personal Data Protection Act of 13/12/1999. Participant anonymity has been maintained throughout the whole research process.

### 3. Results

In this article, we set out the quantitative and qualitative results that enable us to describe successful practices in developing CCCs and analyse characteristics more directly related with pedagogical questions such as their conceptualisation, levels of systematisation and institution-alisation, and the teaching-learning process.

#### 3.1. Conceptualisation of CCCs

Between teachers, students, and the management teams of the centres there is no single way of understanding or defin-

ing CCCs. Nonetheless, this diffuse character does not prevent them from being a generalised term in VET in the Basque Country.

CCCs are present in all centres in some form, given that they are implemented and evaluated. According to the results obtained through the survey, virtually all of the teachers work on the three CCCs included in the questionnaire, namely, “learning to learn”, “team work”, and “innovative and creative thinking”. Just 1.7% of the teachers say that they do not work on these competences “at all”.

“Team work” is the competence worked on the most with 40% of teachers saying that they work on it “a fair amount”, followed by “learning to learn” with 29%. The competence that is least worked on is “innovative and creative thinking”, with 29% teachers saying that they work on it “a little bit”.

Students corroborate, in this case qualitatively, the data recorded by the teachers regarding the presence of CCCs and awareness of their importance in professional training. This collective identifies team work, communication, independence, knowing how to “fail”, etc. as important. For example:

“... in the world of work, team work is vital. Basically, if you won’t work in team, you might as well be planting lettuce, where nobody relies on you, but I think that wherever you are you need, you depend on someone else or even if it isn’t the same company, you are always working to an external benchmark of another person, of another company, so in the end that is

team work too. Because you are pursuing a common objective.” (Student 3)

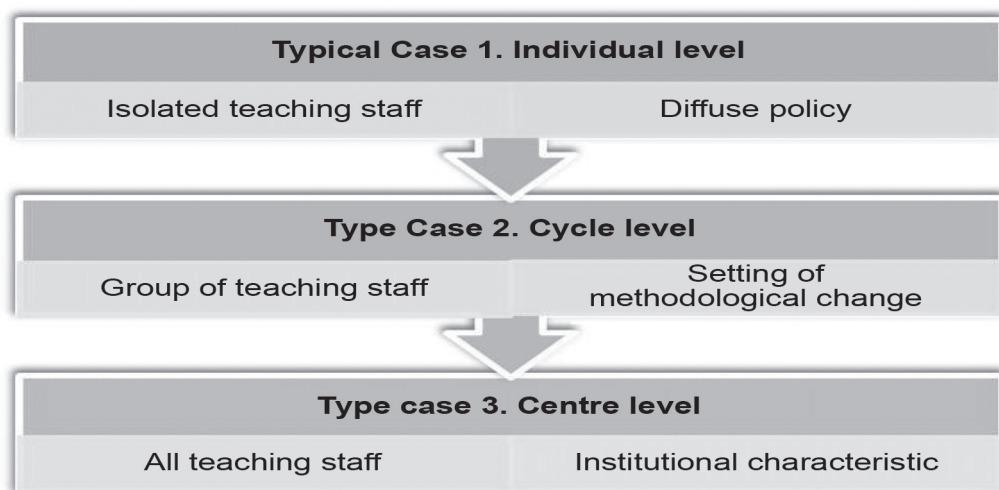
“Punctuality, team work, and also knowing how to talk, because in the end this can be an obstacle for work”. (Student 5)

It is very important to note that CCCs are present in teachers’ practice in VET centres; one sign of this is that students are equally aware of its value for their professional future.

### 3.2. Level of systematisation and institutionalisation of CCCs

In this study, practices in which the teachers, students, and management teams, all independently state that CCCs are intentionally covered are regarded as successful. However, these successful practices differ greatly. A detailed in-depth study enables us to differentiate three levels of institutional systematisation and development of CCCs that we profile in the following typical cases:

FIGURE 1. Type cases of successful practices in the development of CCCs in VET centres.



Source: Own elaboration.

Type case 1. At the level of individual teachers: cases where students recognise CCC work in a module or with a specific teacher. These occur in a more or less isolated and diffuse fashion as there is no explicit centre policy aimed at developing CCCs.

In this context CCCs are seen as specific to subjects such as FOL (Formación y Orientación Laboral –Labour Training and Guidance), EIE (Empresa e Iniciativa Emprendedora – Business and Entrepreneurial Initiative) because they “lend themselves” to these subjects but

that they do not “affect” them and are not covered so much by other teachers. Consequently, CCCs are present but are not cross curricular; they are restricted to an isolated niche in the curriculum where teachers work individually. Most of the centres interviewed are of this type.

Type case 2. At the cycle level with all of the teachers engaged in developing CCCs. Immersion occurs in a setting of a more general methodological move towards challenge-based learning. In this level the teaching team decides which competences they believe are vital to develop and teachers have an in-depth involvement in implementing them. It is difficult to establish how the shift from individual ways of working to more collaborative ones occurs and it is very likely that there is no single pattern. Instead, at a more operational level cycle teachers start working on CCCs based on criteria such as ease of marking on a daily basis and evaluation in all of the modules. In some cases, the cycles are in centres where there is an explicit policy for the institutional development of CCCs but most do not have this. A quarter of the centres interviewed correspond to this typology. In most cases, type case 2 is currently linked to the programme of High Performance Cycles led by Tknika.

Type case 3. At the centre level, a certain degree of systematisation of CCCs to apply across the whole centre is implemented. These centres are characterised by having a centre policy for the development of CCCs so that it has become an institutional feature. In these centres, high performance cycles coexist with cy-

cles and teachers who maintain a more traditional organisational structure and pedagogical practice. In this typical case, management teams have systematised pedagogical work with CCCs, establishing an order and a hierarchy among them for the whole centre, and the teachers adopt this classification and make it their own. While the competences do vary between centres and teachers, they all more or less include the following: team work, problem solving, self-learning, responsibility, attendance and punctuality, organisation, relationship with others, and communication (verbal and non-verbal communication). One teacher explains it as follows:

“In other words, all of us, I think, work on the same competences, more or less, which are the technical competences for each subject area, right? We allocate 50% of the overall mark to them if we do challenge-based work. And then there are three other strategic ones, which are the ones I mentioned earlier: team work, problem solving, and self-learning. And then we have other basic or cross-curricular competences: responsibility, organisation, relationships with others, and then verbal and non-verbal language. For example, in the high performance cycles we have also worked on these competences in more depth. Why? Because that’s what they are going to ask of you in the outside world” (Teacher 1, type 3).

The type 3 cases show significant activity around the evaluation of CCCs, with a portion of the mark, sections adapted to the professional profile are drawn up, and there is intensified monitoring of the evidence.

### 3.3. Characteristics of the teaching-learning processes

According to the data obtained in the survey of teachers, the most common methodologies for CCC development are: project-based learning (22.5%), problem-based learning (17.5%), simulations (17.5%), case studies (15%), cooperative learning (10.5%), analytic approach (9%), others (1%), none used (7%). More traditional strategies are maintained for evaluation, but others also appear that can form alternative pathways more in accordance with a competence-based training approach. Specifically, 49.5% state that they use written exams “a fair amount” and 27.5% “a lot”; 48% use practical exams “a fair amount” and 27% use it “a lot”. Oral presentations are used “a little bit” by 35%, and 41% have used written dossiers.

In general terms, we can note that a common characteristic of these practices is that they are fundamentally directed towards active learning and project and/or challenge-based learning. Even so, we must clearly distinguish between the meaning and the form it acquires in each of the three levels, as will be shown below.

#### 3.3.1. Projects in Type case 1: practical learning, learning by doing, and experiential learning

In this case, the teachers tend to organise small projects, challenges, activities, etc. that are based around students and their learning. The teachers try to structure their teaching to make it more participatory, active, and constructive,

guided by the idea of putting the students in a situation that is similar to what they will encounter in the real world. The work is done using ideas such as: adapting content to reality; construction by the students; reaching out to the reality that the students know; using their language and referents; adaption to particular rhythms; ensuring a close relationship with students; encouraging motivation; and preparing them for real situations through placements, learning by doing and experiential learning, in which the methodology and learning are centred around the students. In the words of one teacher:

“... In the end, you try to be someone who creates a situation, a space, you create time for them to get together. But they have to take the lead, they have to see each other, they have to consider it again, they have to assimilate it.” (Teacher 3, type 1)

In this context, the teachers talk about projects, although in many cases they become more like exercises. It is interpreted as working towards an objective, and the priority is to follow the students’ pace and make the activity theirs.

“And so, what I try to do and I always think about is, above all, that they have to feel very comfortable, they have to be convinced that the project we are going to do is theirs, whether it is good, bad, average, whatever it is like, because if they don’t feel that it is theirs, I’m sorry, it can’t be mine. The project they do has to be theirs, they have to feel ownership even if it seems like an aberration to me.” (Teacher 2, type 1)

The teachers in type case 1 place great emphasis on the educational relationship, in building a bridge between them, the module, and the students to create an intense encounter that leads to meaningful learning.

### 3.3.2. Projects and challenges in type case 2 structuring learning and creating situations

In this case, the CCCs are located in a more general framework of cycle methodological innovation centred on challenge-based cooperative learning. This is the case with High Performance Cycles (ETHAZI)<sup>3</sup>. Teachers see the need to modify the methodology to be able to handle a coherent learning process in line with the effective development of CCCs, always understanding that this is what businesses in the area demand. A challenge is not an exercise; it is an open situation that allows multiple endings and keeps all of the involved parties in a situation of some uncertainty. One teacher explains it as follows:

“So, you know where you are going to start and how, but you don’t know how you are going to finish a challenge or when you will finish it; a good challenge, of course. A challenge that you design in a moment, in the end that isn’t a challenge; it is an exercise, and it’s not about designing exercises, but designing challenges with different alternatives, different durations. So that one group can come up with one solution, and another group will probably come up with another completely different one that is just as good, just as easy”. (Teacher 2, type 2)

In this case the teachers’ efforts are directed towards the ability to solve problems. Students and teachers both see the challenge as a natural learning environment for developing CCCs, where students acquire ever greater levels of independence.

In the High Performance Cycles, there is no single way of creating and developing challenges. Each cycle has its own “life” depending on its context. Working with challenges involves pursuing common objectives and going through various phases. Each cycle designs which phases the project will have and how they will be covered as well as how they will be graded. There is no guide that works and can be replicated in various places, but instead there are some very general common threads and key elements that are repeated in all of the cases studied. Specifically: a vision of the cycle and of building a shared language, developing real challenges with tangible end products, flexible learning spaces and the ability to manage time independently, and ensuring commitment from the students.

Ultimately, we face a situation in which attention has moved from the “fragmented” development of CCCs to the development of the ability to resolve challenges as an ability that brings the other competences together. Teachers realise that the key is condensed in a methodological change that creates the conditions for students to develop an activity, challenges, which have a strongly marked professional character that constantly brings them closer to the world of work.

3.3.3. Projects and challenges in Type case 3. Diversity and methodological decisions at the centre level

In this case CCCs are worked on using mixed strategies. At the level of specific cycles that use a challenge-based methodology, type 2 practices usually coexist with more “local” and individual type 1 practices but form part of an explicit policy of systematic development of the competences in question. We are, therefore, speaking of a case in which the methodological strategies vary according to cycles, modules, teachers, etc.

Two centres show the profile of type case 3 and are a good empirical example from which to extract knowledge. As a specific characteristic, it is worth observing the use of various overarching strategies for developing CCCs such as “the zero challenge” and what we have called “the minimal methodological unit”.

The zero challenge is a test-situation where the whole centre works together. Above all it is experienced as a general initiation to group work, but it has the effect of assigning joint teacher-student time for working on a challenge.

What we call the “minimal methodological unit” strategy, for its part, tries to ensure that in each subject at least one teaching unit is covered in a challenge format. As the teachers recognise, in these cases the limit of the programming is felt much more strongly when working with a challenge, meaning that the challenge is more forced and less natural. In the words of one teacher:

“This is what was decided years ago at the centre level, that every subject

area should have a teaching unit, at least one, in a challenge format, in a format with evaluation by competences etc., and this is what I comply with. I would perhaps like to do more things, but there is also the reality of the programming, right? In other words, in the end I think that it is a very valid methodology, but not for all of the students, because in the same way that there are some students who have told me that really enjoy these challenges, there are others who have said, hey, when are we going back to normal classes. ... I think that if we had a little bit of flexibility regarding the objective and fulfilling 100% of the programming, etc., that might encourage us not to do the teaching unit that this rule establishes, but that we could propose more challenges a bit more naturally”. (Teacher 4, type 3)

This teacher’s reflection puts very interesting final note on practices at an individual level and those that have already moved on to new forms of curriculum at the cycle level. Both can exist and can coexist, the question is for how long and for what purposes. To some extent, this reveals the tension present in the move from an individual subject area practice to a collaborative cycle practice. Official curriculum instructions, which are predominantly seen as content areas that are listed and worked on successively over time in an analytic way, coexist with a comprehensive and overarching didactic strategy –the challenge– that requires time, maturation, creativity, and specific technical knowledge. It is difficult to combine the two within a minimal unit such as the subject area. Moving from one to

the other is only possible, according to the cases analysed, when the cycle teachers, for whatever reasons and under whatever circumstances, decide to assume overall responsibility for the teaching and learning process and manage them in an autonomous and creative way. The role of the centres' management teams in these cases has been support and coverage. Without this twin "bottom up" and "top down" relationship, the process of change would not be possible.

#### 4. Discussion and conclusions

The promotion at a European level of broad training policies based on competences is having a visible impact on VET in the Basque Country at the level of teachers, students, and management teams, as the results of research show. Nonetheless, the prescriptive guidelines that come from the different legal, regulatory, and professional levels are implemented in particular ways according to context, and in this sense, it is important to note that there is no shared idea that gives meaning to the concept of competence, or to cross-curricular competence, as is noted in the literature (Biemans *et al.*, 2009; Mulder, 2007; Riesco, 2008). There are no universal CCCs that are valid for everyone, but instead there are contextual and particular readings for each professional profile and teaching context (Weigel *et al.*, 2007). In this sense, the experiences analysed highlight active efforts by the teachers to reinterpret competences based on the profile and type of the student body, and also the teaching tradition and culture, something that in turn shows a dynamic and open perspec-

tive regarding teaching work and didactic planning.

This diffuse character underlying the concept of competence does not prevent this from being a widely-used term in Basque VET. It can be noted that in educational centres CCCs "are present": they elicit interest, they are selected, put into practice, and evaluated by the teachers. Similarly, the students, perceive the presence of CCCs in their training. Team work appears predominantly. Creativity and innovation, and learning skills are more weakly perceived and need greater attention.

Nonetheless, the study reveals a multitude of "translations", different ways of overcoming the barriers noted by Biemans *et al.* (2009), and enables us to describe them as successful practices: at an individual level, where the teacher chooses to develop CCCs intentionally; at the cycle level, where the teaching team takes collective responsibility for the development of the overall teaching-learning processes; and at the institutional level, where an explicit centre-wide policy supports and guides the development of CCCs.

These successful practices coexist in the Basque system and can even appear simultaneously in a particular centre. From our perspective, they should be interpreted as different "states" in the development of CCCs, that are not necessarily successive or linear, but rather the embodiment of what it is possible to produce in a specific context.

The decision to work on CCCs is more orchestrated and is accompanied by the teaching team and/or the management

team in type cases 2 and 3. More conceptual, methodological, and relational systematisation and depth is attained as well as a greater awareness and perception of the value of CCCs among the students. Specifically, type case 3 has a role relating to the creation of favourable conditions (material, organisational, relational, and of status) for the development of CCCs.

Type case 1 is the most widespread and is very probably present in all centres, although it is difficult to detect in detail. It is the impetus that starts growth and movement towards other alternative forms of curriculum in the cycle.

Following the principles of the development model for competence-based learning presented by Wesselink, Biemans, Mulder, and Van den Elsen (2007), Wesselink, (2010), Sturing, Biemans, Mulder, and De Bruijn (2010), and Mulder (2012) we could say that the features that characterise the typology of cycle are most relevant in aspects relating to defining competences, curriculum design with regards to professional problems, the relationship between learning and real life, the role of the teacher as educator and expert, and the attitude towards learning and professional identity. Nevertheless, aspects such as evaluation and students' own responsibility in the management of learning and knowledge still need greater development.

The results in terms of learning support seeing the type of cycle and particularly the experience of the High Performance Cycles as being of greater relevance and significance from the CCC perspective. Even so, we believe that the levels of satisfaction reflected in our study should, in future, be complemented by a more ex-

haustive analysis of the levels of attainment of competences in terms of learning outcomes and, in particular, from the perspective of employers and/or businesses that cooperate with the centres.

Finally, we should note the importance acquired by the gradual and progressive process of innovative experimentation by the teacher that makes critical reflection on long established curricula and didactic forms possible, as well as the transition from individual experiences to more collaborative models. Similarly, the need for cooperation and active support from the management of the centres as well as from the institutional framework (Escudero, 2012) is clear, such as that offered by Tknika and the sub-department responsible for VET.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> TKNIKA is a centre promoted by the Sub-department of Professional Training and Continuous education of the Department of Education, Universities, and Research of the Basque Government. Through online work, and with the involvement of Vocational Education and Training teachers, this Centre develops innovation projects relating to the technological, educational, and management fields.
- <sup>2</sup> Gaitasunez Project "Buenas prácticas en el desarrollo de competencias clave en los centros de FP de la CAV" funded by the University of the Basque Country, as part of the Universidad-Sociedad call (US12/15), and cofunded by Ikaolan (Association of Public Professional Training Institutes – Asociación de Institutos Públicos de Formación Profesional). Developed within the Grupo de Investigación IkaGura (IkaGura Research Group – GIU 14/08).
- <sup>3</sup> The ETHAZI programme is one of the pillars on which the course of action for pedagogical innovation contained in the IV Plan Vasco de Formación Profesional (4<sup>th</sup> Basque Professional Training Plan) approved by the Basque Government in December 2014 is based: <http://fpeuskadineuws.com/es/index.html>

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# Topography of interpersonal relationships in postmodernity: friendship and education

## *Topografía de las relaciones interpersonales en la postmodernidad: amistad y educación*

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### Abstract

This article considers friendship as a channel for education and as one of its objectives, as it is a necessary ingredient for a fulfilled life. This requires an initial study of interpersonal relationships in the postmodern context, considering their opportunities and risks. Our aim is to draw a topography of these relationships by analysing texts by major thinkers of the last four decades. The result of this analysis is the core of the article, namely, that there are four categories which seem to give a proper account of the characteristics of interpersonal relationships in postmodernity and are relevant in education: 1) the questioning of the individual; 2) the appearance of the internet; 3) the recovery of emotions; and, finally, 4) the extension of the feminine space. As a conclusion, they may all be said to have an ambivalent character that requires central issues in education to be reconsidered: the awareness and emotional regulation; the new constitution of identity and intimacy on the internet; education for male-female relationships, which now

exist outside the sexual sphere, and preventing violence in these relationships; as well as how to educate for cooperation in an individualistic society.

**Keywords:** Civics, friendship, internet, emotions, interpersonal relationships, postmodernism.

### Resumen

Este artículo considera la amistad como cauce para la acción educativa y fin de la misma, ya que constituye un ingrediente necesario de la vida lograda. Ello requiere estudiar previamente las relaciones interpersonales en el contexto postmoderno atendiendo a sus posibilidades y riesgos. El objetivo de este estudio es realizar una topografía de dichas relaciones analizando textos de destacados autores de las últimas cuatro décadas. El resultado del análisis es el eje de la exposición: cuatro categorías parecen articular las características de las relaciones postmodernas y son relevantes en la educación: el cuestio-

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namiento del individuo; la aparición de Internet; la recuperación de las emociones; y la ampliación del espacio femenino. Se concluye que todas tienen carácter ambivalente, lo que obliga a reconsiderar cuestiones educativas centrales: la conciencia y regulación emocional; la nueva configuración de la identidad y la intimidad en la red; las relaciones mu-

jer-hombre, más allá de la esfera sexual, y la prevención de la violencia en ellas; o educar para la cooperación en una sociedad individualista.

**Descriptor:** Educación cívica, amistad, internet, emociones, relaciones interpersonales, postmodernidad.

## 1. Introduction

Education is defined by and justifies itself in accordance with two variables: the needs and possibilities that are intrinsic to the person whose role it is to grow, and the needs and possibilities of the social and cultural context in which everyone develops. Each of these is mutually dependent on the other, because the human being is a social creature. More specifically, interpersonal relationships form the basis of human existence (Winnicott, 1981) and are the horizon on which humans can attain self-fulfilment given that the person is not understood alone (Rof Carballo, 1987). Consequently, the objectives of educational activity do not consider individuals in isolation, but above all their fulfilment, which is intrinsically linked to interpersonal relationships (Romero-Iribas & Martínez Priego, 2011). Friendship has a vital role among these.

The philosophical traditions that see friendship as an essential element of the complete life are well known: from the Aristotelian concept (Aristotle, 1994), passing through Kant (1979), to contemporary work like May's (2012). There are also recent studies that emphasise the

educational possibilities of friendship as a link with a strong ethical character (Welch, 2013), and as a relationship with significant social potential. As Devere states: "the academic debate is invoking friendship as a model that might illuminate issues related to communication, citizenship, international relations, ethnic and cultural identity, peace and conflict" (Devere, 2013, p. 5). In this sense, we are witnessing a resurgence of the concept of civic friendship, directly linked to civic education.

The relationships between education and friendship can be examined from a variety of perspectives, but two broad positions are especially noteworthy: friendship as a means for improving and developing education (Albrecht-Crane, 2005), and education aimed at establishing and maintaining friendship relations, an aspect that appears to be more important than the former. In both cases, the friendship link has a dimension that is intrinsically temporal and, therefore, historical and cultural. This means that "as the social and cultural context of friendship changes over time, so does the meaning of what it is to be a friend" (Pahl, 2000,

p. 1). Consequently, any thorough study of the education-friendship relationship requires the interpersonal relationships that are its foundation to be placed in their historical and socio-cultural framework. To put this of logical terms, they are the *proximate genus* to which the concept of friendship belongs: friendship is a historically and socio-culturally situated interpersonal connection and must be examined as such.

Accordingly, the aim of this study is to create a map showing the *topography* of interpersonal relationships in postmodernity, insofar as they are the *condition of possibility* of friendship. Analysis of some of the most notable sociological and philosophical premises from the second half of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first century offers an interesting panorama of human bonds at the present day. Starting from them, it is easier to understand the sociological and anthropological substrate in which friendship relationships are now experienced, and so formulate their educational implications.

A review of reference literature in these fields was carried out, involving critical analysis of proposals by the identified thinkers and putting them into dialogue with each other (Bauman, 2003; Giddens, 2008; Hochschild, 2008; Illouz, 2007; Nussbaum, 2008; Sennet, 2006); and authors who have examined friendship in depth since 1975: Blanchot (2007), Bloom (1993), Derrida (1998), Lane (1991, 2000), MacIntyre (2001), May (2012), and Pahl (2000). This made it possible to identify features in interpersonal relationships that, once systematised, show the

existence of four large categories. While not exhaustive, these categories provide an overview from which it is possible to consider how friendship bonds are feasible in the contemporary world and under what conditions. This opens the possibility of performing other studies on the friendship-education relationship.

As it is not possible to explain here fully the methodological process of selecting texts, identifying notes, and establishing categories, this article will only set out the results of the study. In other words, what is shown in this work is the moment of synthesis: we will describe the categories that mark the *topos* of interpersonal relationships and identify some of their descriptive notes.

This study is clearly of interest from the educational viewpoint, reflecting both the fact that the friendship relationship allows and encourages personal and social development, and the more novel view that this relationship has significant potential as a social agent. In effect, friendship seems to be a necessary ingredient for personal fulfilment (Aristotle, 1994; Llano, 2002), and it is simultaneously, the result and focus of freedom (Lewis, 2000). Furthermore, the social dimension of friendship is very important with regards to education because of its capacity for promoting and stimulate social change, its creative potential, its current role as an element in social cohesion (Pahl & Spencer, 2006), and its humanising force (Arendt, 1968). These aspects are all very interesting and open new educational perspectives on civic friendship, but they cannot be examined here<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. Postmodernity and interpersonal relationships: education and friendship

Social, economic, geopolitical, and cultural changes of great magnitude have been happening in twentieth and twenty-first century Western societies: a rapid and universal pace of change; a clear awareness of living very differently from in the past; and the appearance of a new social and political agenda where environmental concerns and social movements are increasingly important (Giddens, 2011). There is a strong belief that nothing can be known for certain and the “grand narrative” has collapsed (Lyotard, 1987); consequently, we are witnessing the discrediting of reason and the triumph of relativism. Further elements must be added to this list, including globalisation, the strong presence and influence of social networks, and the consolidation of the information age. For many people, the complexity of problems and their interconnection is much greater than in other periods, with a resultant increase in systemic thinking (Morin, 2011; Polo, 2003). These changes affect all areas of human experience including education and have had a particular impact on interpersonal relationships.

In this way, postmodernity involves a sufficiently abrupt change for rethinking education to be necessary (Bauman, 2007), and it could be argued that something like a “postmodern education” exists (Barrio, 2008) or a *postmodernisation* that radically affects education (Bernal Guerrero, 2011). But in contrast, there are people who consider the postmodern contribution to the theory of education to

be inconsistent (Yuste & Trilla, 2005). On the other hand, there are also those who believe that “there is something about friendship that appears to be quintessentially postmodern. Overwhelmingly friendship has connotations of freedom, choice, individuality and, crucially, subversion” (Pahl, 2000, p. 166).

## 3. A categorical description of interpersonal relationships in postmodernity

In accordance with the analysis of texts on interpersonal relationships in postmodernity that we carried out, four categories were found that draw a topography of these relations and directly affect the experience and comprehension of friendship insofar as it is a human relationship. The first category involves questioning the *individual*, whose leading role is starting to fade. Individualism, commercialisation, the frailty of human bonds, loneliness, and mistrust relate to this category. The second category is the appearance of the *internet* as a new setting for relationships. The transformation of intimacy, online exhibitionism, and the blurring of the public and private are connected to this category. The recovery of the fundamental role of *emotion* in human life is the third category, bringing with it the emotionalising of relationships as its most notable feature. And finally, the *feminine space* and its influence, which includes the growth and feminisation of relationships and the survival of the romantic imaginary. Each of these categories will be briefly presented below, based on the descriptors found in the analysis.

### 3.1. The individual questioned

One of the strongest legacies of modernity is its distinctly individualist character. At the social level, the modern schism between reason and nature leads to the human being going from being regarded as a political animal (Aristotle) to an emancipated individual (Kant). Sociability is not something natural but a consequence of the need to balance personal egotisms; freedom comes to be considered, above all, as independence from anything that is not one's self. People become potential obstacles to personal growth and so each individual looks out for his or her own interests (Innerarity, 1990).

However, while modernity strongly stimulated individuality, a "new sensitivity" (Llano, 2002) has taken shape in postmodernity towards alterity (Levinas, 2004) and also from the educational perspective (Ortega Ruiz, 2016). Ideas such as those of Lane and MacIntyre state that the realisation of the human being is intimately connected to personal relationships. MacIntyre argues that every person in their life passes through moments of dependency —childhood, old age, illness— and so the structure of society and the concept of the common good should be organised around this fact. The human being is effectively located in a network of relations of reciprocity in which, how much each individual can give depends in part on what he or she has received, and what the individual can give depends on what has been received (MacIntyre, 2001). On the other hand, the low levels of social cohesion and personal happiness recorded in Western societies, cast doubt on this ideal. Therefore, Lane

proposes a paradigm shift to move from an "individualist society", that bases its well-being on increasing income, towards a more "friendly society" (Lane, 2000, p. 77), governed by a sense of belonging and companionship.

Because of this, the route to establishing fluid interpersonal relationships that can solidify into true friendship links appears to have opened. Individualism, the primacy of the individual without bonds, is being questioned, and with it the pedagogic naturalism of Rousseau (Altarejos & Naval, 2000). An educational possibility is opening that is not free from risks, since some of the ideas accompanying the development of interpersonal relationships show clear ambivalences. We will describe three of these that help to temper possible optimism surrounding the defeat of individualism: commercialisation of human bonds, their frailty, and loneliness.

One danger that threatens individualist societies is becoming communities where people mutually exploit each other: if the human being is someone whose realisation depends only on his or her self and who is in competition with other individuals, others become a potential instrument for one's own self-realisation. This way, a functioning logic that objectifies people as it sees them as a means to one's own ends can enter interpersonal relationships: something that has been called the *commercialisation of relationships*.

The influence of the market on human relations in contemporary life is a topic that has been covered at length: Tiquun's radicalism (2001), Illouz's

emotional capitalism (2007), humanism, constructivist sociology, etc. According to Bauman, interpersonal relationships appear to be equated with commercial relationships of exchange; therefore, time, effort, and money are dedicated to them in the expectation of receiving security, closeness, help, company, or solace in exchange (Bauman, 2003). Here we find a commercial relationship in which people become consumer objects: one is connected to them insofar as they are a source of profit and they are abandoned when this disappears or another product —a relationship— is found that provides more profit.

Alongside this position, on the lines of ambivalence we identified, there are authors such as Lane, May, or Pahl who believe that “the critique of the influence of the market on human relations is largely unjustified” (Lane, 1991, p. 205) because, despite everything, interpersonal relationships separate themselves, by their very nature, from this functioning logic. Consequently, May (2012) considers that the existence of relationships such as true friendship, which is essentially disinterested, is in itself a challenge to the dominant neoliberal paradigm of our times.

In contrast, the importance of personal autonomy to individualism means that relationships are seen as a loss of freedom and not as a route to personal fulfilment, and so *bonds become frail*, they lose strength. Commitment is seen as something oppressive that restricts one’s own freedom and the fear of depending on another appears. We are facing what Bauman graphically calls *liquid relationships* and that he describes thus:

Having no bonds that are unbreakable and attached one for all, the hero [of our liquid society] must tie together whatever bonds they want to use as a link to engage with the rest of the human world by their own efforts (...) Unbound, they must connect (...) None of the connections (...) are however guaranteed to last (Bauman, 2003, p. vii).

Another consequence of a society with labile interpersonal bonds is *loneliness*, a shadow that hangs over the Western world. Simmel (1977) turned his attention to the loneliness of the person of today and, more recently, Giddens (2008) has stated that people develop in isolation. It is also apparent that loneliness has a significant effect on the USA and advanced Western societies, and not just among the old but also in young people: there is evidence that many people feel lonely (Bloom, 1993).

Certainly, the dominant culture of egotism and pursuit of comfort and self-interest makes it difficult to establish the deep, lasting personal relationships, such as family or friendship bonds, that provide relief from loneliness. “Loneliness has a more specific and subjective cause (...) the absence of intimacy was the strongest determinant of loneliness. It is the lack of someone to confide in and with whom to share one’s feelings and thoughts that is experienced as loneliness” (Lane, 2000, p. 85).

Another consequence of thin fragile bonds is that trust between people is harmed. “The widespread (...) conscience, that all relationships are ‘pure’ (fragile, breakable, destined to last only for as long

as they are convenient and so with an expiry date) is not fertile soil for trust to take root and bloom" (Bauman, 2003, p. 212).

Paradoxically, trust is becoming more and more necessary for social and personal life, since it is no longer provided by our surroundings and because, at a personal level, there is a fear of commitment that also cannot be reciprocated.

The question that arises within this framework is whether educational activity will be possible in a setting of generalised mistrust, for example the teacher-pupil relationship (Postareff & Lindblom-Ylänne, 2011). In effect, the certainty that arises alongside what is known starts in the student with trust: the student first says *I believe you*, before saying *I understand* (Altarejos, 1988).

## 3.2. The internet

Another reality or category in our methodological approach that helps to draw and understand personal relationships today is the internet.

Thanks to the internet, we live in a highly-connected world with a simultaneous absolute lack of communication. The internet makes a multicultural world visible, putting multiple ways of life and ways of thinking into contact and so giving rise to a new worldview. However, it could be said that there has never been such a quantity of information nor such ease of communication alongside such loneliness and trivialisation of the information's content. It is not uncommon today to find that many people live lives that are genuinely disconnected from those around them, but

are virtually connected to others who are far away and whom they might only know online. It seems that: "the *circulation* of messages *are the message* - don't mind the content" (Bauman, 2003, p. 54).

Furthermore, bonds are quickly and easily established on the internet, and their quantity can multiply exponentially. But they are indirect, mediated bonds with a certain disembodiment of the users. This reveals that it is a *new setting for relationships*, one that requires unprecedented rules. In fact, it shapes the type of imagination that appears, for example, in cyberdates. The internet does not allow an intuitive imagination but rather a prospective one that is "disconnected from one's intuitive, practical, and tacit past knowledge" (Illouz, 2007, p. 222). Similarly, this imagination is marked by the hegemony of verbal language, given that online relationships are, particularly in the cognitive dimension, supported almost exclusively by texts because of physical absence. Communication is hampered because it lacks the information provided by non-verbal language.

*The transformation of intimacy* is a complex matter that can be approached from various perspectives (Illouz, 2009; Giddens, 2008; Baudrillard, 1985), and deserves specific study from an educational perspective. Two elements are especially notable in the relationships between the internet and intimacy: the substitution of authenticity by appearance (Nubiola, 2013) and a new configuration of identity itself, as it has changed from something private to become a public and emotional matter, as Illouz observes. Uploading a profile onto the internet involves turning the self into

something public and visible to everyone. "On the internet, the private psychological self becomes a public performance" (Illouz, 2007, p. 78). It is a technology that presupposes and puts into action an *ego* and means that this public emotional *ego* precedes and shapes private interactions.

On the other hand, the consecration of appearance in the definition of the *ego* itself is well reflected in the phenomenon of *posturing* that involves adopting a pose to impress those who see, read, or listen to us. The mediated nature of the internet allows for actions such as the possibility of reflecting before acting or expressing something. Therefore, it gives the option of concealing one's own identity or displaying an artificial image of one's self. This becomes problematic when an online relationship is established, given that this is not based on the reality of *who I am*, but on the construct of *who I want to be seen as*. Consequently, being and appearing become confused, and appearance becomes the new paradigm.

Finally, *private lives become public* online, and the logics of both spheres are inverted. We are witness to a constant *exhibitionism* in which what is surprising is not just the *publicness* of the private, but above all the need to publicly show the personal. As Deresiewicz observes:

The most disturbing thing about Facebook is the extent to which people are willing —are eager— to conduct their private lives in public. (...) Perhaps I need to surrender the idea that the value of friendship lies precisely in the space of privacy it creates: not the secrets that two people exchange so much as the unique and invi-

olate world they build up between them, (...) There's something faintly obscene about performing that intimacy in front of everyone you know. Are we really so hungry for validation? So desperate to prove we have friends? (Deresiewicz, 2009).

Nonetheless, the internet also opens important educational opportunities. The role of the internet in the training and development of civic virtues (Naval & Arbués, 2015) is especially noteworthy owing to its scope.

### 3.3. The recovery of emotions

It seems clear that emotion is another of the categories that help to draw the map of interpersonal relationships nowadays, thanks to the rediscovery of their relevance in human life, their spread into the masculine world (they were previously associated almost exclusively with the feminine), and even because they have come to be seen as a fundamental factor in relationships in the business world. Hochschild, the founder of the sociology of emotion, is one of the contemporary authors who has most emphasised their importance in human life.

On the other hand, we are simultaneously present at a significant *emotionalising* of society and relationships. Some visible consequences of this are the establishment of the *ego* as something emotional or the reduction of human bonds such as friendship to mere sentiment, affect, or affinity (Deresiewicz, 2009).

It is worth insisting that the significance that the emotional dimension of the human being has regained enriches reflection

about on them and their relations, not just because these are nowadays strongly marked by the emotions (emotivism), but also because sociology, psychology, and education are actively concerned with studying this aspect (Damasio, 2006; Hochschild, 2008; Illouz, 2007). Studies such as those by Nussbaum stand out, according to which the various phenomena in our emotional life are correctly explained by regarding emotions as evaluations or value judgements, a novel claim from the rationalist perspective, but one with clear philosophical and psychological antecedents (Scheler, 2005; Lazarus, 1984).

Furthermore, emotions are gradually becoming a recognised part of the masculine realm. The emotional style that has dominated the cultural panorama of the USA since 1920, and that has been so important in providing a language for the ego and social interactions, had an influence on redefining masculinity in the world of work. Nowadays, even professional competence in the company is evaluated in emotional terms: the ability to create social bonds and the capacity to accept and establish empathic relationships with others. As Illouz notes, managers had to incorporate “attention to emotions, controlling anger, and listening sympathetically to others” (Illouz, 2007, p. 4). This also implied notable emotionalising.

It seems unnecessary to state how this category of interpersonal relationships has broken new ground in educational activity, precisely with the development of emotional education derived from, for example, studies on *emotional intelligence* (Mayer & Salovey, 1997; Bisquerra, 2013; Gil & Martínez, 2016).

### 3.4. The feminine space and its influence

The final category that helps to draw a topography of interpersonal relationships, and affects the experience and understanding of friendship is the *growth of the feminine space* and its influence. It is clear that the new presence of women in society, resulting from the large-scale incorporation of women into the worlds of work and education, has broadened and reshaped interpersonal relationships, transforming them in society and the family and other intimate relationships.

Relationships between men and women now occur in the private and public spheres, and so the feminine social space has grown, not just through a greater presence and participation by women in the public sphere, but also through the expansion of the intra-space of women in the field of the family and the private sphere. The fact that men and women have become equal in many aspects, has also created an opportunity to enrich relationships between them in that sphere. Similar education, similar social experiences, and the weight of professional relationships in the lives of both have helped to create a space for equality between women and men that shapes their relationships in a different way. Specifically, friendship between women and men finds fertile soil and widespread possibilities in contemporary society that were unavailable until now in Western society, given that, as Aristotle notes, friendship requires a certain degree of equality.

There is however a lack of codes to interpret adequately the phenomenon of friendship between sexes nowadays, and

so this is one of the challenges that arises in the twenty-first century. The current codes are insufficient for explaining this reality without it, for example, being mediated by sexuality, an area where a strong influence of the *romantic imaginary* can still be seen.

Another area to consider in relationships in the contemporary world is what has been described as a certain *feminisation* of the masculine sex. This refers more to openness towards different experiences, capacities, and roles—that inaugurate a new relationship in the family field and in the work and social fields—than to a potential loss of masculinity, although it might be this in the sense of abandoning certain of its roles.

Masculinity has been redefined in the field of work, because, as stated above, since 1920 it had been felt that controlling emotions was part of managerial competences, emotions traditionally having been attributed to the feminine world. The psychologist Mayo discovered that productivity increased if labour relations considered the feelings of the workers. Without being fully aware of it, a process then began “in which aspects of women’s emotional experiences and selfhood were incorporated into the new guidelines to manage human relationships in the modern workplace” (Illouz, 2007, p. 15).

The anthropologist Cucó notes in a study on friendship that “alongside the trend for the domestication of community life there seems to have occurred a certain *feminisation of the areas of sociability and friendship*” (Cucó, 1995 p. 79). Since the end of the twentieth century, masculine

friendships, traditionally created and conducted in the public sphere, have also moved into the domestic sphere as a consequence of a new reorganisation of work and life in cities.

#### 4. Conclusions and discussion

The conclusions that can be drawn from the research objective of these pages, in other words, from drawing up a topography of interpersonal relationships in postmodernity—recalling that they are a premise for friendship relations and their role in education—are somewhat ambivalent, like postmodernity itself.

In effect, modernity focused on the subject, and developed into the experience and theorisation of the autonomous and isolated individual. In this context, interpersonal relationships, and with them friendship, enter a state of crisis. Postmodernity made an important effort to overcome this but does not seem to have achieved it as the commercialisation of relationships, the frailty of human bonds, and the subsequent mistrust and loneliness persist. The internet has led to an expansion of the world, and so there is more space for interpersonal relationships and with them friendship; however, in this new setting for relationships, speed, disembodiment of users, and how intimacy is compromised in cyberspace, are critical questions. The realm of instrumental reason is being overwhelmed by the recovery of emotions; and yet emotivism, the reduction of human bonds to mere emotion, makes it hard to establish lasting relationships. Finally, the growth of the feminine space—perhaps the most

positive of the categories in absolute terms—favoured by the just presence of women in the different areas of human life, has meant that some relationships such as friendship between men and women have been redefined.

Each of these categories, which are connected to the friendship link as one of the objectives of education, insofar as it is part of the fulfilled life and a factor for social development, opens important areas for consideration by educational theory and for the practice of education. Some of them have already been identified. Others derive from the categorical description given up to here.

1. The necessary dialogue of postmodernity with pedagogical naturalism and the need to overcome the concept of *emancipation* insofar as it implies the undoing of bonds. The attempt to articulate emancipation, understood as an absence of bonds, and the intimate human need for interpersonal relationships, makes existence stressful. Autonomy as the highest ideal of education—not as a developmental moment and personality trait—is unrealistic for two reasons: firstly, because education involves being helped by others, and secondly because radicalised independence leads to loneliness. This radical absence of bonds also has an influence on people's relationship with the sacred, as can be seen in the demystification of the world and the disappearance of the sacred.

2. How to educate for cooperation and collaboration—current points of reference in the training of new generations—in a society that is simul-

taneously plural and multicultural but has a strong individualist heritage.

3. The urgent need to tackle emotional education intentionally and effectively from formal educational spaces too; in other words, promoting the emotional awareness and regulation of pupils at school (Cabello González, Fernández-Berrocal, Ruiz-Aranda, & Extremera, 2006). This includes the desirability of using educational interventions to overcome the reduction of the person and his or her relationships to emotivity, mere sentiment, affect, or affinity.

4. The educational treatment of the different challenges the internet poses. Firstly, the new definition of identity itself, that involves combining appearance and authenticity, something that requires ethical education. Secondly, the transformation of intimacy resulting from the conversion of private life into public on the internet; in other words, education in valuing and respecting intimacy (Martín Montilla, Pazos Gómez, Montilla Coronado, & Romero Oliva, 2016). Thirdly, life in a world that is highly connected and at the same time very solitary, raising the need to humanise cyberspace. Fourth, the mediation of relationships on the internet that confronts us with a new way of relating where physical presence is not full or immediate, something that has a direct influence on communication.

5. In relation to the *expansion of the feminine space*, central issues arise such as: education for equality and the shared responsibility of women and men in private and public spaces

(Elósegui, 2003); preventing situations of violence; and educating men for a world recently colonised by women, albeit still only in some areas.

Along with these fields, other important areas for research are appearing. On the one hand, the friendship-education relationship must be reconsidered to see how friendship bonds are possible and under what conditions in the contemporary world, considering the importance they might take on in the ethical and civic fields.

Furthermore, education must reconsider the potential of friendship, as overcoming a large part of the challenges and ambivalences of postmodernity shown here might theoretically and effectively be in the hands of friendship as an interdependent link that requires trust, respect, and mutual and consistent affection, based on shared intimacy, and that achieves social cohesion.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This question, which started with Aristotle, has been taken up again in the context of civic republicanism by Philip Pettit and in the context of feminist currents—highly visible in the contemporary debate—such as the proposal by Sybil Schwarzenbach who expands the pillars of the concept of Western democracy with civic friendship.

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# Emphasis and limitations of teaching oral communication: an analysis of the Chilean curriculum based on its stated theoretical model

## *Énfasis y limitaciones de la enseñanza de la comunicación oral: un análisis del curriculum chileno, a partir del modelo teórico declarado*

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### Abstract

The Chilean curricular framework defines three main areas for teaching language and communication: writing, reading, and oral performance, which are supported by the communicative approach. The lack of literature review carried out on this topic reveals a lack of research relating to the coherence between the curriculum and the theoretical frameworks that support the teaching of this competence. This study reviews the study programmes that guide the teaching of oral communication in level two of elementary schools in Chile. To do so, each of the learning outcomes of these programmes was analysed and compared with theoretical categories from the communicative competence model. The results show that, while the design considers the different competences, there is still a lack of attention to the criteria of progression criteria and increasing complexity. This is reflected in the absence of systematic and

well defined teaching strategies as well as the over representation of the expositive genre in the proposed strategies.

**Keywords:** Chilean curriculum, teaching oral skills, communicative approach, competences, elementary education.

### Resumen

El marco curricular chileno define tres ejes de enseñanza en lenguaje y comunicación: escritura, lectura y oralidad, los cuales se sustentan en el enfoque comunicativo. La revisión bibliográfica realizada da cuenta de la escasez de investigaciones que indaguen la coherencia entre el curriculum y los marcos teóricos que sustentan la enseñanza de esta competencia. El presente trabajo examina los programas de estudio que orientan la enseñanza de la comunicación oral en el segundo ciclo básico, en el contexto chileno. Para

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ello, se analiza cada uno de los objetivos de aprendizaje de estos programas, contrastándolos con las categorías teóricas derivadas del modelo de competencia comunicativa. Los resultados evidencian que el diseño, pese a considerar las distintas competencias, desatiende los criterios de progresión y complejidad creciente. Esto se ve reflejado en la falta

de dispositivos definidos y sistemáticos para la enseñanza, así como en la sobrerrepresentación del género expositivo en las estrategias propuestas.

**Descriptor:** Currículum chileno, enseñanza de la oralidad, enfoque comunicativo, competencias, Educación Básica.

## 1. Introduction

Formal education has traditionally made space for the study and practice of oral discourses. A clear legacy of the classical era, this is common practice in educational institutions that value the ability to persuade an audience through speeches prepared in accordance with some type of accepted logic and almost entirely limited to formal settings where the existing norms of verbal courtesy and careful diction predominate. The scenario described here refers to the most common model of oral expression that has, with some minor variations, shaped both the curriculum and teaching practices throughout history. This is even more significant if we consider the fact that other socially important institutions such as parliament, churches, and the media, not only encouraged this model, but that saw themselves as the obvious settings for competent oral expression.

Both the model of the good orator (who is capable of persuading or convincing) and that of the good speaker (who has careful diction) started to lose importance towards the end of the twentieth century, very probably because of the media's rapidly

growing coverage and, in particular, its interactive nature: suddenly, the radio and TV were full of ordinary unaffected voices; meanwhile, rhetoric gradually withdrew from public platforms. In parallel, communicative focuses, which were already extensively used in the teaching of second languages, spread to the teaching of the mother tongue, a trend which the Chilean national curriculum formally joined in the early 1990s. Similarly, since the start of the twenty-first century, we have been witness to the ubiquity of information technologies, making multimedia platforms accessible to anyone, and so the traditional filters concerning an ideal spoken performance have ceased to exist: nobody controls the diction of the speakers on these platforms or evaluates their rhetorical power. It is therefore unsurprising that there is a clear divide between what the school system attempts to teach and what actually happens in other spheres of social interaction.

Nonetheless, among specialists, the need to assume an active role in the development of oral communicative competences in the school system survives: "schools are obliged to provide their students with the common reference points of their

language that will allow them to integrate socially and professionally without needing to abandon their traditional customs” (Ruiz, 2000, p. 14). Agreeing with this vision, the Chilean national curriculum has identified oral communication as one of its main teaching areas, alongside reading and writing.

The challenge of developing oral communicative skills faces various difficulties, some of which are not easily resolved. One of these relates to knowledge of the basics of oral language, its nature, dynamics, and transcendent meaning beyond its practical use. Certainly, reflection on these topics does not have a sufficiently central place, instead being marginalised by the almost universal interest in written language. In a literate society, the expectation is that citizens will be competent readers and writers, and so many of the efforts of public education policies focus on this objective, constrained by the permanent pressure of standardised tests, which not only exclude oral expression, but also restrict the field of communicative competence to a few functional applications.

Another limitation, largely resulting from the previous one, is the scarce specialised knowledge of oral language available in the field of pedagogy. Schools are required to take responsibility for developing the competences associated with oral expression, but they do not have the relevant, systematic, and applied knowledge that is required (Fernández, 2008; Pérez, 2009; Núñez & Hernández, 2011).

Along the same lines, there is a belief, among many teachers, that oral commu-

nication is a skill that develops naturally from early childhood and, so, does not require a systematic approach as it is sufficient to consolidate certain formal aspects (Garrán, 1999; Pérez, 2009). On top of this, there is a widespread perception among teachers that there is limited time available for the systematic teaching of these skills in the classroom and a lack of interest among students in absorbing new linguistic varieties that differ from those they bring from their own speech community (Pérez, 2009). This, to some extent, illustrates the limited recognition of a didactic identity for oral expression, which leads to an infrequent and intuitive treatment in teaching and learning.

Regarding the initial training of language students, Jover (2014) notes that teachers’ lack of theoretical and methodological foundations is also a result of their professional training. Apparently, the academy does not supply the necessary tools for the contents or conceptual frameworks of the discipline to be taught effectively in the field of the teaching of oral communication. The incorporation of text and discourse linguistics, and of the sociolinguistic aspects implicated in the use of language in initial teacher training (language teachers) “has not, in most cases, been accompanied by practical experience in the teaching of oral skills” (Jover, 2014, p. 75).

## 2. Approaches to studies in oral expression

Considering the problems described above, a general overview of the studies

that consider oral communication is appropriate. The review of this field reveals three fields of production: reflections on oral communication, didactic proposals for teaching it, and research that examines related topics.

As for reflections, we find studies that cover topics relating to:

- The problems and tensions that teachers face when they decide to include oral communication teaching in their professional practice (Vila & Vila, 1994).

- The importance of the linguistic, textual, and pragmatic knowledge that the pupils bring from their families and sociocultural environments (Rodríguez, 1995).

- Teachers' ideas regarding the teaching of oral expression for intervention in and transformation of their practices (Gutiérrez, 2008).

- The contribution of information and communication technologies (ICT) to the process of teaching oral communication in the classroom (Guzmán, 2014).

For their part, among the publications that make proposals for teaching oral communication, ones with following focuses stand out:

- A didactic model for developing oral macro-skills (Núñez, 2002).

- Experiences for developing oral communicative competences, presented in their sociolinguistic, strategic, discursive, and linguistic components, based on classroom work with different discourse genres (Palou & Bosch, 2005).

- Didactic instruments for teaching oral language, based on specific communicative skills and strategies and basic rules of communicative interaction (Pérez, 2009).

- The development of text typologies, based on conversational exchange and the functioning of interruptions (Núñez & Hernández, 2011).

- Developing students' linguistic skills through three main areas: oral linguistic register, reflection through argument, and research (Vila & Comajoan, 2013).

- Proposals for teacher self-training in skills for teaching oral language, through educational research and the development of formative assessment projects (Gutiérrez, 2013).

Finally, among research pieces, there are ones that examine topics such as:

- Phases of communicative interaction in argumentative oral texts produced by students (Marinkovich, 2007; Salazar, 2008).

- The presence of grammatical strategies for expressing the evidential meaning in oral argumentative discussions (González & Lima, 2009).

- The difficulties and tensions that teachers report concerning oral expression as teaching object (Gutiérrez, 2012).

- The conversational mechanisms used by students in classroom activities from a sociocultural focus (García & Fabregat, 2013).

According to the review we performed, many the works agree on areas related to theoretical and methodological reflection

on oral communication, and on suggestions for teaching them. Without wishing to cast doubt on the importance of the information these sources provide, we believe it is necessary to have research that empirically studies the various problems that underlie the teaching and learning of this competence, as well as the focuses and beliefs that support the teaching of oral communication in the convergences and divergences between the curriculum and teaching practice regarding this competence and, as a necessity, in diagnoses that reveal the level of acquisition of this skill by the students.

Based on the overview described, this piece intends to examine the relationship between the Chilean national curriculum and the theoretical frameworks underpinning it. Specifically, we have undertaken to examine the study programmes that guide the teaching of oral communication in level two of elementary school (year 5 to year 8). To do so, we analyse each of the learning objectives of these programmes, comparing them with the theoretical categories derived from the communicative competence model.

The decision to focus on this teaching cycle, was because of its importance in the process of acquiring the oral and written production skills, that are supposed to be consolidated subsequently in secondary education.

### 3. Oral language in the context of communicative competences

The concept of competence in the field of language and communication studies has been the object of countless

approaches, something explained by at least three reasons: 1) the fierce controversy that arose from the initial critique of Chomsky's perspective, recognised as the formal origin of the theoretical notion of competence in linguistics; 2) the impact of the reworking of the concept in the field of communication, sociology, pedagogy, and other human sciences; 3) the valuing of the linguistic and communicative component in the field of professional and workplace development, as it is an indispensable competence.

While this controversy has led to very different reworkings of Chomsky's position (Chomsky, 1965), it is useful to refer briefly to the importance of the identified critique. The postulation of a self-contained system (Taylor, 1989; Lakoff, 1991), that disregards the speech situation and virtually all pragmatic factors including, obviously, sociocultural variation, does not account for the skill set required to construct meanings and cannot ultimately explain how we communicate effectively (Raiter & Zullo, 2004). Generativist models of linguistic competence are, therefore, regarded as defective models of the social nature of language and communicative functions, and so functionalist and pragmatic trends appear as alternatives with more explanatory power, in accordance with epistemological definitions that contradict the Chomskyan approaches.

The tension between the notion of linguistic competence and the need to account for the set of phenomena at play in communication gives rise to critiques that are relevant to formal linguistic studies. For example, Lyons (1997), when establishing

the distinction between grammaticality and acceptability, draws attention to various phenomena that might mean that an utterance lacks acceptability for the listener, even though it fulfils the rules of construction. On the other hand, the “pragmatic turn” (Rorty, 1990; Wittgenstein, 2003), expressed especially in the pragmatics of speech acts (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969), contributes not only to the critique of the generative view, but also, in the field of applied linguistics, to the consolidation of communicative focuses in teaching, especially second language teaching.

At the start of the 1970s, D. H. Hymes started to define a concept of communicative competence, in other words, a type of knowledge that explains linguistic usage, beyond the sharing of syntactic rules. As well as proposing the integration of linguistic theory with a theory of communication and culture, Hymes (1971) discusses the distinction between the grammaticality, feasibility, and appropriateness of linguistic statements, from the perspective of the language users. Consequently, he believes that “competence” is the more general term for a broad set of human skills and that it includes both tacit knowledge and the skill to use it.

A sufficiently descriptive definition of communicative competence, based on these postulates, is the one provided by Niño Rojas:

We understand communicative competence as knowing how to communicate in a field of knowledge and knowing how to apply it, abilities that comprise types of knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values

(preconditions, criteria, customs, rules, norms, etcetera) that enable people to perform efficient communicative acts, in a given context, according to needs and aims. (Niño Rojas, 2011, p. 25).

Despite the reasonably generalised agreement on the extent and nature of this knowledge, the models proposed to describe, teach, and evaluate communicative competences differ in some categories. Bachman and Palmer (1996), for example, establish a distinction between organizational knowledge on the one hand, comprising a grammatical knowledge and textual knowledge, and on the other hand pragmatic knowledge. Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell however (1995), propose a five-part model that includes linguistic, strategic, sociocultural, actional, and discourse competences.

In general, there is agreement on a type of competence relating to knowledge of the linguistic code; another referring to the strategic application of knowledge to be able to function in different communicative situations; and a competence relating to the knowledge of all the types of linguistic variation. These levels are already differentiated in Canale & Swain’s postulate (1980), revised by Canale (1983), that aims to meet the challenges of teaching second languages. This model has been a clear reference point in its field, but its influence has also spread towards the promotion of the communicative focus for teaching students’ first language. Therefore, its presence in the Chilean national curriculum is no surprise. The following list sets out the details of the competences considered in the curriculum framework for language teaching appears below:

1. Grammatical competences:
  - a. Linguistic competence: the capacity to handle the grammatical components of one's own language.
  - b. Discourse competence: the capacity to construct texts, both oral and written.
2. Pragmatic competences:
  - a. Functional or illocutionary competence: the ability to distinguish communicative intentions and aims.
  - b. Sociolinguistic competence: socio-cultural in nature, this is the speaker's ability to distinguish the patterns of cultural appropriateness to the context, such as register and courtesy.
  - c. Strategic competence: this encompasses the appropriate use of persuasive strategies and formal choices to attenuate undesired effects (MIN-EDUC, 2009).

#### 4. Oral communication in the national curriculum

Oral communication, along with writing and reading, is identified as one of the main areas of the Curriculum Framework and Study Programmes for elementary and intermediate teaching in Chile. In accordance with the foundations of the curriculum, oral language is considered to be "one of the main resources that students possess for learning and participating in the life of the community: through it, knowledge is shared and created jointly with others; in other words, it creates a shared culture" (Mineduc, 2012, p. 10). Consequently, the development of this competence is a crucial factor in the education of independent students who can

share and build knowledge in a democratic society.

While it is true that the curriculum framework states the importance of oral communication by making it one of the three main areas identified by the programmes for studying language and communication, it also recognises that it is one of the areas with the greatest weaknesses in its theoretical and methodological treatment. In the classroom, the teaching of communication is reduced to unilateral transmission of knowledge by the teacher and verification of what the students know and understand by asking them questions, to the detriment of the development of communicative skills that promote the capacity for reflection and thought.

We will now present our analysis of the communicative competences in the oral communication part of the teaching objectives of the study programmes of the Chilean curriculum for years 5 to 8 of elementary schooling, in accordance with the proposal by Canale and Swain (1983) adapted by Mineduc (2009). This examination focusses on the conceptual and methodological treatment of each competence, and the emphases and the limitations.

##### 4.1. Grammatical competence

###### 4.1.1. Linguistic competence

The analysis of the objectives for years 5 to 8 regarding the development of oral expression, proves that linguistic competence is associated with the handling of structural elements from different levels

of language. Nonetheless, the prominent position of vocabulary teaching at all levels is apparent. With regards to this component, the continued acquisition of a varied, precise, and formal vocabulary is promoted to achieve the aim of clear and appropriate expression before an audience. Even in year 5, this structural component has a specific objective: “Incorporate relevantly in their oral interventions new vocabulary taken from texts that have been listened to or read” (Mineduc, 2012, p. 47). The importance given to vocabulary in the school setting might be based on the belief that “broad and precise handling of the lexicon guarantees the possession of sufficient communicative skills” (Núñez & Del Moral, 2010, p. 2); however, without ignoring its importance, it should be noted that this is another component of linguistic competence that must be integrated into the set of communicative skills.

As well as lexical development, grammar teaching is explicitly identified as one of the objectives examined. Grammatical content that focusses on the teaching of oral communication specifically relates to morphosyntactic aspects such as conjugating verbs correctly, using irregular participles correctly, and favouring varied syntactical constructions over familiar or colloquial ones, and with aspects relating to the coherence and cohesion of oral texts to achieve clear and effective expression. The concept of “correctness” appears in connection to grammar but not vocabulary or phonetic-phonological elements; however, their appropriateness the communicative context is expressly stated.

Another element that stands out in the development of this competence, at the declarative level, relates to the phonetic-phonological elements needed to develop clear and effective expression in oral speeches and presentations to an audience. Resources such as an audible volume, intonation, use of pauses and emphasis appropriate to the communicative situation, as well as clear pronunciation, are at all levels regarded as elements that influence and shape oral texts. In this regard, it would be important to know how teachers approach the teaching of these items or the development of these communicative skills in their students, as this requires the handling of disciplinary content that is specific to this linguistic level, and so its presence in initial teacher training would seem to be a necessity.

#### 4.1.2. Discourse competence

This competence relates to how grammatical forms and meanings are combined to create a coherent spoken or written text in different genres (Canale, 1983).

This competence is the one that most often appears in study programmes, especially in years 5 and 6 of elementary school. This would indicate that their emphasis is placed on developing oral skills to construct successfully different text types in accordance with their particular features.

At these same levels, one of the main aims of the learning objectives related to this competence is the development of comprehension by reading a variety of texts: explanations, instructions, news, documentaries, interviews,

testimonies, stories, reports. The methodological proposals promote activities related to expressing orally or in writing an assessment of what is seen or heard in class, formulating questions, and giving well-grounded opinions. On the other hand, in years 7 and 8 there is no increased variation in the text types used, but there is in the objective they pursue, given that comparison and evaluation of what these texts say are added to comprehension.

While gradual changes to the teaching objectives can be seen, there is no greater variation in the treatment given to the different text types. They are viewed as a means for developing comprehension or other skills. It is apparently taken for granted that students can handle key aspects for understanding a given text, such as reconstructing its structure and the regular features that comprise it as such.

For its part, the production of oral texts principally focusses on oral presentations at all of these levels, with activities intended to highlight discourse aspects such as the structure of the presentation, and coherence and cohesion when presenting. However, methodological suggestions are not given, nor are prior activities proposed to underpin these aspects, something that again assumes knowledge on the part of the student that makes it possible for them to identify the rules that shape them.

Another skill that is present in the learning objectives is debating. Students are expected to discuss ideas and seek agreements, activities that are part of debating.

## **4.2. Pragmatic competence**

### **4.2.1. Functional competence**

Also called illocutionary competence, this is defined as the capacity to distinguish communicative intentions and objectives. In accordance with this distinction, our analysis of the learning objectives reveals the scant concern for this dimension of pragmatic competence. One of the year-6 learning objectives includes as content the issuer's intention in advertising messages, something that appears to be directly linked to this competence; however, the prior knowledge that might support this explanation is not specified in the curriculum for this level or in the curriculum for year 5, where we do not find explicit statements relating to this competence. In years 7 and 8, there are stated objectives relating to comprehension and evaluation skills, that involve argumentative practices, favouring the distinction between facts and opinions. Insofar as this skill of assigning an argumentative value to a statement involves the relationship with a point of view maintained by a person (or author), we assume that it contributes, albeit to a limited extent, to developing the functional competence according to which recognition of intentions is a requirement for thorough comprehension of messages.

### **4.2.2. Strategic competence**

This competence involves the command of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that can be used for two purposes, principally: (a) compensating for failures in communication owing to limiting conditions in real communication (for example, the temporary inability to

recall an idea or a grammatical form) or insufficient competence in one or more of the other areas of communicative competence; and (b) facilitating the effectiveness of communication, for example, intentionally speaking slowly and quietly with a rhetorical purpose (Canale, 1983).

At all levels learning objectives are specified that are linked to the strategic competence. Among the ones that develop oral expressive capacity, activities stand out that favour declamation, performance, exposition, and debating. The strategies promoted here relate to the appropriate use of paraverbal and non-verbal language, such as intonation, volume, gestures, and using space.

In the case of debating, students express agreements and disagreements, based on arguments, they question stated opinions, they negotiate agreements with their interlocutors; however, it is not specified what strategies the students should develop, for example to avoid unwanted effects on the interlocutor.

In years 7 and 8, plays and films are used to analyse the effect on the audience of paraverbal elements, such as change in tone of voice, sound effects, music, among others.

#### 4.2.3. Sociolinguistic competences

Our analysis of the learning objectives for years 5 to 8 shows that this linguistic competence is principally associated with the handling of the more prestigious and formal uses and registers, along with the progressive use of politeness formulas. Specifically, the stated intention of

the objectives is for students to achieve improved formal oral expression in the school setting, progressing from familiar and spontaneous uses to more formal uses and registers, with the aim of achieving effective and contextualised communication. So, over different levels the requirement is promoted for students to interact in accordance with social conventions in different communicative situations and develop the capacity to express themselves clearly and effectively in oral presentations, displaying command of the different registers and using them in a way that is appropriate to the situation.

When it is intended that the student will be able to use consciously the elements that influence and shape oral texts, and command and appropriately use different registers, the focus is on the pupils' capacity to reflect on their communicative instrument as a form of social performance. This should result in the abandonment of the prescriptivist trend we see, for example, in the teaching of grammar where the focus is on what is and is not correct. This way, it is possible to advance in showing pupils what is and is not appropriate, according to the communicative context, as one of the functions of school is to expose students to different language-use situations to allow them to reflect on alternative and more socially prestigious speech formats so that they can function in wider and more formal contexts (Rodríguez, 1995).

## 5. Conclusions

As has been stated by various authors, the challenge of teaching and acquiring oral communication skills at school is

complex for several reasons. Teachers do not have sufficient theoretical or methodological tools to teach these skills competently in the classroom. Furthermore, the widely-held belief that this is an innate competence, that consequently does not require systematic planning and treatment, means teaching is limited to certain formal aspects.

The Chilean curricular framework is clear in defining three main teaching areas in language and communication (reading, writing, and oral expression), which are presented with equal status and the same communicative teaching focus. However, this claim of balance is undermined, when we find that the main emphasis is on the areas of reading and writing, to the detriment of oral expression. This is the conclusion reached when we examine learning objectives in detail and note a weak systematisation of the content and its use in the area of oral expression. For example, in the case of writing, both the teaching model and the methodological strategies are clearly presented in the framework of what is known as “process writing”. This clarity, applied to oral expression, might contribute to a more robust adoption, as the teacher would have more defined and systematic teaching instruments. In contrast, in the area of oral expression we find no curriculum elements that guide its teaching in an equivalent direction. This situation evidently contradicts the normative framework, when it states that the development of oral competences is the foundation of the other competences.

Regarding the specific analysis of the level-two study programmes, we can see

that each oral communicative competence is represented in the teaching objectives except for the functional competence, to which we found no explicit references in year 5 of elementary school. This illustrates how comprehension of intentions and communicative objectives, elements of this particular competence, do not seem to be preferred subject matter at this teaching level.

The competence that is most apparent in the general overview is discourse, essentially understood in a structural sense, deriving from the grammar of the text, specifically the basic notions of coherence and cohesion. As for knowledge and command of the linguistic code, vocabulary has a prominent position in the specified learning objectives, especially in years 5 and 6. Nonetheless, this higher profile than the other components of linguistic competence (phonology, morphology-syntax) is not based on a didactic proposal that guarantees it will make an effective contribution to the development of the oral communicative competence. Indeed, its restriction to the structural level of language impedes the planning of appropriate development of communicative competences in the broad sense of the proposed model.

One important feature of the communicative focus is its aim to consider the different communication situations that the speaker must face. At the methodological level, this involves internalising multiple discursive genres. In effect, a variety of genres are identified in the curriculum proposal, including monologic, dialogic and multimodal ones; however, most of the production processes are realised

through expository texts, as well as this being the favoured medium for evaluating oral communication skills. The other genres are, in general, regarded as means for demonstrating comprehension of the textual content.

Finally, an overall evaluation of the curriculum proposal for the area of oral expression reveals a lack of focus on the criteria of progression and growing complexity in meeting the stated objectives, something that is probably explained by

the lack of an organised structure that articulates the theoretical and methodological knowledge specific to the oral competences to ensure adoption of the model by the teacher and its subsequent transposition into the classroom.

Based on the preceding analysis, we have identified some of the general challenges for teaching oral communication in the context of the competences identified in the study programmes for years 5 to 8 of elementary school.

TABLE 1. Challenges for teaching Oral Communication.

| Grammatical Competence                                                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                             | Pragmatic Competence                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                                               |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Linguistic Competence                                                                                                                                                                                         | Discourse Competence                                                                                        | Functional Competence                                                                                                                                                                                 | Strategic Competence                                                                                                                                            | Sociolinguistic Competence                                                                                                    |
| Incorporate vocabulary in the most balanced way, along with the other levels of the language.<br><br>Integrate the units and levels of the language in the framework of a communicative teaching perspective. | Apply a relevant methodological and evaluation instrument for the systematic treatment of discourse genres. | Incorporate this competence explicitly, at least from year 5 in elementary school and consider communicative objectives, beyond the argumentative functions that predominate in the study programmes. | Guide the development of the skills and attitudes to various types of communicative interactions, considering both the role of the speaker and of the listener. | Value the diverse linguistic varieties that the students bring and integrate them into the teaching of the standard language. |

Source: Own elaboration.

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# The relationship between parenting styles or parenting practices, and anxiety in childhood and adolescence: a systematic review

## *Relación entre los estilos educativos parentales o prácticas de crianza y la ansiedad infanto-juvenil: una revisión bibliográfica*

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### Abstract

Anxiety is one of the most common pathologies in the childhood and adolescent population and it has a high comorbidity that sometimes makes diagnosis and treatment very difficult. It also tends to persist over time, causing great difficulties in the daily life of children and adolescents. In this review the empirical evidence for the relationship between parenting styles and practices and anxiety in children and adolescents is analysed based on twenty-two articles. Reasonably consistent evidence was found, based mainly on European populations, that lower levels of anxiety, or fewer anxiety symptoms or internalising symptoms were related to affection, warmth, and acceptance from parents. In contrast, higher levels or more of these symptoms were linked to authoritarian style, rejection, psychological control, excessive parental control, over-involvement, rigid discipline, and hostile control. Furthermore, the review provided evidence of the need to

develop preventive family education programmes and include parenting practices as an important part of the process for treating childhood and adolescent anxiety.

**Keywords:** Parenting, anxiety, childhood, adolescence, bibliographic review.

### Resumen

La ansiedad es una de las patologías más comunes en la población infanto-juvenil y presenta una elevada comorbilidad que en ocasiones dificulta el diagnóstico y el tratamiento pertinente. Asimismo, tiende a persistir a lo largo del tiempo y provoca grandes dificultades en la vida diaria de los niños y adolescentes. En esta revisión se ha analizado la evidencia empírica sobre la relación de los estilos o prácticas de crianza con la ansiedad en la población infanto-juvenil a partir de una revisión bibliográfica basada en veintidós artículos. Se han encontrado evidencias bas-

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tante consistentes que relacionan el afecto, la calidez y la aceptación con menores niveles o síntomas de ansiedad o síntomas internalizantes en población generalmente europea; y el rechazo, el control psicológico, el excesivo control, la sobreimplicación, la disciplina rígida, el control hostil y el estilo autoritario, con mayores niveles de ansiedad o síntomas. También se ha puesto de manifiesto la necesi-

dad de desarrollar programas preventivos de educación familiar, e incluir las prácticas de crianza como elementos clave a trabajar en los programas de intervención y tratamiento de la ansiedad infanto-juvenil.

**Descriptores:** Estilos educativos, prácticas de crianza, ansiedad, infancia, adolescencia, revisión bibliográfica.

## 1. Introduction

Anxiety is a common problem in the childhood and adolescent population, it has high comorbidity, it tends to persist over time and it causes major difficulties for the individual's social and emotional functioning.

Furthermore, one of the most important features of childhood and adolescence is what is known as *environmental determination*, namely, this population's dependence on adults, something that makes them especially vulnerable to multiple influences that are outside their control and can affect their behaviour and how they confront specific situations. Consequently, family factors play a fundamental role in the adjustment and development of the minor. More specifically, educational style has been identified as "one of the variables that has the greatest influence on the emotional and social development of the child" (Sala, 2002, p. 544).

Educational styles, according to Pérez and Cánovas (1996, cited in Aroca, Cánovas, & Sahuquillo, 2014, p. 195) are "practical models or patterns that sim-

plify parenting and parental education habits in certain basic dimensions that, overlapping in different conditions, give rise to a variety of common types of family education." Some authors, such as Darling & Steinberg (1993), find it necessary to differentiate between parenting styles and practices. For them, the educational style is defined as the set of attitudes, goals, and parenting patterns that create an emotional climate in the parent-child relationship, while parenting practices are specific forms of interaction between parents and their children in specific situations.

Similarly, theoretical approaches to educational styles distinguish between two approaches: the typological approach, that classifies parents according to their educational style defined by the relationship between various dimensions, and the dimensional approach, that tries to link some of the most significant variables or dimensions of the educational style with variables regarding the adjustment or competence of their children (Oliva & Parra, 2004). However, these two approaches can be seen as complementary

(Oliva, Parra, Sánchez-Queija, & López, 2007) and are closely related, as “the dimensions that the researchers have most often linked to the adolescent’s adjustment are precisely those that serve to establish the typologies of parenting styles” (Oliva & Parra, 2004, p. 109). These dimensions are affection and control. As Darling and Steinberg (1993) note, beyond the theoretical models used, almost all of the research is based on these two dimensions. Therefore, this review will focus on the analysis of these two dimensions in the studies that adopt a dimensional approach.

The affection dimension refers to the warmth, support, and love in interactions, the parents’ ability to respond, their acceptance of their children’s feelings and behaviour, and their participation in their activities. This dimension is labelled in some research as acceptance, warmth, attention, care, or support. Some studies also investigate the opposite pole to this dimension: rejection, criticism, hostility or negativity (Bögels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006; Luis, Varela, & Moore, 2008; McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2006; Wood, McLeod, Sigman, Hwang, & Chu, 2003).

The control dimension is defined as the set of limits and rules, the parents’ regulations for channelling their children’s behaviour, the knowledge of their activities, and their demands for responsibility (Betancourt & Andrade, 2011; Oliva *et al.*, 2007). Nonetheless, most of the studies refer to control in its most extreme pole, seeing it as the excessive regulation and restriction of the minors’ activities and behaviour, excessive involvement in their children’s decision making, and limiting

their autonomy. This dimension is also labelled in some studies as restriction, exigency, rigidity, over-involvement, or discipline. Its opposite pole is granting or promoting independence (Aroca *et al.*, 2014; Bögels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006; McLeod *et al.*, 2006; Wood *et al.*, 2003). Likewise, some authors emphasise the need to establish a differentiation between psychological and behavioural control, as they have different implications on the minor’s adjustment. Behavioural control defines the behaviour of “attention and supervision of the children’s activities, referred to in various pieces of research as supervision or monitoring” (Betancourt & Andrade, 2011, p. 28). Psychological control is a more intrusive, coercive, and manipulative control of the thoughts and feelings of the children, that is manifested through strategies such as provoking guilt or emotional blackmail, invalidating feelings, and overprotection (Betancourt & Andrade, 2011; Oliva *et al.*, 2007).

On the other hand, from the cognitive models that explain anxiety, various authors suggest hypotheses on how certain dimensions of educational styles affect the appearance, development, and maintenance of anxiety. So, for example, Chorpita and Barlow (1998) theorise that excessive parental control restricts the child’s ability to manipulate and relate with their environment, limiting behaviour that involves exploring new situations independently. Similarly, the lack of warmth, acceptance, or care makes young people see that they do not have support when faced with new situations and that their actions do not have any influence on

their surroundings, and thus they can develop a feeling of powerlessness. Both practices can make them regard their surroundings as something threatening over which they have no control. Along the same lines as these authors, Dadds and Barret (2001), Hudson and Rapee (2001) and Rapee (1997) maintain that for children with a genetic vulnerability to anxiety, excessive parental control or over-protectiveness can reinforce this vulnerability, reducing their opportunities for developing coping strategies, giving them a sense of insecurity for successfully handling their setting, and increasing the perception of threat of their surroundings.

In the end, these authors suggest that excessive control and the lack of affection can make the children develop a perception of generalised threat and a feeling of personal inefficacy or of an inability to confront threatening events; these being the principal components of cognitive or psychological vulnerability of the cognitive models that explain anxiety. According to these models, this vulnerability interacts with personality predispositions and stressful events, explaining the appearance and development of anxiety (Chorpita & Barlow, 1998; Clark & Beck, 2012).

## 2. Objective

Based on the foregoing and given that educational styles are modifiable factors on which it is possible to act, and given the high levels of prevalence, comorbidity, and the strong impact of anxiety on the childhood and adolescent population, the aim of this review is to analyse the ex-

isting bibliography to determine whether there is consistent empirical evidence regarding the relationship between educational styles or parenting practices and childhood-adolescent anxiety. Two specific theoretical questions are considered:

- 1) Is the empirical evidence that suggests that certain educational styles are related to anxiety in children and adolescents consistent?
- 2) Is the empirical evidence that indicates that certain specific parenting practices are associated with anxiety in the childhood and adolescent population coherent?

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Search process

In October and November 2014, a bibliographic search process was carried out for articles that analyse the relationship between parents' educational styles or parenting practices and anxiety in children and adolescents. In the first phase, an initial search was carried out to give an idea of the volume of information and identify key words and descriptors as well as the criteria for selecting the articles. In a second phase, a systematic bibliographical search was carried out in the following electronic databases: Dialnet, Redalyc, PsycInfo, and Medline. The keywords or descriptors used were the following: *estilos educativos, prácticas de crianza, prácticas educativas, ansiedad, infantil, juvenil, infancia, and adolescencia* for the Spanish-language databases (Dialnet and Redalyc) and *parenting practices, parenting styles,*

*anxiety, childhood and adolescence* in the English-language databases (PyscInfo and Medline). These were combined in various ways to expand the search.

These keywords returned an initial group of articles that was reduced based on the inclusion criteria set out in the next section. In the first stage, the articles were filtered based on the title and the abstract, and in a second phase they were filtered based on their content. In total, one article was selected from Dialnet, five from Redalyc, fifteen from PyscInfo, and one from Medline, giving a total of twenty-two articles that met the inclusion criteria.

### 3.2. Selecting articles: inclusion criteria

The inclusion criteria used were as follows:

a) Articles that included a direct and up to date measurement of the educational styles or parenting practices of one or both parents.

b) Articles that include a measurement of anxiety in children or where the children have a diagnosis of, as a minimum, an anxiety disorder.

c) Articles in which the association between childhood-adolescent anxiety and parenting practices or parental educational styles has been statistically proven and articles that comprise literature reviews.

d) Articles in which the children and adolescents in the sample were not older than 18.

e) Articles with a date of publication after 2000.

f) Articles published in English, Spanish, or Catalan and for which full access to the text was available.

Consequently, articles that associated childhood-adolescent anxiety exclusively with the type of attachment or, solely, with aspects of the family functioning or type were excluded, as were retrospective studies, as they do not use direct and up to date measurements of educational styles or parenting practices. Similarly, articles that analysed the relationship between parenting styles or practices with anxiety childhood-adolescent when this was the result of a medical condition were excluded.

### 3.3. Description of the selected articles

Of the twenty-two articles selected, three (Bögels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006; Cuervo, 2010; Wood *et al.*, 2003) are literature reviews and, two others are meta-analyses (McLeod *et al.*, 2006; Yap, Pilkington, Ryan, & Jorm, 2014); the rest (seventeen) are research articles. Regarding the research design of the seventeen studies, sixteen of these use a cross-sectional design and the remainder a longitudinal design (Muhtadie, Zhou, Eisenberg, & Wang, 2013).

Of these seventeen studies, seven of them relate the educational styles or parenting practices with anxiety only (Erozkan, 2012; Hale, Engels, & Meeus, 2006; Lindhout, Markus, Hoogendijk, & Boer, 2009; Luis *et al.*, 2008; Varela, Niditch, Hensley-Maloney, Moore, & Creveling, 2013; Varela, Sanchez-Sosa, Biggs, & Luis, 2009; Woldfradt, Hempel, & Miles, 2003); one with anxiety and oppositional

defiant disorder (Hudson & Rapee, 2001); two of them with internalising problems (Laskey & Cartwright-Hatton, 2009; Muhtadie *et al.*, 2013); and seven of them with internalising and externalising symptoms separately (Betancourt & Andrade, 2011; Franco, Pérez & de Dios, 2014; García-Linares, Cerezo, de la Torre, Carpio, & Casanova, 2011; Nunes, Faraco, Vieira, & Rubin, 2013; Oliva *et al.*, 2007; Roelofs, Meesters, Teer-Huurne, Bamelis, & Muris, 2006; Yahav, 2006).

Regarding the measurements of the educational styles or parenting practices, fourteen of the articles evaluate and analyse this variable from a dimensional approach (Betancourt & Andrade, 2011; Franco *et al.*, 2014; García-Linares *et al.*, 2011; Hale *et al.*, 2006; Hudson & Rapee, 2001; Laskey & Cartwright-Hatton, 2009; Lindhout *et al.*, 2009; Luis *et al.*, 2008; Nunes *et al.*, 2013; Oliva *et al.*, 2007; Roelofs *et al.*, 2006; Varela *et al.*, 2013; Varela *et al.*, 2009), two articles from a typological approach (Erozkan, 2012; Muhtadie *et al.*, 2013), and a single study analyses this variable from both of these approaches (Wolfradt *et al.*, 2003).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Typological approach

Regarding the articles that start from a typological approach, consistency is only observed in the results for the authoritarian style. This style has been linked to higher levels of anxiety (anxiety sensitivity and trait anxiety) in two articles (Erozkan, 2012; Wolfradt *et al.*, 2003). In a third study (Muhtadie *et al.*, 2013) it is noted that the interaction of the author-

itarian style with low levels of effortful control (temperament) of children predicts internalising problems. In Cuervo's literature review (2010), the existence of evidence that relates this style with internalising behaviour is also noted.

On these lines, the work by Lindhout *et al.* (2009) shows that high levels of negative affection (or rejection) and low levels of promotion of independence (the other extreme to control), are jointly related to the presence of anxiety disorders. The interaction of high levels of parental control and low levels of expressions of affection match the definition of the authoritarian style; therefore, these findings are coherent with the articles that analyse the authoritarian style and can be added to the evidence that links this style to higher levels of anxiety.

Nonetheless, for the democratic or authoritative style the results are more ambiguous; two articles (Erozkan, 2012; Muhtadie *et al.*, 2013) show that this style is related to lower levels of anxiety sensitivity or internalising problems, but a third (Wolfradt *et al.*, 2003) associates it with moderate levels of trait anxiety.

The remaining educational styles are different in each article, thus preventing comparisons between the results from being made.

### 4.2. Dimensional approach

Regarding the affection dimension, we can see different results depending on the geographical origin of the sample.

Most of the pieces of research used in this review give reasonably consistent

evidence about its relationship with the levels of anxiety symptoms or internalising symptoms in a generally European population. More specifically, affection or warmth show a significant relationship with lower levels of trait anxiety (Wolfradt *et al.*, 2003) and internalising symptoms (Oliva *et al.*, 2007), and rejection, at the opposite extreme, has been related to higher levels of anxiety symptoms, or internalising symptoms in seven pieces of research (Franco *et al.*, 2014; García-Linares *et al.*, 2011; Hale *et al.*, 2006; Hudson & Rapee, 2001; Nunes *et al.*, 2013; Roelofs *et al.*, 2006; Yahav, 2006).

Nevertheless, inconsistencies have been found in the articles that use samples of Latin American families that have emigrated to the USA. The study by Luis *et al.* (2008) obtains results that contradict the previous ones. That is to say, it finds that a lack of warmth and acceptance is associated with lower levels of anxiety. This study's sample comprises children and adolescents from European and Mexican families resident in the USA, and Mexican children and adolescents who live in Mexico. However, in another study (Varela *et al.*, 2009) that uses a similar sample (children and adolescents from Mexican families resident in Mexico, and children from European and Latin American families who live in the USA), results indicate that acceptance by the father is associated with lower anxiety symptoms, while acceptance by the mother is related with greater anxiety symptoms for the groups of Latin American and European children resident in the USA but not for the group of Mexican children who live in their country of origin. The third piece of

research using a sample comprising Latin American families who have emigrated to the USA (Varela *et al.*, 2013), finds no links between this dimension and childhood-adolescent anxiety symptoms. The inconsistency of the results of the studies performed with children from Latin American families who live in the USA suggests that further research is required to analyse relations in this group, as it is possible that cultural characteristics have an influence, as well as situational ones deriving from the process of migration or relating to the context in which these families live, such as potential difficulties accessing work, health care, education, economic problems, cultural assimilation, etc. (Ramírez & De la Cruz, 2003; cited in Varela *et al.*, 2009). This might explain the discrepancies with the results of the other articles (generally using European samples) that find reasonably consistent evidence for the relationship between affection or rejection and childhood-adolescent anxiety.

On the other hand, the meta-analysis studies analysed also show that rejection is linked to greater levels of anxiety. The study by Yap *et al.* (2014) states that aversiveness is associated with greater levels of anxiety, with a medium effect size; similarly, in the study by McLeod *et al.* (2006) it is noted that aversiveness is associated with greater levels of anxiety, and warmth with lower levels of anxiety, but with a small effect size, noting that aversiveness might have a larger impact on anxiety than the absence of positive parenting.

Similarly, the literature reviews show evidence for this relationship, while noting

that the consistency between the pieces of research is lower than for the control dimension in one of the reviews (Bögels & Brechman-Toussaint, 2006), or is only moderately consistent when dealing with observational studies (Wood *et al.*, 2003).

With regards to the control dimension, the results of the articles included in this review are less consistent, among other aspects, because the evidence depends on the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the construct used. Despite this, a series of constructs have been found that give reasonably consistent findings.

Consequently, for the psychological control construct generally consistent evidence is observed throughout the studies. Apart from the research by Nunes *et al.* (2013), which does not find correlations with anxiety, the other pieces of research (Betancourt & Andrade, 2011; Hale *et al.* 2006; Oliva *et al.*, 2007; Wolfradt *et al.*, 2003) show positive and significant correlations, indicating that this construct is related with greater levels of anxiety symptoms or internalising symptoms.

Similarly, studies that analyse over-involvement (Hale *et al.*, 2006; Hudson & Rapee, 2001), excessive parental control (Luis *et al.*, 2008), and hostile control (Varela *et al.*, 2009; Varela *et al.*, 2013) are also fairly consistent, demonstrating that these constructs are related with greater levels or symptoms of anxiety or internalising symptoms. Nevertheless, it is important to note that some differences are apparent in two of the articles, in particular regarding the gender of the parent and when cultural factors intervene, as is stated below. In the study by Varela

*et al.* (2009), while control by the mother is related with the anxiety symptoms of the groups of European-American and Latin American children and adolescents, control by the father is only related with anxiety symptoms in the group of European-American children and adolescents. In the study by Luis *et al.* (2008), excessive parental control is associated with higher levels of anxiety for Mexican and European-American children and adolescents, but with lower levels of anxiety for the group of Mexican children and adolescents resident in the USA.

Regarding the rigid, harsh, or punitive discipline construct, the results agree on identifying its relationship with greater internalising symptoms (García-Linares *et al.*, 2011; Laskey & Cartwright-Hatton, 2009), albeit with a different magnitude or strength of the associations (the associations found in Laskey and Cartwright-Hatton, 2009 being only moderate), and with differences according to the gender of the minor in one of the studies (in García Linares *et al.*, 2011, the magnitudes of the correlations are lower in the case of girls).

On the other hand, for the behavioural control, overprotection, and lax (low or indulgent) discipline constructs the results are less coherent and conclusive. In one study (Yahav, 2006), for paternal overprotection no differences were found between overprotection by the parents of children and adolescents with internalising symptoms in comparison with those from the control group, but differences were found in comparison with their siblings who did not display symptoms. In the other study (Roelofs *et al.*, 2006), positive associations

with anxiety symptoms are found but their magnitude differs according to the gender of the children.

Regarding lax, low, or indulgent discipline, one of the studies (Franco *et al.*, 2014) finds that this is connected with greater levels of social withdrawal and anxiety, another (García-Linares *et al.*, 2011) finds associations with internalising symptoms but only for boys, and the third (Laskey & Cartwright-Hatton, 2009) does not show such associations.

Likewise, the evidence on behavioural control is also inconclusive, finding discrepancies in the magnitude and even the direction of the associations: Betancourt and Andrade (2011) find that maternal behavioural control is negatively correlated with all of the emotional problems, and behavioural control by the father with only two of the problems (depression and self-harm); in the study by Oliva *et al.* (2007) the correlations found are low or of limited significance, indeed it even found a positive relationship with internal problems when behavioural control is exercised by the mother.

As for the meta-analysis studies analysed (McLeod *et al.*, 2006; Yap *et al.*, 2014), both show that over-involvement is related to higher levels of anxiety, even though the effect sizes are not very large.

The literature reviews emphasise the consistency of the evidence that relates control with higher levels of anxiety in observational studies. Nonetheless, the two pieces of research that use questionnaire measurements give different conclusions: Bögels and Brechman-Toussaint (2006) state that there is consistent evidence for

this relationship, but Wood *et al.* (2003) state that the results are inconclusive.

## 5. Discussion

Regarding the first question posed for this review, we can conclude that the authoritarian style has consistently been related with childhood-adolescent anxiety throughout the studies, being associated with higher levels of anxiety or internalising symptoms. These results agree with the claim by Aroca *et al.* (2014, p. 217) who state that families who adopt this style “usually oblige the minors to perform actions that create tension and anxiety in them.” Similarly, they support the evidence that indicate that this style has a negative impact on the adjustment and development of the minor. The other styles should be investigated in greater depth.

As for the second question, reasonably consistent evidence has been found linking affection, warmth, and acceptance with lower levels or symptoms of anxiety or internalising symptoms in a generally European population, and linking rejection, psychological control, over-involvement, excessive parental control, rigid discipline, and hostile control, with higher levels or symptoms. The other constructs on the control dimension do not provide sufficiently consistent data, nor do they make it possible to establish decisive conclusions. These results agree with the perspectives and hypotheses of the authors of the cognitive models to explain anxiety, which hold that excessive parental control and a lack of warmth can give minors a perception of generalised threat and a feeling of personal inefficacy.

These elements interact with personality predispositions and stressful events to explain the appearance and development of anxiety. Although the results match these perspectives, they are not empirical proof for them they do not make it possible to demonstrate these hypotheses. This is principally because while the relationship between these practices and anxiety is analysed, the specific mechanisms that can mediate this relationship are not examined (for example, the minors' cognitive biases: attentional bias towards threatening information, interpreting ambiguous information as threatening, underestimated assessments of their own coping resources, etc.) on which the previous hypotheses are based. Similarly, a large majority of the pieces of research analysed in this review do not consider the temperament or personality of the minors, these also being relevant components for explaining anxiety in cognitive theories. It would be interesting to examine the specific mechanisms that might mediate the relationship between educational styles or parenting practices and childhood-adolescent anxiety, as well as analysing the interaction of the minors' temperament with the educational styles or practices and anxiety, and even examining the possible interactive effects of other factors (such as the anxiety of the parents, beliefs, and cognitions about their own parental competence and their own children, the family functioning and type, etc.) in future research.

This review has also made it possible to detect a series of limitations in the field of research that it is important to note. It is possible that these limitations might,

at least partially, explain the lack of consistency of the results of some of the studies. These, in turn, propose new lines of enquiry or questions that should be tackled in future research on the topic.

Firstly, in this work the results of the dimensional approach have been grouped based on two dimensions (affection and control), even though not all of the research projects use the same terms or constructs to evaluate them. Furthermore, it is important to note that most of the studies do not define the dimensions or constructs evaluated. This is especially significant in the control dimension. While for the affection dimension there seems to be a large degree of agreement between researchers on its conceptualisation, for the control dimension "researchers have not reached agreement on the aspects to include under this label" (Oliva *et al.*, 2007, p. 49), something that involves a "range of criteria and inconsistent results" (Aroca *et al.*, 2014, p. 218), and so, "it is difficult to know which of them is the one that is really related with the adjustment of the children" (Oliva *et al.*, 2007, p. 49). Consequently, there is a clear need to define precisely the dimensions evaluated in the pieces of research, using the same criteria and constructs.

Similarly, for the anxiety variable, this review has included studies that use different constructs and measurements for this problem. Furthermore, while most of the studies use non-clinical samples of children and adolescents, three pieces of research start with diagnoses of anxiety disorders in the minors. It may be that there are variations in the effects of the parenting practices in minors who suffer

from an anxiety disorder in comparison with the non-clinical population, or that the diagnostic status of the minors has an impact on the parents' parenting practices.

Likewise, the fact that studies examining the relationship between parenting styles or practices and internalising symptoms are included, prevents us from concluding that the findings are specific to anxiety. Much of the literature on this topic has focused on analysing the relationship between educational styles or parenting practices and the minor's internal adjustment. In fact, of the selected pieces of research, half examine the relationship with the problems or internalising symptoms together.

Furthermore, few of the pieces of research reviewed, apart from analysing the relationship with anxiety, examine the association with other problems to check whether the results found are specific to anxiety or shared with other types of problems of psychopathology in general.

Consequently, for future pieces of research, it would be advisable to examine the relationship between parenting styles or practices and measurements of anxiety specifically, and include groups of children or adolescents with other problems to check whether the results are specific to anxiety or are shared with other problems.

Regarding the demographic characteristics of the samples in the studies, it is important to note that, on the one hand, the results of the pieces of research for the childhood and adolescent population are analysed without differentiating the childhood stage from adolescence, as many of the pieces of research reviewed

do not differentiate between them. It is possible that parenting styles or practices have a different impact depending on the minor's developmental stage, or that the parents adapt their strategies or behaviour according to the developmental characteristics of their children. Along these lines, Yap *et al.* (2014) suggest that some of the factors that are especially relevant in adolescence might differ from those that are more important in early childhood. Therefore, analysing the relationship separately for each of the developmental stages seems opportune.

Furthermore, while a large majority of the pieces of research analysed use samples of European background, studies on other cultures are also included. It is likely that culture has influences relationships between educational styles or parenting practices and anxiety. Indeed, for the affection dimension, major discrepancies were observed in the studies with samples from Latin American families who have emigrated to the United States. Similarly, certain cultural differences were also noted for the control dimension. Some authors claim that control or authoritarian practices seem to have neutral effects –or even positive ones– on Latin American children (Halgunseth, Ispa, & Rudy, 2006; cited in Varela *et al.*, 2009). These practices are valued in collectivist cultures (such as the Latino and Asian ones), insofar as they are seen as a mechanism for instilling respect for authority and for collective or family needs compared with individual ones (Luis *et al.*, 2008; Varela *et al.*, 2009); consequently, they might not have the same repercussions as they do

in more individualist cultures such as the European. In this way, these discrepancies, suggest the need to examine the relationship of the parenting styles or practices in different ethnic and cultural groups, and examine possible trans-cultural differences.

Regarding the gender of the parents, most of the pieces of research analysed the parenting styles or practices of both parents together. Despite this, the studies that considered the parents' practices separately found differing results according to the gender of the parent. This might indicate that the impact of the different parenting practices varies according to the gender of the parents, illustrating the need to consider the styles or practices of both parents separately and analyse the impact of this variable in research. Likewise, it would be interesting to take into account the effect of the gender of the minors on the results, as it is possible that boys and girls respond differently to parenting practices (as has been noted in some of the studies analysed in this review, such as García-Linares *et al.*, 2011).

Regarding the evaluation measures, pieces of research have been included in this review that used different types of measures. However, apart from two studies, all of them solely used questionnaire measures to evaluate both variables, these being measures that are questioned by several authors. For example, Holden & Edwards (1998; cited in McLeod *et al.*, 2006) criticise these measures for their lack of convergent validity. In future research, it would be advisable to use different evaluation measures, and to use multiple informants.

To conclude the limitations, while this review has provided evidence for the relationship between certain styles or dimensions and anxiety, it has not been possible to demonstrate the nature of said relationship as, apart from one study, the rest are pieces of research of cross-sectional design. Therefore, it is not possible to demonstrate causal hypotheses that explain a possible directionality of the results obtained: whether certain parenting styles or practices might, along with other factors, explain the appearance and development of childhood-adolescent anxiety; whether the particular characteristics or inner states of the minors determine the parenting styles or practices; whether the relationship is bidirectional, etc. Consequently, one challenge for future research is to use longitudinal research designs and so clarify the nature or direction of the effects.

Ultimately, generally consistent evidence has been found in this review that links affection, warmth, and acceptance with lower levels or symptoms of anxiety or internalising symptoms in a mainly European population. Furthermore, rejection, psychological control, excessive parental control, over-involvement, rigid discipline, hostile control, and the authoritarian style have been linked to higher levels or anxiety symptoms or internalising symptoms. The need to continue with the field of research to resolve the limitations and tackle the new questions that emerge has also been demonstrated. Although the results cannot be regarded as completely definitive and, in the absence of corroboration with other more consistent empirical evidence, they could have significant im-

plications in the practical and professional field. Specifically, in the development of preventive family education programmes focused on providing parents with guidance on the types of practices and behaviour to use to avoid the appearance of anxiety problems in their children and to encourage their development and well-being; always trying to adapt these programmes to the uniqueness of each family and individual, and valuing the family “as a setting for learning [at the same time as] an educational environment” (Torío, Peña, & Rodríguez, 2008, p. 171). Likewise, in the clinical setting, parenting styles or practices should also be included as key elements to be worked on in intervention and treatment programmes for childhood-adolescent anxiety.

In conclusion, it is clear that there is a need for continued research on this topic and to identify the parenting styles or practices that are risk or protection factors for childhood-adolescent anxiety. Once identified with solid empirical evidence, the next challenge will be to develop prevention programmes and include these factors in treatments and interventions for childhood-adolescent anxiety.

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## Book reviews

**Ibáñez-Martín, J. A. (2017).**

*Horizontes para los educadores.*

*Las profesiones educativas y la promoción de la plenitud humana*

[*Horizons for educators:*

*Educational professions and*

*the promotion of human plenitude*].

Madrid: Dykinson. 282 pp.

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A review should start with an overview of the book, and then a more detailed analysis of its parts and chapters. This book considers *the current educational situation*, describes it, analyses it in-depth, and makes a variety of interesting arguments. In other words, anyone who reads this book by Ibáñez-Martín, an Emeritus Professor at the Madrid Complutense University, will know what the author has done over the years: study.

This book, *Horizontes para los educadores. Las profesiones educativas y la promoción de la plenitud humana*, comprises four parts as well as a prologue and an introduction. While it will prob-

ably not be the author's last work – it is to be hoped that he will continue writing so that we can learn from his writings – it could be described as monumental, a compendium of an entire academic life in 17 chapters, 271 pages, 413 notes, and, as if that were not enough, a 7-page index of names in two columns, something that is always appreciated. In brief, this book is undoubtedly very important and will clearly continue to be so for a long time.

It is also worth noting some formal aspects of varying degrees of interest. Firstly, it does not employ the widely-used generic APA citation system. This means that the author provides the precise page, paragraph, or line of the reference, direct or otherwise. This level of intellectual honesty is rare nowadays. Furthermore, thanks to his lengthy career of serious accumulated scholarship, Ibáñez-Martín offers thorough scrutiny of each topic, including its international trajectories, how interest in it has risen and fallen, important milestones, monographs, influential conferences, and,

most importantly, in all cases, the first authors to start working on the topics or the ideas under discussion. Here this honesty is combined with avoidance of the butterfly-like style often found in academic writings that constantly flitting from one trend to another, or, rather from one funding source to another.

This careful examination makes it possible to identify another very important common factor; the different topics covered in their different chapters combine to offer a national and international state of the question, sometimes through a flood of chronologically presented reading, or, more often, through a series of paragraphs, each of which expresses one of the dominant and most widely used arguments about the central topic of the chapter. The question of whether they are correct is settled later. It is important to note that a historiographic examination of the question under discussion is not the same as the discussion itself. Ultimately, what most frequently happens in academia is that the former is confused with the latter, as though, for example, the history of the university were the same as its ultimate meaning, or, turning our attention to the chapter that considers most arguments one after the other, as though the history of teaching Catholicism were the same as the educational objective of its transmission. That Ibáñez-Martín makes a deliberate effort in each chapter to differentiate between what things are and what happens to them, what remains and what changes, is of a high academic standard in my view.

Another characteristic that is very much present throughout the book and

that the reader will find at the start of every chapter, is that each topic is a battlefield where, with the appropriate elegance, the author starts by describing all of the relevant arguments about the matter under discussion, including the most prevalent and widely held ones, wherever they might come from, for example, from the writings of others, from the ephemeral but highly influential opinions of social networks at a given time, or from the description of an event and the important lessons that can be drawn from it. Having done this – again allowing us to appreciate his intellectual honesty, this time represented by rigour – Ibáñez-Martín, as though setting out a chess board, positions the most widely accepted arguments, regardless of whether they are a pawn or a king, and starts using his own intellectual arsenal to try to ensure that we all win the struggle, giving more clarity to the problems presented and bringing us a bit closer to the best and truest argument. However, if we are all to be able to win, there sometimes must be a checkmate, and there is.

Finally, it is worth emphasising the author's constant efforts to accentuate the pedagogical perspective of the problem under discussion. Some might regard this as another foolish epistemological game, but it is not. It has more substance than the classical dispute about the scientific identity of pedagogy. I refer to what professor Ibáñez-Martín suggests is the peculiarity of the pedagogical question; what must educators as educators ask themselves about the situation and what answer must educa-

tors as educators provide. For those of us who see ourselves as pedagogues and wear this badge with pride, despite current times, it is very pleasing to read, among other examples, that «pedagogy is called upon to find rational answers to key issues» (p. 63) or that «pedagogy ... is a practical knowledge in the Aristotelian sense of the word, a prudential knowledge about what is good or bad for the human being as an individual and as a member of society, a knowledge that nowadays has a special difficulty, since the many requirements that currently afflict education – diverse multicultural populations, people of very varied ages, ever more demanding social requirements – turn pedagogical knowledge into an undertaking that is fraught with difficulties» (p. 64) or, finally, that it is worth noting that «these theses are educationally irreproachable» (p. 190).

Moving on to other matters relating to the content, which is what matters most, he does not confuse the potential reader in the prologue. Indeed, from the start Ibáñez-Martín warns us that this book «is not intended for those who regard educational work simply as a way of making a living ... but instead is for those who aspire to a degree of nobility in their profession, leading them to make the most of life and turning them into attractive people for those who are nearby, so that those surrounding them find in them someone who identifies lofty targets for existence and, with their example, they stimulate the desire to excel in order to meet these targets» (p. 12).

Reading the introduction, «Educar para vivir con dignidad» (Educating to

live with dignity), is indispensable, not just for the usual ordered overview of the topics to be covered, but also to gain some essential ideas that make up the basic interpretative framework used in each chapter. For professor Ibáñez-Martín, in contrast with the bien-pensant proclamations of international bodies, principally UNESCO, the basic problem of western education is not a problem of schooling, but «a cultural problem» (p. 11). At various stages in the text he emphasises this idea, for example, when stating that we must «move the educational debate away from the quantitative level» (p. 144) or that «education is never achieved simply through *mechanical* means» (p. 150, author's italics). «The cultural problem of our days is not a shortage of school places, nor that knowledge or skills are not taught. The central question is that in education we have side-lined the analysis of something complex but vital – discussion of the outlines of a *dignified, examined, and accomplished life* – restricting ourselves to encouraging submission to the contemporary mentality» (p. 19, author's italics). Ibáñez-Martín believes that this happens «in two ways». The first involves «rejecting the idea of truth, especially truth about the concept of humanity, to replace it with the idea of authenticity or relativism» (p. 21), and «the second form comprises magnifying the importance for the human being of the social group of origin in which it develops» (p. 22).

The first part of the book is called «El marco básico del quehacer educativo» (The basic framework of the educational activity). It comprises five chapters of in-depth reflection on the objectives of this

activity in which, as the author reminds us, it is necessary to know how to combine the demands of the human condition with the current requirements of globalisation. According to Ibáñez-Martín's argument, this involves recognising new responsibilities concerning the ethical commitment that is now required of teachers in their work and their relationship with the students. This in turn entails going beyond the figure of being a «skilled teacher» to instead become a true «mentor», as «*education is not mere training but is the appropriate outcome of the discovery that the human being is not born in plenitude, but moves continuously towards it thanks to its capacity to commit itself to what it discovers to be true*» (p. 40, author's italics). For students to attain this plenitude, educators must adopt guiding principles for their activity that include promoting a pedagogy of desire (Ch. 4) and excellence in education (Ch. 3). This will require them, firstly, «to make an effort to awaken in their students the desire to *stand up for themselves and help themselves*, without allowing themselves to be influenced by appearances but instead seeking true wisdom» (p. 98, author's italics) and, secondly, to endeavour to achieve the highest possible performance from every pupil, avoiding self-satisfied paralysis that provokes narcissism and overprotection.

Among the many and interesting suggestions made in this first section, I would like to emphasise, regarding the argument we are considering here, the need to reflect seriously «on the characteristics that must guide the exercise of freedom, promoting free development based on free acceptance of the condition

that falls to the individual as a human being, and on the particular features of this condition for each person» (p. 65). Another interesting proposal, in my opinion, is that after analysing a variety of strategies for promoting excellence, all of them very interesting and very well argued, he concludes with the original idea that «full excellence is only achieved when in the school all of its members care for one another» (p. 86).

The second part of the book is entitled «Fanales para la tarea educativa» (Beacons for the educational task), with five chapters covering multiple themes: intellectual education, moral education, religious education, the teaching of Catholicism, the ethics and deontology of teaching, and the possibilities and limitations of the educational agreements. I believe that the common interpretative framework of these chapters is the public exercise of liberty and its impact on personal development when faced with the multiple pressures of the dominant mentality. The reader first encounters an analysis of the interesting case of Emily Brooker and its implications for understanding the profound scope of intellectual liberty. Furthermore, Ibáñez-Martín also warns us of another way liberty is limited, in this case by «Faustian politics». «Faustian politicians» are not content to care for the community by promoting the common good, but instead lose respect for the nature of things and seek to create a *new man* in accordance with their way of understanding the human being, for which end they employ different methods depending on the political system in which they operate» (p. 135, au-

thor's italics). Faced with this situation, the author suggests that we consider that «as educators we are called upon to rally the people against Faustian politicians so that we may all enjoy the freedom to uphold our own ideas in the public sphere, in the same way that we are obliged to eschew indoctrination in the classroom, avoiding the suppression of evidence or teaching something that is not based on relevant arguments, as this is a matter of empowering young people, not reducing their vigour» (p. 137).

Ibáñez-Martín also proposes another area for analysing liberty, emphasising the idea that «any educational action is intrinsically an agreement» (p. 146) and that, therefore, «pluralist democracy also demands a plurality of schools, that are the natural expression of the desires of the diverse groups to which they belong» (p. 145), although the author notes that this must not, from a pedagogical perspective, affect support for the need for these schools to be organised with educational aims independent of the style of each school.

While the first part of the book considered the «ethical turn in educational work», it now turns to a detailed analysis of the role of ethics and deontology in teaching, directly raising the underlying problem: «it is difficult to speak of the importance of the critical sense in education without being in a position to establish an ethical code, apart from the fact that the education of students cannot be limited to memorising what is good and bad, but instead must know the meaning of education for human growth and the best ways of transforming this meaning into the

best pedagogical methodologies» (p. 164). Furthermore, he uses a very well-chosen metaphor, describing teaching «as a cable with four strands in which the red wire (the moral dimension) is very important, but the green wire (the effectiveness of pedagogical initiatives), the blue wire (how opportune its interventions are), and the yellow wire, the depth and brilliance of its choices, are also important» (p. 165).

This second part concludes with a chapter called «Las formas de enseñanza escolar de la religión en una sociedad libre» (Ways of teaching religion in school in a free society), dedicated to analysing basic elements on which there might be agreement for the theoretical and practical development of an agreement on education. It is in this chapter that the reader perhaps finds the most extensive and frequent use of one of the distinctive features of Ibáñez-Martín's thought that we mentioned at the start of this review; he argues and counterargues different positions and propositions to find the best one. The defence of broadening the limits of liberty when faced with the oppression by dominant mentalities that characterises all of this part of the book leads him to suggest, in this case, that «I also do not think it is very sound to argue that the current conflict about teaching a specific religion at school can only be overcome by completely eliminating it from the school. It seems to me that attitudes of greater tolerance, more imagination, and more respect for the Constitution and the identities and liberties of the citizens are required» (p. 186).

The third part of the book is called «Las metas de una universidad educado-

ra» (The targets of an educating university) and comprises four chapters. The first, which is particularly interesting, covers «the study of the deeper characteristics by which any university must define itself, those that can never be absent, however different the aims each university aspires to attain» (p. 195). Ibáñez-Martín is against viewing the university as a «tertiary school» or a «school for professional studies». The main «aspirations» or «essential characteristics» that he identifies in the work of universities are «the search for an environment of liberty and the desire for universal truth» (p. 197).

The next chapter is truly surprising, owing to the specific scope of the practical proposals he analyses when emphasising the different levels of professional competence of university teachers regarding «Training for teaching», «The lecturer's knowledge», «How the lecturer's discourse is presented», «What interest is there in involving the student in the understanding of the discourse», «What attention is given to the characteristics of group teaching», «What special initiatives can be put in place to ensure that the discourse taken on board takes root with the students», «Checking what has been understood by the student», «Evaluation's fitness to its aims», «Ways of driving the evaluation process», and «Measures for giving evaluation an educational effect». The reader will find more similar proposals regarding evaluation of the «Research competence of university teachers». Individuals are free to draw their own conclusions about why a particular way of comprehending theoretical research on education allows someone, in this case, as well as initial

philosophical training, to ignore a certain technically-focused pedagogy.

The third chapter in this section is dedicated to «La específica contribución de la universidad a la paz» (The university's specific contribution to peace). At this point I would like to draw particular attention to the proposal regarding what specific contributions by teaching staff rather than institutions might be. This proposal is based on three main concerns: firstly «promoting social confidence through conversation and coexistence, secondly, encouraging solidarity and friendship between different people, and thirdly, maintaining a university dialogue that aims to find and provide the truth that feeds the soul, a dialogue that is an authentic gift, completely removed from any desire for dominance» (p. 231).

The last chapter in this section is called «La universidad: palabra y pensamiento crítico en la ciudad» (The university: Word and critical thought in the city). In it the author analyses in detail various preconditions for encouraging critical thinking in university students, warning that «the imagination sometimes dazzles us with its attractive form, when what we must address are the lights of intelligence that try to penetrate the depths of the being of our knowledge» (p. 247).

Given its intellectual honesty, to which we have referred on several occasions, this book of a life – an academic life – could not end without the content of its final part, entitled «Los compañeros de un educador» (The companions of an educator). This comprises three chapters, in which he gives thanks for the friendship,

assistance, and example, of very varied types, received from the companion-expert, Professor Millán-Puelles, the companion-friend, Professor Eisner, and the companion-disciple, Professor Esteve.

Before finishing, I would like to draw attention to some ideas that professor Ibáñez-Martín mentions when analysing a given topic in its particular chapters that to my mind transcend specific problems and have a much broader perspective, and indeed have some impact on me as a reader owing to their breadth or general impact since there are, in reality, a *way* of looking at education. Consequently, the statement that «I am not obsessed with the idea of change, but I do believe that it is important to change whatever is necessary to respond to the challenges of the present» (p. 152) seems very significant to me. Likewise, but in much greater depth, it is necessary to emphasise the significant caveat that «if education must develop the humanity of the student, the teacher must have a reasonable and reasoned position on the meaning of human dignity and on the meaning of human existence, as well as a knowledge of the pedagogical actions that have proven to be most effective, taking those ideas as basic guidelines in their work and as criteria for its evaluation. These ideas will, therefore, be the ones that guide all educational decisions, ranging from how to structure the educational system and shape the curriculum to how to evaluate, and the decision to accept or reject home schooling» (p. 164).

Professor Ibáñez-Martín's book is a reflective, well-documented, and well-argued text on important topics that might be of interest to educators nowa-

days. It is a brave text, one that does not conform with most of the positions of the current dominant mentality regarding education in the shaping of human beings. The reader will recognise the origin of some texts and also, in some cases, interesting updates to them. But, above all, when reading them as a whole and in the suggested order, one becomes aware of the difference between a book prepared throughout an academic life and writings driven by the urgency of the moment, fashions, or the curriculum. And this is a robust, solid, and compelling text, one that is to be studied, not just read. It is clearly ready to become a classic in the training of educators. For the postmodernists of theory-literature who want something more than ideas, I would say that it is very well written, it has a dazzling culture, numerous accounts, comments on news items, stories, and literary and cinematic references, all pervaded by an elegant sense of humour. Indeed, we hope that in future editions the author will reveal whether he sold Campbell's book to Amazon and for how much

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**Pring, R. (2016).**

*Una filosofía de la educación políticamente incómoda* (edición a cargo de María G. Amilburu) [A politically uncomfortable philosophy of education (edited by María G. Amilburu)]. Madrid: Narcea. 158 pp.

«Remember Chicago!» This is a warning that those of us who work in university teaching and research in the field of

education should repeat over and over again. The Department of Education at the University of Chicago, founded in 1895 by John Dewey, disappeared despite its early prestige. This department chose to pursue scientific and theoretical excellence in research. Turning its back on the connection with teaching, it ignored the training of teachers and the learning that university researchers can and should derive from the practical contexts of teaching at other levels (primary and secondary schools). In platonic terms, the members of the department in Chicago chose to take refuge on the Isles of the Blessed, dedicating themselves to the contemplation of pure forms without taking risks or trying to descend to the cave of everyday educational practice. Consequently, they lost credibility in scientific terms, in proportion with the discredit that they earned among professionals and politicians, circumstances that led to the department's closure.

In this magnificent book which combines several previously published pieces by Richard Pring, the author gives warning signs such as this one while offering a framework for reflection to understand more deeply the phenomenon of education at present. In short, he sketches an overview in which the role of the philosophy of education is more justified than ever, this awkward discipline that rebels against the currently dominant empire of quantification, measurement, and the language of educational evaluation.

It is true that, following the British tradition, Pring identifies *education* with *formal education*, dedicated above all to

teaching of knowledge. But this task, intended to satisfy a fully human demand, is inconceivable without moral learning. The vision of education the author offers explores the field opened by J. Dewey and R. S. Peters among others, even stating that an educated person might not shine at an academic level and might not show high levels of performance in the ever-more abundant external tests, or will perhaps not have high marks in the centre's internal exams. Nonetheless, this person will have a sense of the direction to take in life, and will be able to reflect broadly and critically on what he or she values in it, from a humane and humanising position.

This is precisely one of the missions of the philosophy of education: to ask repeatedly what it means to be an *educated person*, and schools, universities, educational centres, the community in general, and experts must collaborate in the answers. Practitioners of philosophy of education must motivate these reflections, they must collect and synthesise the most valuable answers, delving into them in greater depth from a more general and abstract plane and based on previous theorising. But they cannot arrogate the exclusive right to offer solutions, isolated from praxis.

Likewise, on the part of the educators involved (in this case teachers) involved, it would be most inadvisable to become mere dispensers of a curriculum imposed from on high or from outside, or to turn into no more than examiners or, even worse, official exam preparers with the aim of scoring highly in the rankings. In contrast, as Pring states,

the teacher should be a *thinker* and *creator* of the curriculum, not just its *deliverer*. And it is in this rethinking that the value of the *philosophy of education* is located, which, as we said above, must not be the exclusive task of professional philosophers.

While reading this text and after reading it, one feels like one is taking the pulse of the current state of affairs in education, discovering basic problems such as neglect for reflection about the aims of education when faced with a mercantilist view of human beings, a new discourse that revolves around eye-catching concepts like *success*, *management*, *external tests*, *performance*, *rankings*, *competence*, *evaluation*, *quality indices*, etc. In light of this, Pring asks: is this education? How is it possible to call this education? Where are the integral growth of the person, the citizen's contribution to the common good, understanding the real need for ethical transformation, the relevance of participation for making democracy an authentic way of life, or the educational celebration of diversity to rewrite, between everyone, a common space of coexistence?

Answering questions like these is undoubtedly vital in our time, as even though the official documents of governments and ministries of education say that the objective is to provide an education for all, in reality, as Pring observes, «it has not been possible to avoid a reductionist view of education that only guarantees *success* to a small number of students: those who perform well in the framework of a narrow concept of education, limited to the *academic framework*» (p. 65).

In this compilation, painstakingly edited by María G. Amilburu, the reader encounters stimulating arguments to develop this broad idea of education, guided by one of the most prestigious philosophers of education, in whose reflections thinkers of the stature of Dewey, Peters, Oakeshott, Hargreaves, Kohlberg, Noddings, McIntyre, Ayer, and Ryle, among others also appear.

The revision of the figure of John Dewey is especially interesting. In an article with the more than eloquent title: «Saviour of American education of worse than Hitler?» Pring, leaning more towards the former position, tries to deconstruct the accusations that, since R. M. Hutchins, have affected the legacy of Dewey and his proposal for human development in democratic communities. As Pring notes, «in England and Wales, as in the United States, we are witnessing a revolution in educational language, aims, and provision, characterised by disdain for personal experience and the professional tradition; by the transfer of responsibility for education from the public to the private sector, specifically to profit-making companies; by an emphasis on competitiveness at the expense of cooperation, the deprofessionalisation of teachers and an equivalence between what is worth learning and what is measurable and quantifiable» (p. 82). Educators and educational academics and thinkers who question the benefits of such a revolution, which has expanded beyond the borders of the USA and Britain, might find a good basis in the pedagogical thought of Dewey who might not have been education's great saviour, but undoubtedly casts

light on the shadows of the current educational panorama.

As well as the article mentioned above, this book contains an unquestionably well-chosen series of Pring's writings, forming a coherent whole around questions such as the meaning of *education* and *educated person*, the relationship between school and community (regarding Dewey's common school), the need to expand the mercantilist notion of the human being and education, the importance and limits of evidence in educational research, the virtues relating to such research, and the essential role of universities in training teachers. It should be noted that these institutions must, of course, maintain the critical tradition that characterises them but not at the cost of avoiding praxis and immersion in real educational settings. Remember Chicago!

Vicent Gozálviz ■

### Grupo SI(e)TE. Educación (2016).

*Repensar las ideas dominantes en la Educación*  
[Rethinking dominant ideas in education].

Santiago de Compostela: Andavira. 189 pp.

Many assumptions and foundations in the field of education are seen as absolute truths that are generally accepted and are not questioned. Grupo SI(e)TE performs the task of re-examining some of these dominant ideas in our society, approaching them from a perspective of reflection and commitment to educational work.

This book is preceded by a dedication to José Luis Castillejo Brull, the cofounder of the Group who died in December 2016.

The book covers twelve topics, each of which focusses on one of the dominant ideas in education. It groups them into three sections that revolve around the thematic axes of politics, school, and society.

The first part comprises chapters one to four and focusses on analysing dominant ideas in education from a political perspective. The questions covered are the transmission of values in education, the compulsory status of education, equality, and democracy in schools.

The first chapter of this work suggests going beyond the transmission of values, as its interest is not in «offering a pedagogy of the transmission of values, with precise techniques and strategies, but asking ourselves how to make possible a transmission based on the values that must be transmitted so that they can be recreated and lived by citizens and *take root* in them» (Pérez Alonso-Geta, p. 24).

In the second chapter, García Garrido disentangles the question of compulsory schooling. After a historical overview of the matter and faced with the reactions it causes at present, the author comes out «in favour of making it flexible, adapting it to varying circumstances, opening it up to different formal educational pathways and a range of types of educational centres and programmes» (p. 37) in response to the interests of students and the wishes of their families. He also argues for public authorities to promote *integrated education policies*.

«Equality has become a political keyword, a social demand and the basis of

the democratic forms of the state.» With these words Rodríguez Neira (p. 41) starts chapter three. After analysing the contradictions and conflicts deriving from this social demand, the author focusses on the repercussions that the paradigm of the antiauthoritarian school has had on education, and concludes by noting that without authority there is no education, as there is no education without teachers taking responsibility for the present and the future of their students (p. 51).

Chapter four poses the question of whether the school should be democratic. This issue is examined by Sarramona who states that «the link between school and democracy is no less complex than the general relationship between society and democracy» (p. 64). The democratic ethos in the educational sphere requires a series of conditions: the existence of a clear set of regulations known by all, being the result of a participatory process, that it can be reviewed, scrutiny of the hidden curriculum as a source of democratic distortion, and the presence of a personal commitment to the group and the institution.

The second part of the book comprises chapters five to eight and covers some dominant ideas in education from the perspective of the prevailing social assumptions in educational work: the ideal of excellence, education inside and outside the school, knowledge and know-how, and the language of education.

Rodríguez Neira analyses excellence as an educational ideal in chapter five, starting from the position that it is a so-

cial and political good, as well as an individual reality. «Excellence is the only resource that can provide us with the pride of being and the only property capable of giving meaning to our daily work» (p. 75). He sees this as an obligation rather than a personal goal that education must facilitate.

In chapter six, Colom Cañellas guides us through the topic of «diverse educational universes», education inside and outside the school. The author suggests that we should «consider educational phenomena as a whole and understand them and approach them from a single viewpoint» and argues for a complementary approach required by the existence of a formal type of education and an informal one, analysed under the umbrella of a unifying theory of education.

Vázquez Gómez uses a question for the title of chapter seven: «¿Saber igual a saber hacer?» (Is knowledge the same as know-how?). Here he states that «the focus on know-how, which provides the foundations for competence-based education, is of little use for understanding and resolving complex problems» (p. 100). Human competence is not limited to know-how and involves the «potential for optimising transference», in the author's own words.

Chapter eight concludes this second part. In it, Touriñán considers the topic of language in education. With his normal mastery, he exposes the reality that «in the educational setting, a language empty of content, or with a contrary or even contradictory meaning is sometimes used, developed, and fabricated»

(p. 107). He argues for the value of generating concepts pertaining to pedagogy as well as avoiding «opinionitis» the dictatorship of opinion) and the traps that the slogans and metaphors used in education set for us. The solution to this problem requires creating a way of thinking that enables us to account for the «educational» character of the educational activity, because: «1) it meets the criteria for use of the term, 2) through its activities it fulfils the aim of educating, and 3) it fits the real meaning of this action, in other words, it is in accordance with the character traits and meaning that pertain to it» (pp. 123-124).

The third part of the work analyses some of the dominant ideas in education from the educational perspective (chapters nine to twelve). The central topics are the relationship between school organisation and didactic methodology, the innovative role of technology, the meaning of educational resources, and the adaptive relationships of education to the students in the educational institution itself.

In chapter nine, Colom considers the relationship between school organisation and didactic methods. He indicates that «the mismatch between school organisation and didactic methodology is a constant that continues over time in the most varied ideological contributions» (p. 139), and argues for a new concept of school organisation that is flexible and permeable to the teaching staff's needs regarding methodology and innovation.

In chapter ten, Touriñán states that «every educational action needs resources to be implemented. And the first nec-

essary resource is the one that allows us to progress from knowledge to action» (p. 147). The central topic of this chapter is resources as structural elements of the educational intervention in which the choice of a resource implies support for a specific technology. But we must bear in mind that they must always conform to the activity and meaning of education. Starting from the complexity of the type of resource, he emphasises the distinction between internal and external resources, the former relating to competences, capacities, internal activities (thinking, feeling, wanting, choosing-doing, etc.), and the latter with communal activities that are external to the agent (play, work, study, etc.) and instrumental activities (reading, drawing, dance, calculus, etc.). The importance of resources does not prevent the author from stating that «education is not a problem of resources and more resources,» as this would be to confuse their pedagogical value (p. 162).

In chapter eleven, Vázquez Gómez clears up the myth of educational innovation understood as technological innovation. The title itself poses the question «Is educational innovation a matter of technological innovation?» (p. 163), and the piece argues that «this is one of the most dominant pedagogical myths at present». For the author, of course, educational innovation «easily outweighs this technological reductionism», given that «any educational innovation always starts with the introduction of a new idea, whether about the foundations, the processes, or the aims of education» (p. 165).

Chapter twelve closes the third part of this work. In it, Sarramona attempts to

answer whether education should adapt to the needs of the student. His argument is that «the school must provide the setting where these needs can be developed ... promoting habits of cooperation, dedication, collaboration ... through shared learning, performing group tasks, and taking part in activities that respond to social needs» (p. 179).

Grupo SI(e)TE, the members of which are the authors of this book, has reconsidered education, deconstructing dominant ideas and myths. As readers, we take away the enjoyment of this work which, with its guidance, will undoubtedly help us reflect on our own educational formulas. Its pedagogical interest is beyond doubt and it is compulsory reading for anyone wishing for a better understanding of the educational problems it covers.

Maria Julia Diz López ■

**Marina, J. A. (2016).**

*Despertad al diplodocus. Una conspiración educativa para transformar la escuela y todo lo demás [Wake the diplodocus: An educational conspiracy to transform the school and everything else].*

Barcelona: Ariel. 219 pp.

Can we improve the Spanish educational system in a short time period? This is the question José Antonio Marina tries to answer in this book, where he compares the Spanish education system with a great sleeping diplodocus that must be woken. Doing this requires doing something that is only possible if

we all work together, every citizen of this country, not just those of us who work in education.

It is a call to action, educational mobilisation, uniting to move in the same direction in a turbulent period when learning is more important than ever. The book contains 219 pages of arguments for improving education in our country, for undertaking an educational change over a five-year period that is perfectly justified in the first chapter. A change that envisages «expert in learning» as the profession of the future as part of the appearance of a new science «of cultural evolution and pedagogical progress», which will act as a guide to society's learning and will make it aware that it must continue to learn. Educational mobilisation has already begun; there are ever more initiatives that transform educational reality, and guided by educational professionals, it is in our hands to take advantage of this opportunity, to propose a shared and debated process of reflection and implement its actions at all levels, as if we do not, others to whom this task does not correspond will take charge of it.

Throughout its pages, there is a large collection of «lived experience boxes» full of innovative educational experiences, based on scientific evidence, that are already being carried out in schools over the world.

While Marina defines himself as an «educational megalomaniac» who recognises his inability to make his dream reality, he knows that the only way of producing a phenomenon is by increasing the probabilities of it occurring. Therefore, he

dedicates chapters three to seven to each of the agents of the change that he considers to be key.

Chapter one considers the complexity of implementing an educational change and the question of who should manage it. Two important concepts are used: on the one hand, the fact that a system comprises distinct elements and that each of them has an influence on the whole, and, on the other hand, that before anything else, three elements are needed for a change to occur: believing it is necessary, wanting to do it, and knowing how to do it. Therefore, before offering solutions, Marina tries to stimulate forces to drive these solutions.

However, motivation is no use if there are not clear targets to aim for. Therefore, Marina proposes five objectives that might make a coherent, realistic, and inspiring guide for those who want to join in with the change: reducing the school drop-out rate to 10% compared with the current 21.9%, climbing by 35 points in the PISA scale, thus putting us on a par with countries like Finland, increasing the number of excellent students, and reducing the distance between the best and the worst, facilitating a situation where all students can attain their maximum personal development regardless of their economic situation, and finally encouraging the acquisition of twenty-first century skills, such as emotional intelligence.

Chapter two proposes a model of intelligence for pedagogical change that emanates not from amateurs but from experts in the subject. In Spain's recent

history, there have been attempts to transform education using laws of dubious rigour and with minimal agreement that are of little use for the twenty-first century. In light of this problem, the above-mentioned science of cultural evolution should appear, showing its capacity for the school to reach its economic, cultural, social, and personal objectives, taking advantage of all scientific discoveries and integrating them into our culture. However, far from providing directions, what will most define this science is its ability to teach its citizens to manage their intelligence and capacities so that they can learn and solve problems all through their life.

From the third chapter onwards, the agents of change start to be discussed; the first of these is the school. The training future teachers receive will depend on the value we place on education, and the teachers we have will largely depend on the success of the educational system. In Spain, teaching is not an elite profession, like medicine or engineering, and our objective should be for it to become one like in the countries with the world's best educational systems. Consequently, the relationship between the school and the university is inescapable.

Each management team must act as a true team, intelligently and pulling in the same direction. Every single one of their members must feel that they form part of a team that has been formed for a purpose that is bigger than them as individuals: facilitating the integrated development of new generations. They must definitively become organisations that learn, and

must be true allies for the students who also have something to say in the transformation of the centres. We cannot make changes that silence their true protagonists.

Chapter four adds another ally: the family, «the second prime engine of change». School and home must be united, sharing a pedagogy that favours their co-operation and mutually helping each other. Marina sees the family as a micro-system within the macro-system in which the child develops physically, emotionally, linguistically, and cognitively, and so without the involvement of the family, what is done at school will probably fail. If we claim that improving teacher training is a prerequisite for educational success, perhaps we should do the same with the other agents, and, if this is not possible, the school should offset shortcomings in the family.

Teachers, parents, and students live in a certain setting, somewhere that has an influence on every one of them, and precisely because of that is part of the educational system. These are cities, the third engine of change, the implications of which are discussed in chapter five. The city, according to Marina, is a fine example of shared team intelligence and its success is because it supports the happiness of its inhabitants. If cities contribute to the intellectual, emotional, cultural, and economic well-being of their citizens, it is not possible to separate the objectives of the school from those of the city, both being jointly responsible for change and for mobilising all citizens to meet these objectives.

Chapter six is dedicated to the world of business, the fourth engine for change as organisations that learn can extrapolate their capacity to promote and invest in talent, be results-oriented, define their vision, mission, and culture, and work in a team, things that can be unfamiliar to those who run the educational system. Furthermore, if schools are the place for children and businesses are places for adults, the transition from one to the other will be less of a shock.

The seventh and final chapter refers to the last link in the system and engine of change: the state. A good knowledge of which functions correspond to the central state and which to the regional governments in the running of Spain's educational system would solve most of the legislative failures that have marked recent years. A state agreement on education could involve the agreement we have been awaiting for so long, although good management of the new measures by the agents mentioned above is still necessary. The state must promote education, finance it, manage it, and achieve a real learning society. The opinion of experts in these measures and an increase in funding until it represents 5% of GDP, would be two key elements that would contribute to the quality of the educational system.

The book concludes by noting that substantial changes are produced by the synergy of small changes that, while not very visible on the large scale, proliferate increasingly in Spanish classrooms. One teacher can change a class but many can transform the system. This work is a brilliant proposal for doing

this with our system (so long as we work together).

Aída Valero ■

**Esteban, F. and Román, B. (2016).**

*¿Quo vadis, Universidad?*

[*Quo vadis, University?*]

Barcelona: Editorial UOC, 258 pp.

From the signing of the *Magna Charta Universitatum* (1988) to the present day, there have been vertiginous changes in the praxis and conception of the university. These changes have continuously been accompanied by works that take a critical position towards them and by works that do nothing but support a model we might agree to define as technical-didactic that has become one of the hegemonic ways of organising universities. This book by Francisco Esteban and Begoña Román proposes other changes that follow what could perhaps be called a third way, one that offers new pathways and recovers other concepts of the university from memory. These are other pathways to continue thinking in depth the project of a university that for those of us who work or study there runs through and traps us.

It is a matter of thinking and presenting this institution in a broad way connected with the overall idea of what it means «to be part of a university» and of what is based on the very idea of the university (from its inception to the present day). This is the sense that Karl Jaspers gave it in *The idea of the university*, a recently republished work

where he suggests that «the university is a community of scholars and students engaged in the task of seeking truth.» A simple and succinct definition (that would surely be questioned by many members of the university community) which is at the heart of the book we are reviewing here.

This book was originally presented as the doctoral thesis of one of the authors (Francisco Esteban) at the faculty of philosophy of the University of Barcelona, and was supervised by the other author (Begoña Román). It is a mature work (it was Esteban's second doctoral thesis; his first was in pedagogy) that connects and fits perfectly with a broad group of authors and works that over time have meticulously approached the study of the university. The most important of these include Manuel García Morente (*El ideal universitario y otros ensayos* [The university ideal and other essays]), José Ortega y Gasset (*La misión de la Universidad* [The mission of the university]), John Henry Newman (*Discourses on the scope and nature of university education*), Étienne Gilson (*El amor a la sabiduría* [The love of wisdom]), and the multi-author work *La educación personalizada en la Universidad* [Personalised education at university]. Most of these books have been republished recently and share the interest Esteban and Román show in the aims and the hidden *ethos* of the university project. This interest has been accompanied by experiments that with radical clarity call for a liberal education project in the university and that are expressed through the use of great books in the core curriculum (examples such as those

of Thomas Aquinas College in the USA or the University of Navarra in Spain). All of this makes *Quo vadis, University?* a necessary question, for the future, for resistance, for orientation and guidance in bureaucratic situations and in other cases.

This book contains four large chapters that will be considered below. Chapter one tackles the question of memory and the university and acts as a fixing point to show that there has been something continuous in this institution from the Middle Ages to the present day. As the authors state, «The thing that gives its identity to what we understand as the university is not just the word itself. A university, per se, is no more than a corporation of people. However, what makes this corporation a university and not something else, is the fact that this corporation specifically comprises experts and students, people who embody and bring life to a particular activity geared towards a special purpose: intellectual development» (p. 23).

The second chapter focusses on the «Philosophy of university education», something that is not always present in works that take the university as their subject. Using communitarianism as a working framework, the authors examine contemporary university education. Consequently, they subdivide the chapter into two sections to tackle the intended question in greater detail: a) preliminary considerations on the idea of the university; and b) thinkers who have tackled the topic of the idea of the university in their research (Humboldt, Newman, and Ortega y Gasset). In the authors' words, «the

three philosophies of university education display two shared characteristics. The first is that they were established drawing on the genesis and evolution of the first universities of the Middle Ages. The second is their transcendence, as they are still present in the reality of European universities» (p. 131).

The third chapter considers questions relating to communitarian critique and university ethical education. After setting out questions about the idea, aim, and mission of the university in the previous chapter, this section focusses on the communitarian critique. To do this, it reviews questions linked with the identity of the individual and its educational possibilities in the university. Consequently, the authors suggest that «university education is interpellated by the area outlined here. In it, experts and students come together who, as well as playing their corresponding roles, have and display a certain ethical nature» (p. 163). That said, the ethic offers certain resources that are used for serving the ideal of the university.

The last chapter is a good, well-structured, forward-looking pedagogy. This chapter does not easily yield when facing ways of comprehending the university (especially in its most utilitarian and mercantilist extreme). For the authors, «utility has taken the reins of university education» (p. 209). The fact that the student (in the proposal made by the authors of this book) comes to be recognised as an ethical learning subject gives another distinct perspective. Beyond instruction in the form of competences, headings, portfolios, and certifications, there is the idea

of education (*Bildung*) that endeavours to restrict «productive planning» and «profitable programming».

Ultimately, this book is an interesting read for continuing to think about the university and for continuing to exercise the original mandate for which it was created: bringing together experts

and students. This union must continue to permit those who inhabit it to move between the deep possibilities of the *paideia*, the *humanitas*, and the *Bildung* in pursuit of a complete liberal education that allows them to develop as rounded individuals.

Jordi Planella ■