

Education Form Social Justice. Didactic Orientations for the Degree in Primary Education

María Navarro-Granados

¹²University of Extremadura

¹²University of Extremadura, Badajoz, Spain

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Abstract: In an increasingly pluralistic and diverse society, recognising the importance of promoting a truly inclusive education from all sectors is an unquestionable fact. The aim of this paper is to show, from a critical perspective, the evolution of attention to diversity in Spain. To do so, we briefly review the main laws and regulations that have been developed in the country, highlighting their most significant aspects. We also carry out a review of the research on actions that contribute to moving towards greater educational inclusion in our schools. Finally, we made a series of didactic proposals to work on this subject with students of the Primary Education Degree. Among the main conclusions, we highlight the urgent need to take into account the results of empirical research in this field when drawing up educational policies.

Keywords: educational inclusion, legislation, social exclusion, education policy.

I. INTRODUCTION

Phenomena such as poverty, inequality and social exclusion can become serious obstacles to achieving inclusive quality education (UNESCO, 2015). Spain is one of the European Union (EU) countries with the highest levels of inequality and poverty, especially among children (Bello & Unicef, 2016).

As can be seen in the figure above, Spain is the country, apart from Romania, worst placed in terms of child poverty. At the other extreme is Finland. This is particularly striking considering that Spain invests almost half the EU average in social protection for children and has been increasing its public spending on education since 2006 (Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2016).

Similarly, equality of opportunity in the country is still often conditioned by factors such as socio-economic status and social and cultural capital (Sastre and Escorial, 2017). Thus, the rate of child poverty quadruples in cases where parents have a low level of education compared to those with a university education, and also increases in families with an immigrant background (Unicef, 2016).

This inequality is truly worrying if, in addition, we take into account that Spain is still the second country in the EU with the highest early school dropout rates, although it has improved in recent years (Bello and Unicef, 2016).

A wide range of factors are involved in this process. However, the likelihood of early school leaving is higher when a number of conditions are present, such as: having a low socio-economic and cultural level, being an immigrant, speaking a language at home other than the one used at school, living in single-parent households, not having received early childhood education, among others (OECD, 2012). Therefore, there are starting conditions that, if not adequately taken into account or measures to improve them are not implemented, will continue to reproduce inequalities.

Along these lines, another worrying fact in Spain is the so-called "ghettoisation" of schools, which affects children's right to receive an inclusive education. There is still a high percentage of schools attended almost exclusively by pupils with a low socio-cultural level, many of whom are at risk of poverty and social exclusion. Much has been urged of education administrations to put an end to this occurrence which encompasses a number of complex issues, including urban ghettoisation (de Haro, 2009). Moreno (2013) sees it as a clear form of exclusion that is not only the result of a high percentage of pupils at risk of exclusion living together, but as the result of policies of inequity. This is an issue around which a debate continues to rage regarding the measures that should be implemented to prevent this phenomenon from occurring. One of them is to apply some "corrective" mechanism to the principle of freedom of choice for families to choose the school their children attend, since according to some authors there will continue to be a concentration of socially disadvantaged students in certain schools (Sastre and Escorial, 2017), an issue that the PISA report itself recommends reducing (OECD, 2016).

Despite the fact that these schools have had access to a number of additional resources in recent years, early school leavers continue to be more concentrated in these schools (OECD, 2014).

Another important data point is enrolment in the first cycle of pre-primary education (0-3 years), which is a crucial stage in favouring greater educational inclusion as it is the one that provides the most "equalising" level. Thus, in Spain it has been and continues to be an educational level with unequal representation depending on family income levels due to the scarce supply of public places (Sastre and Escorial, 2017).

Diversity is a characteristic of our current societies that we consider truly necessary. Specifically in the field of education, in order to truly take this diversity into account, it is necessary to provide each and every child with educational responses in accordance with their particular needs, characteristics and interests. However, in Spain we still often find ourselves with homogeneous educational responses that respond to the now outdated model based on "integration" (González and Martínez, 2012).

Given all this, we ask ourselves: what educational model should be promoted in order to develop schools and, therefore, increasingly inclusive societies? With the aim of answering this question, we analyse what educational actions have been presented to us from research in this field as successful in moving towards a truly inclusive education, so that we can draw a series of relevant conclusions.

II. WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INCLUSIVE EDUCATION?

First, we consider it important to clarify a number of concepts regarding the treatment of diversity (García, 2017):

- Exclusion. It implies the denial that people with special educational needs receive a quality education.
- Segregation. This is the model behind the belief that education or teaching in homogeneous groups is of higher quality. It also separates those with disabilities from mainstream classrooms.
- Integration. Students with disabilities have to adapt to the "norm" and are provided with specific teachers and support.
- Inclusion. The student with a disability is in the classroom with his or her peers and receives support if necessary. All students are considered to have different needs and are guaranteed access to a common curriculum with the necessary support.

As we can see, inclusive education goes beyond the mere "integration" of students. Thus, behind this concept lies the concern to provide teaching-learning processes thinking about the conditions and processes that can favour meaningful learning for all students in relation to their abilities and characteristics (Echeíta, 2008). Educational inclusion refers to the participation in the educational environment of all those students who may be vulnerable due to their circumstances and/or characteristics (Booth and Ainscow, 2002), and it is this perspective on which we place special emphasis in the present work. In other words, the aim is to offer opportunities for success to all students regardless of their initial circumstances (Consejería de Educación, 2016), adapting educational action in order to guarantee the longed-for equality of opportunities (García, García, Biencinto & González, 2009).

Therefore, one of the main differences with respect to integration, reflecting the fact that it is a more advanced model adapted to today's societies, is that diversity is perceived as an enrichment (Booth and Ainscow, 2002).

The aim of inclusive education is none other than to provide quality education for all learners, respecting that each learner is a unique being with different needs, abilities and learning expectations from others, in a way that eliminates all forms of discrimination (UNESCO, 2015).

III. DEVELOPMENTS IN THE RECOGNITION OF DIVERSITY IN SPAIN

García, García, Biencinto and González (2009, p. 110), analyse the evolution in terms of the school's recognition of diversity, making the following division:

A. Diversity is not recognised in the classroom and everything that deviates from the "norm" is marginalised. Special education centres are created for these children and with regard to the education system, it is the pupil who must adapt to the system.

B. Difference is no longer perceived as a deviation but as a deficit. Efforts are made to bring the person who is different closer to the "norm". These people can be integrated into schools but receive different educational attention from the rest (mainly compensatory measures).

C. Inclusive approach to diversity, considering the latter as an inherent characteristic of human beings. Diversity begins to be seen as something positive and evolves towards individualised attention. With regard to school, activities are provided that can be achieved by all students, developing their potential in different ways. In this case, methods are adapted to the students.

The recognition of special education was an important milestone, as it was acknowledged that there are students who need trained teachers, special programmes, specific materials, etc. However, this model was flawed as it led to the segregation of these pupils (Verdugo, 2004).

As can be seen in the table above, it was not until the enactment of the LOE that attempts were made to go beyond mere integration and move towards educational inclusion (González and Martínez, 2012; Toboso et al. 2012). A clear example of this concept of integration is clearly seen in the LISMI (1982), which states that students with disabilities will be integrated into the mainstream education system by receiving the necessary support. Likewise, although significant steps were taken in the LOGSE of 1990, the measures implemented were still oriented towards integration (García, 2009).

Currently, we find ourselves in a situation of uncertainty with regard to educational policy in Spain, where the LOMCE is still in force with many detractors. With regard to the issue at hand, there are many sectors that criticise the current law in relation to educational inclusion, with the introduction of the well-known "re-evaluations" at the end of certain educational stages (López, 2013).

Finally, it should be noted that, despite the LOE's intention to move towards an inclusive model, this has not always been satisfactorily implemented in Spain, where there is still a tendency to confuse inclusion with integration (Pérez, 2009; Verdugo and Rodríguez, 2012)

IV. THE ROAD TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION. WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US?

An EU-wide project, although already completed, which has managed to make progress in terms of educational inclusion, is the "INCLUD-ED" project, which aimed to analyse educational strategies that have proven to contribute to overcoming social inequality, in order to be able to implement successful and effective policy measures. Some of these successful educational practices that have proven to achieve positive results in all contexts include the following (Valls, Prados and Aguilera, 2014):

- Inclusive groupings. This involves grouping students in heterogeneous groups by increasing the number of adults in the classroom. An example of this increase can be seen in the so-called "interactive groups", where the student learns from the contributions of multiple people, understanding learning from a dialogical perspective where everyone learns from everyone else.
- Extending learning times beyond school hours (e.g. with dialogic gatherings, homework club, learning mentors, etc.).
- Encourage family and community participation that goes beyond merely informative or consultative participation.

Focusing our attention on schools that work with students at risk of social exclusion, Save the Children makes a series of recommendations that we consider interesting (Sastre and Escorial, 2016):

- Develop strategies to attract and retain the most qualified teachers in these schools (good working conditions, support and incentive systems to improve staff stability, etc.).
- Ensure that these schools can rely on additional teachers to implement inclusive measures.
- Ensure quality teacher training.
- Create networks of schools to establish mutual support, exchange interventions and practices.
- Diversify the educational profiles of the professionals working in these schools (pedagogues, social educators, psychologists, etc.).

Given the evidence linking disadvantaged schools to low performance, the OECD (2012) sets out a series of recommendations for disadvantaged schools, highlighting the need to go beyond educational measures and also implement economic and social measures:

- Develop and support school leadership. School leadership is considered an important factor in the transformation of these schools. However, they are often not adequately trained and selected to work in them. Therefore, it is necessary to provide them with specialised knowledge, reform coaching and mentoring programmes, develop strategies to retain and attract leaders in these schools, etc.
- Foster a positive and supportive school environment. These schools often face problems with student behaviours, which often affect the working climate. Education policies should therefore: prioritise the development of a positive teacher-pupil and peer work climate; promote the use of diagnostic tools to identify disruptions in learning difficulties; ensure that these schools provide children with sufficient support (counselling, tutoring, etc.); smaller classrooms to make teaching and learning more effective for these students, etc.
- Training and retention of competent teachers. Such schools are not always staffed with the best teaching professionals. As the most influential factor in student learning, coherent policies should be in place to recruit quality teachers, train them in the skills and knowledge needed to work in these schools, provide mentoring for new teachers and incentives to attract and retain quality teachers.
- Ensuring effective learning strategies. Pedagogical strategies are an aspect that necessarily needs to be taken care of even more in these schools as they can make a difference. To this end, education policies must ensure: use of diagnostic tools and summative assessments to monitor children's progress; guarantee a curriculum with high expectations of success. Ultimately, learning paces are often so different in these children that teachers need to be able to adapt to them and develop diversified pedagogical practices.
- Linking families and communities to the school. In these schools, families are often less involved in their children's learning. Therefore, from the school it is necessary to work to make parents have more positive attitudes towards the school, improve communication strategies between the school and families, providing them with clear guidelines on how to support their children's learning, encourage people who are part of the community to advise students and support their learning, among others.

Finally, we find interesting the conclusions reached by Fernández and Batanero (2013) regarding good practices of school leadership in inclusive schools. Firstly, developing a professional culture based on collaboration is essential in this type of school, for which principals must be able to create enthusiasm, excitement and motivation among the teaching staff. Equally, we believe it is essential for the school head to be able to manage interpersonal relationships by delegating responsibilities or, in other words, to exercise more democratic leadership. In this way, he/she will be able to achieve the proposed objectives more closely.

V. CONCLUSION

As we have been able to see by analysing the laws and provisions that have dealt with diversity in Spain, it is necessary to continue working to implement inclusive measures that go beyond the model based on integration. To this end, we believe that the educational policies to be implemented in a country should be based on the educational research that has been

carried out on the subject in question, a fact that is scarcely present in Spain. In this sense, there are many studies that show how grade repetition is a measure related to the probability of school failure and this continues to be the measure universally used in our educational system for those who do not reach a certain academic level (Mendizábal and Calero, 2013, p. 564). Therefore, we agree with Sánchez-Santamaría (2015) that one of the main handicaps of the Spanish education system is the lack of connection between the scientific field and educational policies, an issue that, as the author rightly reflects, does not occur in other fields such as medicine.

Likewise, we believe that in order to move towards truly inclusive schools it is necessary to implement measures that go beyond the school, as the well-known "Learning Communities" have done, because for there to be inclusive schools there must be inclusive societies, and this is achieved with holistic measures from various fields.

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