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meritocracy, justice and care**



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INTRODUCTION

Taking up the concept of meritocracy advanced by Michael Young in 1958, M. Sandel (*The Tyranny of Merit*, 2020) states that graduates and highly qualified professionals in the USA today attempt to take such advantage of education for their children that meritocracy has been converted into hereditary aristocracy. More than an egalitarian ideal and a remedy for inequalities, based on the effort, talent and dedication of each student, the meritocratic ideology ends up justifying and legitimate those inequalities, its essence being restricted mobility and not equality.

Very present in the school model, the appealing idea of merit, which is supposedly accessible to all those who make an effort and work, tends to hide the existing social and cultural inequality among students, taking them all as a standard or a norm (middle class, autochthonous, good academic and cultural family capital, ...) and considering any deviation from this norm as a deficit, either on the part of the family or on the part of the student. This social construction of concepts of normality and family deficit leads to a refusal to look at each child and each student per se, with attention and care, transforming poverty and inequality into lack of family support and lack of commitment to studies.

The subordination of schools to mandates of standardisation, performativity, competitiveness, selectivity and individualism serves this ideology, reinforces and crystallises social inequalities and contributes to a serious anthropological and axiological reductionism of school education, moving it away from the capacities and emancipation of each and every child and from the ideals of democracy and social justice, thereby reinforcing the "tyranny of merit".

Besides school justice understood as the redistribution of educational goods, several perspectives have stressed the relevance of justice as recognition, in a framework of cultural respect for personal identities, agency and promotion of civic and political participation.

The educational paradigm of care, already widely worked on by Noddings, for example, has been proposed as a more ecological and alternative educational model, based on attention, equity, respect and promotion of each child and student, not in an individualistic perspective, but in a framework of co-responsibility and social solidarity and construction of relationships that "humanize the human". Thinking about education between meritocracy, fairness and care has emerged as a timely and pertinent field of analysis and as a challenge to the presentation of studies, mainly theoretical and/or empirical.

Joaquim Azevedo & José Matias Alves

WHAT PHILOSOPHY FOR CULTIVATING MERIT? RELATIONS OF RECOGNITION AND ORIGINAL TRUST ABOUT THE WORLD

Giuseppe Tognon*

Abstract What is cultivated in merit? Talent or commitment, genius or the application of methods of study, work, social self-promotion? These questions reveal that the crux of the problem is to move from the consideration of a merit recognised mostly a posteriori, on the basis of expected or otherwise recognisable results, to a different consideration, according to which merit basically consists in a life purpose and thus in a project that brings inner well-being and social tranquillity, without limiting personal initiative and on the contrary allowing everyone to enjoy someone's particular talents. In recent times, both new ethical-social theories on the «recognition relation» have emerged that have sought to overcome the antinomy between conflict and human progress, and new relational theories in the psychological and psychoanalytic spheres (important references are A. Honneth, E. Levinas and P. Ricoeur; for *Infant Research* D.W. Winnicott, L. Sander, D. Stern, J. Benjamin). A second interesting philosophical path for reconstructing the basis of a theory of merit that does not depend on pre-established social models is that of the original *doxa*, of «original trust in the world», in what is perceived and in its reliability. Husserl speaks of this in a number of texts, not numerous but significant. The theme is developed by Merleau-Ponty with his «perceptual faith or trust» that would constitute the true original condition and thus the authentically «natural» condition.

Keywords: Cultivating Merit, Meritocracy, Phenomenology of Education, Recognition Theory, Trust

Preface. The discussion on merit has long occupied the public debate in all democracies. In the United States, the topic is part of the discussion on human capital and social excellence and is central to philosophical reflection on equality and justice: three important references are J. Rawls, M. Nussbaum and M.J. Sandel. In Europe the picture is more complicated because in the Old Continent the weight of national histories and religious disputes is greater and the intervention of

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the public hand is stronger. In Europe, the public school model counts a lot and specific national factors are involved. In France, for example, merit is an issue that closely concerns the State, which selects the ruling class through an established system of highly meritocratic public schools.

There are great ambiguities surrounding merit and meritocracy. Meritocratic theories sometimes conceal the return of neo-liberal and reactionary economic ideologies, while their rejection justifies the re-proposition of egalitarian equal opportunity theories that do not take into account the end of illusions about infinite economic growth. In Italy, the new conservative government decided, for example, to change the name of the Ministry of Education to «Ministry of Education and Merit», without anyone really understanding what merit was being taken as a model. The merit of studying? That of teaching well? That of excelling in some subject or in periodic and final assessments? This provoked irony and concern among families and teachers' unions. The question of merit always tends to slide to the level of recrimination against laxity and in favour of a model of school or work relations based on the authority of the system and models of behaviour inspired by a vision centred on personal effort and commitment. Success certainly requires effort, but personal effort is only one of the conditions for success. Commitment is not enough: successes are often due to luck and many failures occur despite commitment. Reducing merit to effort is a serious mistake. While effort is within everyone's reach, merit in order to develop requires starting conditions, e.g. a talent, a mandate, a drive ..., without which it would not be possible to evaluate it. However, for a whole series of other conditions, some fortuitous, merit is often rewarded to many who have no talent.

The most recent theories on intelligence and human relations show that any «individualist» idea of merit does not correspond to biophysical and social complexity. There are cases of merit that belong to team games or group dynamics. A great footballer, or a good manager, on their own can do nothing, whereas if they are assisted by a team they can express the best of themselves and to the benefit of the group. If we insist on rewarding individuals on the basis of expected results, on a predetermined scale of success, we will not be able to integrate those random, non-predetermined elements that alter our social model of reference and drive us to build new ones. There is no taxonomy of merit, and if there were, it would be as uncertain as all other taxonomies, psychological, aesthetic, moral, political. Instead, more attention should be paid to how to «cultivate» merit in order to make it grow in an orderly manner and in a quantity beneficial to the greatest number of individuals.

I. What is cultivated in merit? Talent or commitment, genius or the application of methods of study, work, social self-promotion? These questions reveal that the crux of the problem is to move from the consideration of a merit recognised mostly a posteriori, on the basis of expected or otherwise recognisable results, to a different consideration, according to which merit basically consists in a life purpose and thus in a project that brings inner well-being and social tranquillity, without

limiting personal initiative and on the contrary allowing everyone to enjoy someone's particular talents. Whoever cultivates needs a seed because cultivation – like any human activity – needs something alive that has its own line of development. We are now able to operate in deep genetics but we are not yet able, fortunately, to cultivate nothing or to create from nothing. Every biological and social process needs an origin.

Merits can be distinguished into «outcome» merits, achieved by the individual or the group, or 'gift' merits bestowed on the basis of someone else's will. Outcome and gift are two distinct models, because the gift cannot be identified with a material reward. Both contribute to each person's endowment, but they are not interchangeable. The gift presupposes a different «recognition» from that used for a reward that is not based on productivity and efficiency criteria. There is often no correspondence between merit and reward. Many merits are not identified, let alone recognised. Every social «recognition» depends on the context and the «jury», i.e. those who are called upon to judge. This partly explains why meritocracy dislikes, so to speak, states of war or situations of great conflict, in which many social hierarchies collapse in the face of emergency. And while gifts can be untethered from a logic of efficiency and also from the awareness of the recipient – think of childhood, for example – certified merits are not necessarily secure. Since they depend on more or less rational evaluation criteria, they are sensitive to changes in social systems, the market and public opinion.

The threats to our societies are so great that the entire economic theory on human capital, born in the 1960s, is in trouble. The progressive destruction of workplaces at the hands of technology and artificial intelligence is accompanied by the sclerosis of public apparatuses and the ineffectiveness of active training and employment policies that devour enormous amounts of financial resources with results that do not live up to expectations. Not only economic and financial inequalities between individuals have increased, but also those between areas of a country and between social classes. The re-emergence of the debate on merit in situations of global crisis almost seems to herald the restoration of an ideology of austerity in which individual merit would return to shine as the only chance to emerge and be saved. Meritocracy would claim to make up for the social and civil disintermediation of human relations that is a consequence of economic crises. Moreover, it does not take into account the circularity between man and the environment because in most cases it only examines the retributive aspect of merit without understanding that the well-being of people does not coincide with the well-being of the consumer who through competition is always looking for a reduction in price. To avoid the risks of revolution, contemporary elites have willingly embraced the consumerist drift of societies proposed by new forms of capitalism. The availability of time and space available to an individual embarking on a path of merit has been reduced through the collective neurosis of consumption, which is a way of attributing to objects those purposes and values that instead belong to the community. The claim to include the future of all in the present of a few is typical of an elitist vision of society in which the most deserving must receive the maximum of

satisfaction and rewards so that nothing is left to chance. Holding the reins in science, technology, and the political arts is an ambition in itself positive, but it does not translate into social expropriation only if it is the result of a democratic investiture that prevents the hoarding and «black» market of knowledge. Otherwise, the mass of the last is destined to represent, with its toil and «vulgarity», the «graveyard» of reality and the excuse for some to separate themselves from it.

II. In the meantime, it is useful to start with only apparently simple questions: 1. What is talent 2. How talents are distributed among people 3. How everyone can develop their talents; 4. How to reward the results of one's talents. It is not easy to state what talent is: it was a currency and has become a genetic factor. It was an autonomous capacity of the individual but also the sign of a divine blessing. The metamorphoses of talent are tortuous. A modern scientific tradition has imposed the idea that talents are inscribed in DNA, that they are gifts of nature, and that the task of the educated society is to detect them early and preserve them. According to Adrian Wooldridge (2021), meritocracy and the spirit of competition are decisive for building freer and more prosperous societies. For decades, people insisted on intelligence tests and objective assessment tests, but realised that they are neither reliable nor useful tools. There are children with high cognitive potential who refuse to compete and who give up, or freeze, at the chance to excel. Many gifted children have troubled adolescence and fail to find a satisfactory place in society. The theorisation of the early search for talent has certainly reawakened interest in childhood and shown that helping those who start out disadvantaged requires intervention as early as kindergarten. But the hypothesis of a mass screening of childhood intelligence has proven to be unrealistic and also undemocratic. It would be appropriate to educate everyone on the basis of their own potential, but while some are obvious (physicality, the ability to memorise, musical competence, linguistic ability...) others, sometimes the most sought-after, are not «natural» but constructed, second-rate.

Given the impossibility of categorising people according to IQ, we focused on the equal opportunities' theory, which however does not answer many other questions. Compulsory schooling has become the winning formula for the democratisation of society and for bringing everyone beyond a minimum level of knowledge. At the same time, the idea of opportunities suggests that one should not, in the name of abstract egalitarianism, give up on really getting to know children and stimulating them to discover their talents. However, there is an open sea between discovery and development: no life experience is linear and the growth of each individual is subject to unforeseen events and qualifying encounters. Continuous paths of recovery can be attempted, but we now know that no recovery can ever be a valid alternative to a person's natural development. On the other hand, beyond a certain age and after attending a congruent number of school years, it is no longer possible to adopt an egalitarian logic. In tertiary education, it would not be fair to waste resources on those who do not want to apply themselves or who prove incapable of progressing, but unfortunately resistance to selection is now very strong even there. It is proof that

where one claims to practise equality by right, one ends up fossilising inequality. The strongest separate themselves from the masses and seek refuge in the factories of excellence.

A decisive point is the reward to be given to those who have succeeded in developing talents, whether natural or acquired. This would appear to be peaceful and that is how meritocrats see it. Actually, many believe that rewarding the strong is nothing more than arrogance and a sign of a bad conscience. US philosopher Michael Sandel's anti-meritocratic critique in his 2020 book *The Tyranny of Merit. What's Become of the Common Good* is raising much discussion. According to the author, the idea of treating talent as an investment is the most obvious manifestation of the arrogance of the strong dictated by the will to humiliate the weak. In fact, Sandel's criticism has a weakness in that it disregards the desire of humans to «play the game» of who is better, and does not take sufficient account, except in a negative way, of human ambition and aspirations to compete, which belong to the nature of the *Sapiens* species. Living in a flat world and restrained by the concern not to be violent or to be too unkind is as unhappy a prospect for mankind as the opposite view that would apply talent selection from birth.

Meritocratic theories fail to cohabit with a serious theory of equality: while the former want to see results right away and are not content to simply act as a stimulus to energise the whole of society, the latter, equality, is a hypothetical ideal construct, founded certainly on rational data extrapolated from scientific observation (the unity of the human race), but never tested on the historical plane. The gap between the factual plane of power and the ideal construct of a general theory of man makes the issue highly controversial. Ultimately, most of those who reflect on the matter come to the conclusion that the only thing that is certain is that it goes hand in hand with the certification of inequalities. In order to prevent this from leading to paralysis, it is then necessary to work on the perceptual level one has of the former and the latter. This would be an exercise in social pedagogy that should lead to avoiding negative contrasts. This way of proceeding seems to recall the Aristotelian theory of virtues, moderation and balance between extremes. In reality this is, in my opinion, a poor approach to a fundamental issue, which is that of the recognition of a natural right to life that subjects all theories of social organisation to an examination of legitimacy with respect to the need for recognition that underpins personal identity. The prize is first and foremost life itself. Additional rewards are needed to enable mankind to care for it and, above all, to improve it where and when life is under attack, presents malformations, creates tensions, clashes with difficulties imposed by men. Life is a process that, like all phenomena, does not escape human evaluation but sustains itself in the desire for self, in a «self-love» that, as the ancients taught – echoed by Rousseau in the fourth book of the *Emile* – is positive, as opposed to the «self-respect» that depends on the opinion of others or what one believes to be theirs. The rewards of achievement belong to the logic of self-love, which makes those who lack a healthy desire to live or who feel insecure because of their inferiority very fragile.

III. Is a different perspective on merit possible? Certainly: I tried to outline it in a small book, *La democrazia del merito*, (2016). One of the conditions is that the discourse is not extrapolated from the more general ethical-political context in which it traditionally moves, on the relationship between equality and justice in liberal societies. However, the fact that terms such as «justice», «equality», «social conflict», «human solidarity» appear worn out to the point of boredom among scholars themselves, fuels public and private disenchantment. What is lacking, moreover, is a systematic study that reveals and explains the uncertainties of the idea of «merit», which is an inheritance from the Latin language and culture, which roughly summarised with it phenomena and positions that in other cultures had and would have found much finer specific explanations. In Greek culture, for example, a distinction was made between *kleos* and *axios*, between someone else's recognition of something heroic and the price or exchange value of something. Christian theological culture developed a heated discussion on the relationship between human merit and divine grace that occupied the public space in the very centuries that were decisive in the construction of modernity, to the point of prompting the ecclesiastical authorities themselves to impose a «truce» on a thorny issue that was pushing theology far away from modern rationality.

An interesting perspective remains that of an educational model for which the measurement of a «standard» merit gives way to a pedagogical proposal on the development of talents that is able to identify those that are socially most useful without preventing others from being born. Seen from the side of the educator, merit is very different from those who see it from the side of the pupil. Yet it is precisely the educational sphere that has long ago abandoned the path of merit, both because of a false egalitarian ideology that has dominated the scholastic discourse in some past decades, and also because of the disappearance of those leaderships that we might call intermediate, between the father figure and the figure of the political leader, who, with the passage from elitist schooling to mass literacy, have played a very important educational function. This is the case of the figure of the teacher and the professor who accompanied and then even replaced the figure of the parish priest. Called upon to perform roles as teachers, hundreds of thousands of men, and later especially women, have built a «road of merit» in compulsory schooling that could channel all students. In this way, the modern ideology of the elites has paid its debt to mass democracy while continuing to occupy those areas where the added value of knowledge and power was and is greatest, in elitist schools, private universities and in general all those «factories of excellence» from which the meritocratic verbiage emanates.

However, there is still a lack of a philosophical theory capable of laying the foundations of merit deeper than those traditionally taken into account by evaluation processes applied in schools and society. In order to get away from logics marked by functional economic ideologies, it is certainly important to start again from a fine factual analysis, based on pedagogical observation and case studies, of the relationship between master and student, between adult and child, between strength and weakness, which underlies our dual way of reading reality. However, case analysis and

pedagogical observation are not sufficient to correct meritocratic logics by preserving the value of merit as an anthropological premise that resists social segregation. The distinction between meritocracy and merit is the phoenix of egalitarian theories that have never been able to ground it solidly. Without the meritocratic perspective, the evaluation of merit would take on no political significance and become a universal sharing element, like the air we breathe. What is needed, therefore, is a philosophical reflection on the possibility of going beyond the dichotomy between principles and reality, between existence and possibility, which is typical of the Western cultural matrix. A binary and conflicting representation between merit and demerit, between poor normality and emerging dignity is consistent with a Manichaean view of reality and the logic of conflict. Without bothering Augustine and his polemic against the Manichean heresy or without going into the depths of the Neo-Platonic philosophies, it is useful to recognise that the philosophy of education is perhaps the only special philosophy that does not contemplate conflict as an archetype and, indeed, postulates a principle of necessity in every life experience. The philosophy of education is forced to continually combine the principle of reality with the principle of possibility in order to have margins on which to operate through the construction of a renewed humanity. Having as its object individuals in their «preventive» indeterminacy, i.e. assuming positively the postulate of human life, the philosophy of education uncovers their limits and magnitudes and impacts with the limits of the *genos* but also of the *kratos* that emerge from living together. The core of educating cannot therefore be reduced to a hierarchical and asymmetrical relationship between those who know and those who do not know, between those who teach and those who learn. The radical anamorphism of educating is generated by the broader anamorphism of human experience, which is never predictive, and which continuously impacts the death of individuals. The phenomenology of educating is therefore not that of classifying, but of internalising, that is to say, of reappropriating experience with the help of social and cultural representations. The phenomenology of educating is therefore not that of classifying, but of internalising, i.e. reappropriating experience with the help of social and cultural representations. It needs an analytic of recognition that refers back to philosophies that recognise man for his need for relationships and that reject fideisms. In recent times, both new ethical-social theories on the «recognition relation» have emerged that have sought to overcome the antinomy between conflict and human progress, and new relational theories in the psychological and psychoanalytic spheres (important references are A. Honneth and P. Ricoeur; for *Infant Research* D.W. Winnicott, L. Sander, D. Stern, J. Benjamin) that have also had interesting parallels in the theological sphere in the work of H.U. von Balthasar and H. Verweyen)¹.

¹ I refer to a useful systematic work by F. Ceragioli, «*Il cielo aperto.*» *Analitica del riconoscimento e struttura della fede nell'intreccio tra desiderio e dono*, Effatà editrice, Cantalupa (Torino) 2012.

Recognition is the “place” of all revelation, whether secular or religious, and it is the place where the essence of human happiness is most powerfully revealed: to be recognised in freedom, even without merit, just by sharing. This is what has happened for thousands of years, but which modern societies have partly contradicted, attempting to place certainty on the same level as truth, the given before the real lived. Modern societies have found their coat of arms in the image of the tree of knowledge and have prospered when they have linked the fate of communities to their ability to transform collective ignorance – dogmatics – into new relationships based on criticism and the progress of science. Thanks to the physics of bodies and the sociology of liberal democratic individualism, they shattered the community into the masses but recreated social pyramids by concentrating much greater power and prestige in small groups than they could have had from the sheer number of their members. At this point, every ancient theory, secular or religious, of the correspondence between the talents to be cultivated and one’s social status, on which previous meritocracies were based, collapsed and the way was opened for the theory of elites and the social dialectic that the phenomenological approach to intersubjectivity (which I will mention below) has made it possible to overcome thanks to the decisive function that the relationship would have in the construction of identity. Ricoeur (2005:250) writes that «Being-recognized, should it occur, would for everyone be to receive the full assurance of his or her identity, thanks to the recognition by others of each person’s range of capacities».

A second interesting philosophical path for reconstructing the basis of a theory of merit that does not depend on pre-established social models – certainly not the only one – is that of the original doxa, of «original trust in the world», in what is perceived and in its reliability. Husserl speaks of this in a number of texts, not numerous but significant². Husserl basically states that phenomenological reduction, the stripping away of all pre-understanding, does not destroy what is natural in the experience of the world and, above all, does not deny the desire to live. Every theoretical or practical activity is founded on this presupposition, on the universal ground of the belief of the world. The being of the world is that self-evident truth that not only can never be doubted, but on the contrary is the premise of all doubt, probability or certainty. The activity of knowing, of judging, always arrives after this original trust, inevitably comes late, to verify this or that element of the world, in the case that it has become doubtful, or to subject this or that

² E. Husserl, *Erfahrung und Urteil*, L. Landgrebe (Hrsg.), Academia, Prag, 1939, §7 [Welt als universaler Glaubensboden für jede Erfahrung einzelner Gegenstände vorgegeben], p. 23-26, engl. transl. *Experience and Judgment*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1973, p. 28-31; Id., *Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie, Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, Hua, Bd. III/1, Karl Schumann (Hrsg.), Nijhoff, Den Haag 1976, § 104 [Die doxischen Modalitäten als Modifikationen], pp. 240-242, engl. transl. *Ideas for a Pure Phenomenology and Phenomenological Philosophy*, Book 1, Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis - Cambridge 2014, p. 207-208; Id., *Umsturz der koperkanischen Lehre in der gewöhnlichen weltanschaulichen Interpretation* (1934), Manuskript D17, published under the title *Grundlegende Untersuchungen zum phänomenologischen Ursprung der Raumlichkeit der Natur*, in M. Farber (ed.), *Philosophical Essays in Memory of Edmund Husserl*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass. 1940.

particular entity or aspect to a «critical examination» or «a more thorough study» (Husserl, 1973: p.31). The theme is developed by Merleau-Ponty with his «perceptual faith or trust» that would constitute the true original condition and thus the authentically «natural» condition. The French philosopher opens his 1945 book on the *Phenomenology of Perception* by stating that phenomenology «Although it is a transcendental philosophy that suspends the affirmations of the natural attitude in order to understand them, it is also a philosophy for which the world is always “already there” prior to reflection – like an inalienable presence – and whose entire effort is to rediscover this naïve contact with the world in order to finally raise it to a philosophical status» (Merleau-Ponty, 1945: p.1). Again, at the end of his life, in his posthumously published notes, Merleau-Ponty warns us not to give in to the temptation to replace «perceptual faith» with «reflection»: one must take «into account the total situation, which involves reference from the one to the other. What is given is not a massive and opaque world, or a universe of adequate thought; it is a reflection which turns back over the density of the world in order to clarify it, but which, coming second, reflects back to it only its own light» Merleau-Ponty, 1964: p.56). Unlike Husserl, the French phenomenologist even goes so far as to doubt that this original faith in the world can be put in brackets, made the object of reduction, of epochè: « the reflection is not to presume upon what it finds and condemn itself to putting into the things what it will then pretend to find in them», but « it must suspend the faith in the world only so as to see it, only so as to read in it the route it has followed in becoming a world for us [...]» (ibidem, p. 60; engl. transl., p. 38). The reflection of another important philosopher, Simone Weil, who worked to the extreme on the idea that origins are roots in something deeper – the human genre - and not geometric points, should also be linked to this idea of trust. The origin is the immersion in birth and unhappiness from which only through the asceticism of an education can we distance ourselves (Weil, 1949).

The phenomenological perspective is well suited to a philosophy of educating whose task is «esthetics» (Tognon, 2014), to elaborate a pedagogical interpretation of experience that has its foundation not in what ought to be, in some extraneous thing to which to submit, but in the common feeling of life with which to reconcile oneself daily, even while accepting its limitations and sorrows. In this fundamental human dimension, there is no merit, but necessity. This feeling is nourished through the various stages of perception and only later is it reflected in the various moral elaborations of human coexistence, which, however, cannot replace it, nor can they be defined as its products. Educating works, therefore, so that the gap between what one takes as a model and what one is is not closed. From this open «wound» on the unknown that is living comes the energy that transforms everyday experience into a work of mending. In this perspective, talents are stitches in the living flesh of humanity, but none of them can separate man from human, individual from species, mind from consciousness, power from fear, fear from expectation.

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THE DEEP ROOTS OF MERITOCRACY

Luigino Bruni* & Maria Beatrice Cerrino**


«La sventura è di per sé inarticolata.
Gli sventurati supplicano in silenzio
che vengano fornite parole per esprimersi.
Vi sono epoche in cui non sono esauditi»
S. WEIL, La persona e il sacro

Abstract Meritocracy, whose teachings are the blaming of the poor and the ethical justification of inequality, is becoming the new religion of our age. Thanks to meritocracy, the natural inequality of the capitalist market, which is artificially mitigated in society by political and social means because it is considered morally and socially undesirable, has become a moral property. Academic merit leads to widely differing privileges and positions, which have sustained and continue to sustain the fabric and inequalities of our society. If we want to break the spiral of inequality and exclusion, we must put in place anti-meritocracy education policies, in the same way that during the twentieth century Europe was able to introduce free, universal and compulsory schooling.

Keywords Meritocracy, Talent, Merit, Inequality, Gratuity.

Meritocracy, whose dogmas are the blaming of the poor and praise for inequality, is becoming the new religion of our time. Its origin in fact is rooted in the story of religions and the worship of idols. The religion most intertwined with economics is that of the Bible. Consider the centrality of the covenant of the people of Israel with YHWH. The Bible took it from the commercial and political treaties of the time, which were based on the principle of “do-ut-des”. In the biblical covenant the initiative comes from God, appearing in some traditions as something one way, without explicit reciprocity: the mere fact, however, that the people had to 'accept' it made the covenant a relationship of reciprocity (as gifts are).

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The chief way in which economics entered the bible is in the theology of retribution. The goods and evils we receive in life are a payment for our faults or merits, or those of our parents. And so the rich were rich twice over: in their daily lives and in their religion.

In the Old Testament we find this expressed mainly in the Pentateuch and in the book of Job (which reacts against that vision). It is a very pervasive and deep-rooted idea in the Bible, up until the New Testament, and passing beyond it right to our day.

This view did widespread and serious damage to the social, spiritual and ethical evaluation of the poor. The poor were the beggars, but so too were the lepers, the blind, the dumb, the lame, all lumped together as the dregs of society.

To defend their idea of a just God, those ancient 'economic religions' condemned the poor, who were discarded by life and by God. The discarded were guilty, even if their faults were not always visible to the naked eye and only to the theological eye. Thus God, in the face of the world's spectacle of apparent injustice, could be considered just because in reality each person received only what he or she had deserved (either themselves or their forebears)

Wealth, health and longevity were doubly blessed, while poverty, sickness and early death were doubly cursed. Until quite recently, many parents segregated their severely disabled children at home or in institutions, because the religious and social curse on their family implied by those diverse children was felt too strongly.

It took millennia for human civilisations (and not all of them yet) to finally be able to say that disability is not a curse and that material and psycho-physical destitution is not a moral stigma. It is a question and a cry, and the civil and moral quality of a society depends on how it responds.

The ancient idea of poverty-curse has never been defeated; it has changed forms (unemployment, inefficiency, immigration...), and has disguised and camouflaged itself (meritocracy). It has become stronger, convincing us that the deserved poverty of others bears no relation to our own deserved wealth: blaming the victims is the oldest and simplest strategy for freeing us from any responsibility. Cain tried to evade responsibility for his brother, not answering God's question ("Where is your brother?") and denying any guardianship for him.

Christianity continued to develop the relationship between economics and faith. From the earliest days of the Church, Paul and later the Church Fathers borrowed the Greek category of *oikonomia* to try to describe and explain the most innovative truths of Christianity (the incarnation and the Trinity: the economy of salvation, the economic Trinity and the immanent Trinity).

Talents, drachmas, coins, merchants, administrators, populate the parables and many Gospel images, which are steeped more in economics than in any other area of human life. There is thus much economics in the language and symbolic code of biblical humanism and Christianity, and therefore of the West.

We cannot deny that even in the Gospels there is much economics - although the Greek word *oikonomia/oikonomos* only appears in Luke's parable of the dishonest steward. The interpretation of the parable of the talents, which is a message about the logic of the Kingdom of heaven became, over the centuries, a praise of the logic of business and capitalism and even of meritocracy. It is one of the 'misunderstandings' which come from the use of the language of economics to express realities of faith. The view of the world and social relations typical of economics, *homo oeconomicus*, is therefore much older than economic science. If in modernity *homo oeconomicus* has been able to establish itself as a universal ideology, it is because its logic was ancient and very much rooted in human experience.

It was in fact religion, well before economic science, that invented *homo oeconomicus*. We do not have enough historical evidence to say which came first in this marriage between economics and religion. It is very likely that they co-evolved, because both are primitive in the experience of human communities. The exchange of goods and services based on a golden rule of reciprocity was the first language with which humans learned to relate to one another.

It also provided the first language in which to speak to their idols and gods. It's an economic language that has not helped us in understanding God, or human beings. We have eliminated the biblical God, but we have not freed ourselves from the economic categories of faith that became capitalism. It is very difficult to free ourselves from the economic idea of faith when we are increasingly surrounded by economics and its teachings. We would need a serious theological analysis of capitalism to understand it, and perhaps try to change it.

The Bible (above all the prophets and Job) and Christianity have attempted a real anti-meritocratic revolution, albeit with little success (the parable of the last-hour worker and its anti-meritocratic wage policy; the 'elder brother' in the Prodigal Son story, who rebukes the merciful father for not following the merit scale).

Meritocratic societies are ruthless. Despite this, the ancient meritocratic theology has continued to influence the West. Today, meritocracy is the ethical legitimisation of inequality.

In Europe in the 20th century we fought inequality as an evil; in the 21st century, all it took was to change its name (meritocracy) to transform inequality from a vice into a public virtue. A bizarre outcome, considering that meritocracy was and is presented as a struggle to overcome inequality.

Hence the strange fact that meritocracy fanatics are people who in good faith would like a better and fairer society.

A key word in the present economic and political moment, meritocracy is among the few words capable of acquiring the consensus of (almost) everyone, and whoever dares to question it, distinguishing between meritocracy and meritability (preferring democracy to meritocracy), is immediately pointed out as a supporter of demerit, perhaps to justify his or her own. And the accusation would indeed be justified if those who question meritocracy do so in order to support the cause of the incompetent, the privileged, the recommended, or the protected. Simply to contrast merit with demerit, praising the former and blaming the latter is banal, and therefore not useful.

The argument becomes relevant when we explore it further. The subject of merit is ancient and complex, and has generated endless discussions, even theological ones.

Regarding meritocracy, the words of the German philosopher Walter Benjamin from a hundred years ago ring true: 'Christianity in the age of the Reformation turned into capitalism'.

Indeed meritocracy, before becoming an economic dogma, was a religious and theological category. 'Earning merit', 'earning heaven' and are expressions (among others) and themes that have been central to Christian piety for centuries and continue to accompany the lives of Catholics today.

A certain idea of merit was already present in the Bible, but it was the encounter with Greek and Roman ethics that transformed part of Christianity into an ethics of merit and virtues, to the point of thinking that for a Christian to be declared a saint it had to be shown that he or she practised heroic virtues.

Biblical and evangelical ethics, on the other hand, were different; excellence was not in the virtues but in agape, which is not part of either the Stoic or Aristotelian virtues.

For some years now, meritocracy has left the debates of the theology classrooms, forgotten the doctrinal disputes of Paul, Augustine, Pelagius, and Luther, and entered the more elegant and modern classrooms of *business schools*, where these issues are addressed without theological expertise.

The new name of inequality

Inequality is the natural condition of human beings (and many animals), because the talents that each person receives at birth are different from those of others. The great Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto, at the end of the 19th century, demonstrated that income inequalities respond to similar

distributive laws in all societies because they are linked to unequal levels of intelligence, and, being natural, we simply have to accept them as a given of nature.

Christianity, on the other hand, because of the message of radical universal fraternity that animates it, has tried to fight against this datum of nature, attempting to unravel the inequalities underlying the sacred-hierarchical structures of ancient societies. Periods of equality, however, have always been brief and limited to small communities, while the principal narrative of Christian Europe has continued to be, apart from a few outstanding exceptions, a story of inequalities and castes. The law of motion in Western history has generated a few islands of equality and fraternity, in oceans of inequality. Modernity and the Enlightenments, at the culmination of a long and (perhaps too) slow process of cultural and religious maturation, did launch a pitched battle against inequality, and gave rise to an era of scientific, philosophical, spiritual, civil and economic achievements that were unimaginable, extraordinary and immense.

These miracles of the modern West were the fruits of the battle against natural inequalities which were not considered unchangeable, and which were above all a social construction. Without more egalitarian societies (not just more democratic: not all democracies are egalitarian) hundreds of millions of men and women who went on to innovate, invent, and change the world would not have been included in politics and the economy. The brighter moments of medieval Europe in the civic, spiritual and economic sense were associated with more egalitarian periods in the cities and the convents.

This struggle accelerated during the 20th century. The period produced its monsters, but its deepest soul gave birth to the welfare state, it allowed women to be able to study and work, permitted children to stop working so they could go to school, and the elderly to be able to stop working and have a pension to live the last part of their lives with dignity.

It invested a large share of its wealth in creating these wonderful common goods and thus reduce inequalities. For many European countries, the second half of the 20th century was a golden age of an economy and a society where inclusion, equality, rights, quality of work and freedoms grew, and where servants, the poor, castes, and privileges declined.

But while many, almost all of us, were enjoying the fruits of this happy historical conjuncture, in the backrooms of economics, finance and politics an anti-egalitarian counter-revolution was beginning, created and planned by large multinational corporations and international *business* schools. Not something radically new, this could be explained by the ebbs and flows of ideas, reactions and counter-reactions.

What we have, however, is a radical and totally underestimated novelty: in order for capitalism to establish itself as a universal cult, and thus be able to obtain everything from its adherents and fuel a train hurtling along at breakneck speed, it has an absolute need for a moral, possibly spiritual, legitimisation of the axioms on which it is founded. And it has performed this miracle: the natural inequality typical of the capitalist market, which civilisations had artificially mitigated through politics and the churches because it was considered morally and socially undesirable, at one point became a moral property: meritocracy.

Meritocracy is not simply a more attractive name for the former exaltation of inequality, but a perfect mechanism for amplifying and intensifying it. It gives it a content of justice, by considering natural talents as merit rather than gift. Thanks to meritocracy, natural inequalities are no longer opposed but praised and rewarded. The time has come for us to at least begin to become aware of this.

Merit is the great paradox of the economic cult of our time. The first spirit of capitalism was engendered by Luther's radical critique of merit theology, but today that 'rejected stone' has become the 'cornerstone' of the new capitalist religion, springing up in the heart of countries built on precisely that ancient Protestant anti-meritocratic ethic.

Salvation by grace alone and not by our own merits was placed at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation was also a revival, after a millennium, of Augustine's polemic against Pelagius (Luther had been an Augustinian monk). The anti-Pelagian critique was essentially a shattering of the ancient idea that salvation of the soul, God's blessing, paradise, could be earned, bought, and merited by our actions. Merit theology also tried to imprison God within meritocratic logic, forcing him to punish and reward on the basis of criteria that the theologians attributed to him.

The fight against Pelagianism was anything but marginal. It was decisive for the Church of the early centuries (a struggle that in reality, as we can see, was never won). If, in fact, Pelagian theology had prevailed, Christianity would have been added to the many apocalyptic and gnostic Middle Eastern sects, or transformed into an ethic similar to Stoicism. It would have lost the *charis* (grace, gratuitousness), which was its specific mark, and which clearly distinguished it from the dominant religious doctrines and meritocratic idolatries.

Neo-Pelagian ideas continued to inform Christian doctrine and above all Christian praxis, right up until the real disease of the "indulgence market", something only understood within a retributive-meritocratic deformation of the Christian message. And as always happens in matters of religion, the consequences of these theological ideas were (and are) immediately social, economic and political. Those who were considered demerited were (and are) condemned and marginalised even

by their fellow human beings, while the deserving, before earning paradise in the next life also achieved it on this earth, where their merits were associated with many privileges, money and power.

Meritocracy and education

The word 'meritocracy' has a relatively short history¹, but for the past few years it has been gathering ever more transversal, choral, consensus. Anyone wishing to denounce corruption and inefficiency need only utter the phrase 'we need more meritocracy here' to gain widespread support, and to convince themselves that they are finally on the right track.

Merit (from *mereor*) is in fact becoming the new global ideology of our time, which by presenting itself as a technique, confusing merit with competence and responsibility, does not easily reveal its ideological nature.

An interesting paradox emerges from the historical excursus just given: the first spirit of Protestant capitalism was generated by Luther's radical critique of the theology of merit. Salvation by *sola gratia* and not by our merits was placed at the heart of the Protestant Reformation. It was also a revival, after a millennium, of Augustine's polemic against Pelagius (Luther had been an Augustinian monk). The anti-Pelagian critique was precisely an overcoming of the ancient idea that salvation of the soul, God's blessing, paradise, could be earned, bought, merited by our actions.

The history of Christian Europe has been a slow process of breaking free from this archaic view of faith, alternating between more Augustinian and more Pelagian historical phases. But until recent times, it had never been possible to build a society that was entirely, or even predominantly, meritocratic. Army, sport, science, school, were areas that tended to be built on merit, but other important spheres of life were governed by different and sometimes opposing logic. In the family, in care, in civil society, the basic criterion was not merit but need, a word now forgotten and replaced by consumer tastes. School, for example, is a place where few if any questioned whether the meritocratic system should be the prevailing one (although not the only one) in the education and evaluation of children and young people.

Academic merit has determined widely differing privileges and dignities, which have governed and continue to govern the structure and inequalities of our societies. Doctors, lawyers and university

¹ M. YOUNG, *The Rise of the Meritocracy*. London, Thames and Hudson, 1958. In this satirical essay of fanta-sociology, the author imagines he is in the year 2033, Meritocracy (a term he coined) is in power; some reforms based on equality of opportunity are enacted, particularly in the field of education, but the result produced is not a democratic system, but a new caste society in which the great majority is even more subtly humiliated; hence the uprising.

professors have therefore had much better salaries and social conditions than workers and peasants, while the workers who day and night keep the streets and sewers clean, the nurses and health workers whose work has come powerfully to the fore in the time of our present health emergency, today receive salaries hundreds of times lower than those of the managers of the companies in which they work.

Schools at all levels should not be based on merit. If we look at it from afar on the surface we see successes, a few failures, and we think that school resembles business: grades like salaries, academic achievement like career advancement. But this is too distant and therefore a wrong view of school (and business).

The meritocratic ideology that is also trying, with success, to occupy schools is based on the dogma that talents are merits and therefore those with more talent should be rewarded more. But we all know that this dogma is a deception or at least an illusion for society, and even more so for schools. Talents are gifts, and our performance in life depends on the talents-gifts we receive, and very little on merit (because even my capacity for commitment is a gift). What merit is there in being born intelligent, rich, even good? That is why schools must be inspired by values that are not only different from meritocracy but opposite.

If we want to break the spiral of inequality and exclusion, we will have to initiate anti-meritocratic educational policies, something we were able to do in Europe during the last century with the introduction of universal, compulsory and, free schooling. Article 34 of the Italian Constitution states: 'The able and deserving, even if deprived of means, have the right to attain the highest levels of education'. In the light of what has been said, this formulation could be partly revised. Those who ought to be put in a position to reach the highest levels of studies are not so much or only the able, but the less able, because being more or less able is not a question of merit, but of social, family and environmental conditions, largely inherited, which are neither fault nor merit.

Education open to all and for all was conceived, and sought, to reduce the social and natural inequalities that meritocracy, i.e. the ideology of merit, actually increases. All boys and girls go and must go to school, not just the deserving. Everyone must be enabled to flourish and achieve excellence, not just the deserving. Everyone is entitled to care, esteem, recognition, admiration, dignity even if they do not have much merit or if they have less than others. Moreover, the school is a wonderful garden where many talents flower: "Precossi, I give you the medal. No one is more worthy than you to wear it. I don't just give it to your intelligence and your good will, I give it to your heart, your courage, your character as a brave and good son. Isn't it true," he added, turning towards the class, "that he also deserves it for that? Yes, yes, they all replied in one voice." Precossi was the son of a blacksmith who drank and occasionally beat him. But he too got his medal.

This was not Derossi's medal, who was the top of the class. It was the medal of a different schooling. After De Amicis² came Maria Montessori who eliminated grades, and then Don Lorenzo Milani and the school of Barbiana. Democracy has seen a multiplication of Precossi medals, which today are called school inclusion and support teachers. We have learnt that there is more to children's lives than merit. The day someone convinces us that schools must also be founded on meritocracy we will start giving medals all the same and always to the same pupils, we will make special classes and schools for those with few merits, inequalities will explode and democracy will have finally given way to meritocracy.

We cannot fully understand the rise of inequality in our time if we do not look very seriously at its root: the sharp rise of the meritocratic theology of capitalism. And we cannot understand the increasing blaming of the poor, who are regarded more and more not as wretched but as those with few merits, if we do not consider the unabated advance of meritocratic logic. If, in fact, I interpret the talents received (from life or from parents) as merit, the step of considering those who do not have those talents as undeserving and guilty becomes very, very short.

The effects of meritocracy

Meritocracy, therefore, has very ancient and profound roots. Deep down in human civilizations, there has always been the thought that an order should exist that rewards each person according to the merits he or she has acquired and punishes him or her for the faults committed and accumulated. Generally, this order was conceived as supernatural and postponed to a future life, since it was all too evident that on earth such an order did not exist and had never existed.

At a certain point, however, within the evolution of Western civilisation, an entirely new and unexpected idea appeared, the idea that a meritocratic society was possible in the here and now (Santambrogio 2021). This was because such a society in reality already existed, it was the *business community*, of which large companies and banks were the best examples. There, merits were quantifiable, measurable, could be sorted on a scale, so that everyone got what was due to them, no more and no less. What was “theirs” in merits and, clearly, in demerits. A reward system that convinced much and convinced many, because it presented itself and still presents itself as a higher form of justice (compared to ordinary and common justice).

² DE AMICIS, E. (2018) *Cuore*, ET Classici Einaudi, Torino. The book *Cuore* (Heart), is a very popular Italian children's novel, written in Turin by Edmondo De Amicis, structured in separate episodes and first published by the Milanese publisher Treves in 1886. The book takes the form of a fictitious diary of a third-grade boy who recounts the unfolding of his school year 1881-82: each chapter bears the date of the day and a title referring to the subject. See the recent article <https://www.avvenire.it/opinioni/pagine/la-medaglia-di-un-altro-merito> Luigino Bruni, Avvenire, 22 ottobre 2022.

In the space of just a few years, meritocracy has thus migrated from the business community to the whole of civil society, from politics to schools, from the left to the right, from healthcare to the non-profit sector, and it is also undermining the ecclesial communities. It is a major ideological project, one of the biggest of our time, based on the ethical and anthropological deception that is as obvious as it is unspoken: that our merits and demerits are obvious and easy to see and can be sorted, measured, and then rewarded.

The discourse on merit was also at the centre of a treatise by the economist Melchiorre Gioia, who in 1818 began *Del merito e delle ricompense (On Merit and Rewards)* as follows: "The ideas that in the minds of men correspond to the word merit, are, as everyone knows, infinitely diverse". In reality, today "not everyone knows", and too many have forgotten this old and profound truth. Those who invoke meritocracy think that merit is something one-dimensional, and quite easy to identify, weigh up and use as a criterion for good choices. There are certainly fields in which merit is immediate, those where very specific and rare technical skills are sought, like scientific research or Japanese cuisine. In the economy and in organisations, however, merit is something complex and not at all easy to identify. Let us imagine a small or medium-sized (industrial, let's say) company that has three candidates for a single management position in the personnel area.

The first, Andrea, would like to return to Italy after eight years working abroad as personnel manager in a large company. Among the candidates, he has the best technical curriculum, topped off by a master's degree in 'human resources' from a prestigious university in London. The second one, Bruno, does not have a master's degree, is younger than Andrea, but he does have a first-class degree in economics and has worked for five years as a manager in a social cooperative, obtaining excellent references for his relational talents and teamwork coordination.

Finally there's Catia, who is Bruno's age, is married, has three children, and graduated with honours in the psychology of work, although two years late because she finished her studies when her first child was on the way. She has a brief experience of cooperation work in a large organisation, where she coordinated complex projects, and therefore knows English very well (more than Andrea and Bruno).

Which of the three is more deserving of being hired? Or at least to make it to the second stage of the selection process? This comparative exercise is very common in large organisations, or when small to medium-sized companies outsource personnel selection to external agencies. A first common-sense look at these three curricula should first of all tell us that we are dealing with three people who are all deserving, but deserving for different reasons.

In modern business culture, it's Andrea's merits that are seen and rewarded, more than Bruno's and Catia's. No intelligent recruiter can deny that the merits are many, but in the dominant culture

of the business world, they are weighed and sorted, deeming some more relevant than others (Thomas Piketty). The reason is that technical merits and qualifications can be easily translated into quantity, and so appear objective and thus fair.

On the other hand, relational and qualitative merits are difficult to order objectively, and they have often been used and are still used as excuses to disguise the hiring of friends and relatives. They are merits that lend themselves more to abuse, but they are no less important, even in terms of turnover and company development.

We thus make the serious mistake of forgetting that while a master's degree, techniques, know-how, can be acquired on the market, relational and qualitative talents, the *know-why*, are tied to our stories, and are the result of choices and long and costly investments which no market can provide. Today, companies are not only suffering and closing due to a lack of turnover and financial capital, but also due to a shortage of relational and spiritual capital. Relational and emotional illiteracy leads to an inability to say words like 'excuse me' or 'forgive me', words that, when they are missing, block companies as much as or more than a credit squeeze. This so-called 'human capital' is the primary resource of every enterprise, but it is a plural capital, made up of many dimensions and skills.

Many women especially mothers develop, by nature and by necessity, capacities to manage complexity (children, family, parents, relatives, work, social relations...), capacities that also have a great organisational and economic value, if they are seen and valued in the right way. Scientific research has highlighted the economic damage caused by discrimination against women in decision-making roles. The economic crisis is the result not only of demerit, but also, and above all, of the choices made by too many managers hired solely on the basis of merits measured by master's degrees and PhDs, but who then turned out to be deficient in relationships, ethics, and humanity.

Therefore, the company and the market are not meritocratic environments, because while results depend to a large extent on unforeseen and often unpredictable *ex-post* events, choices are made on the basis of *ex-ante* information. Among successful entrepreneurs there are many undeserving people rewarded simply by chance, while among those who fail there are many deserving ones who simply found the wind against them. The main vehicle of meritocracy is *business* itself.

It is another paradox, even more surprising, of a business meritocracy mainly produced by the Anglo-Saxon world whose humanism was born out of Luther and Calvin's radical polemic against 'salvation by merit'. The novelty of capitalism today is the extension of meritocracy to every sphere of civil life, whose first and most relevant consequence is the ethical legitimisation of inequality, which from being an evil to fight against is becoming a value to be defended and promoted.

The steps are three: 1) we start by considering talent a merit; 2) we continue, reducing people's many merits to the simplest and most useful ones (who today sees the merits of compassion, meekness, humility?); 3) and finally, we remunerate talent-merits in different measure, widening the distances between people and radically forgetting the decisive role that chance and providence play in our talents.

Thus, if I am the child of educated, rich and intelligent parents, if I am born and grow up in a country with many public assets and a good health and education system, if my genetic makeup has been particularly fortunate, it follows that I will attend better schools, I will accrue more scholastic merit than my peers born in more unfavourable natural and social conditions, and I will in all likelihood find a better paid occupation in the labour market under the meritocratic system. And so, by the time I retire, the distance from my fellow citizens who came into the world with fewer talents will have multiplied over my lifetime by a factor of 10, 20, 100.

There is therefore a need for a new public discussion of what merit and its plural nature are. Otherwise, we will continue to have too many deserving people staying outside the walls of the city of work. Some remain there because undeserving protected and recommended candidates pass in front of them; and many others remain because they have merits that our economy and society cannot see and recognise. Two injustices, one more important than the other, and the second is more serious because it is not even perceived as such.

The talents of humility, meekness, compassion, mercy, diverse authentic human and relational capital are systematically denied. They are not valued and are often ridiculed and identified in those considered losers. These different virtues are chained up, as in the myth where Kratos is ordered to chain Prometheus, who is the friend of men and enemy of the powerful and their ideology.

How long will a business community with too many 'easy' merits and a mass destruction of 'difficult' merits last? And what will happen when the famine of merits other than business merits strikes schools, associations and churches? Where will the undeserving multitudes created by meritocracy go?

If we had imagined another kind of capitalism less anchored to the religion of retribution, we would almost certainly have had a less sick planet and healthier social relations. Today we must at least prevent its logic from becoming the culture of all social life.

We have seen that yesterday and today meritocracies have only one great enemy: gratuitousness, which they fear more than anything else because it breaks down hierarchies and frees people from the slavery of merits and demerits. A revolution of gratuitousness - shouted, desired, lived, given –

is the only way to free us from this new flood of Pelagianism, and if, in this time of slavery and forced labour in the service of Pharaoh, we keep dreaming together of a promised land free from all slavery, including the gentle slavery of merit.

We are greater than our merits, we are better than our demerits.

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PROFUNDIZACIÓN CONCEPTUAL Y OPERATIVA EN LA EDUCACIÓN PERSONALIZADA MEDIANTE EL MÉTODO DELPHI


CONCEPTUAL AND A DEEP CONCEPTION IN PERSONALIZED EDUCATION THROUGH THE DELPHI METHODOLOGY

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Abstract Personalized Education is a common expression in educational fields that presents an axiomatic confusion regarding its scope and meaning, in this article both the theoretical discussion and the information collected empirically from a series of recognized experts are presented. About its definition, purpose, importance, and basic principles. **METHOD.** To advance in the conceptual and operational clarification of the term, given the conceptual complexity and the difficulty of reaching consensus, a consultation using the Delphi method was chosen, with the contribution of 14 experts, which was carried out in 4 months, through 3 rounds of consultation. **RESULTS.** The results have allowed consensus on its definition and the convenience of developing tools for evaluating the degree of personalization with a view to offering educators a clear and up-to-date understanding of what it means to educate from this vision. **CONCLUSIONS.** This is concluded that the concept of personalization implies taking into account an educational model aimed at training unique, autonomous, open, responsible, supportive and resilient people, capable of overcoming and persevering on their own.

Keywords Delphi technic; personalized instruction; inclusion; teaching model; individualized education.


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Resumen La Educación Personalizada es una expresión habitual en los ámbitos educativos que presenta una axiomática confusión en cuanto a su alcance y significado, en este artículo se presenta la discusión teórica e información recogida empíricamente de una serie de reconocidos expertos. Sobre su definición, finalidad, importancia y principios básicos. **MÉTODO.** Para avanzar en la clarificación conceptual y operativa del término, dada la complejidad conceptual y la dificultad de consenso, se optó por una consulta Delphi, con la contribución de 14 expertos, durante 4 meses, en 3 rondas de consulta. Por la importancia del perfil de los expertos participantes, la consulta incluyó académicos especialistas en educación personalizada y profesionales vinculados a la educación personalizada -por su trabajo directo o como asesores. **RESULTADOS.** Los resultados han permitido el consenso de su definición y la conveniencia de desarrollar herramientas de evaluación del grado de personalización con vistas a ofrecer a los educadores una comprensión clara y actualizada de lo que supone educar desde esta visión. **CONCLUSIONES.** Se concluye que el concepto de personalización comporta tener en cuenta un modelo educativo orientado a educar personas singulares, autónomas, abiertas, responsables, solidarias y resilientes capaces de autosuperarse y perseverar por ellos mismos.

Palabras-

-clave Técnica Delphi; educación personalizada; inclusión; modelo educativo; educación individualizada..

Introducción

El trabajo presentado aquí forma parte del proyecto “Personalizar, un modelo para una educación de calidad en siglo XXI” llevado a cabo por *Institució Familiar d’Educació* y cuyos resultados amplios están contenidos en el INFORME DELPHI DE EXPERTOS (Moreno, 2020). En este artículo se focaliza la mirada en la definición de la Educación Personalizada, su finalidad, principios básicos e importancia.

La Educación Personalizada no es un concepto nuevo en la literatura especializada pedagógica y didáctica; es un constructo que ha sido estudiado por diferentes investigadores y expertos a lo largo de los años (Coll, 2018). Actualmente este término se ha introducido dentro de los sistemas educativos en diferentes contextos, entre ellos la normativa sobre educación en España, donde aparece reflejado que “el corazón de la ley es una enseñanza personalizada” tal como se recoge en la Ley Orgánica de Modificación de la LOE conocida por su acrónimo LOMLOE (2020). Sin embargo, se observa que, en ocasiones, existen importantes y significativas diferencias semánticas en el uso de dicha expresión. Como expresan Lokey-Vega y Stephens (2019, p.316): “investigadores presentan esfuerzos sobre el tema, pero no hay un acuerdo común y unánime”.

A principios del siglo XX el filósofo John Dewey propone una educación progresiva centrada en el interés del alumno, su propuesta educativa estaba basada en el concepto de aprender haciendo (*learning by doing*) y la experiencia personal como motor principal de crecimiento. Para Dewey la

educación escolar debía favorecer el diseño de experiencias reales para los estudiantes. Destacaba la importancia del elemento activo e impulsivo del niño en el proceso de aprendizaje. Esta filosofía educativa dio lugar a la “*Progressive education*” en EEUU y al movimiento “Escuela Activa” internacional. Según Dewey, la persona aprende a través del movimiento e interacción con su alrededor y a través del ensayo y error. De hecho, se observa el “*learning by doing*” favoreciendo experiencias reales para los estudiantes (Ruíz, 2013)

Este planteamiento se refleja en la mayoría de las propuestas de innovación pedagógica actuales, por ejemplo en la centralidad del alumno en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje, el aprendizaje por descubrimiento y la concepción del docente como facilitador de los aprendizajes y diseñador de entornos personalizados de aprendizaje.

A lo largo de todo el siglo XX pedagogos como Decroly, Montessori, Freire o Freinet continúan esta visión crítica de la educación tradicional, aportando propuestas que contribuyen a potenciar la idea de la importancia de centrar el foco en el aprendiz. Todo esto va originando el surgir de la educación personalizada. En el ámbito educativo español, su representación sería Víctor García Hoz, quien destaca la acción del educando, asumiendo este sus responsabilidades. En concreto, “la educación personalizada viene a resumir las exigencias de la individualización y de la socialización educativas, y constituye un tipo de educación más acorde con las profundas necesidades humanas y las condiciones del hombre en la sociedad tecnificada en que vivimos” (García Hoz, 1970, p. 87).

Las aportaciones de este autor fueron desarrolladas posteriormente por sus discípulos destacando entre otros: Bernardo, (2011); Pérez, (2012); Castellanos, (2013); García-Garrido, (2014); Coll, (2016); Javaloyes y Calderero, (2018); o Barredo y Bausela, (2020); de sus aportaciones se concluye que es necesario tener en cuenta las diferencias del alumnado en el ámbito educativo evitando así la homogeneización en el terreno escolar (Garatte y Clúa, 2016; Mitchell, 2017; Nuske, et al. 2019)

Hoy día el entorno social es más globalizado y, a veces, sería necesario prestar atención a las características individuales del alumnado (Kefallinou, Symeonidou, y Meijer, 2020). Nteropoulou-Nterou y Slee (2019) señalan cómo la realidad social y educativa es consustancial con la heterogeneidad y la diversidad del alumnado y la interdisciplinariedad del conocimiento. No obstante, la educación personalizada se muestra como una posible respuesta para estas características del entorno educativo contemporáneo. De aquí la necesidad de llegar a un consenso sobre esta concepción educativa para aplicarla correctamente ya que, en ocasiones, no existe un criterio claro (Korkmaz y Tay, 2016).

Muntaner (2017) y Ainscow (2020) en sus investigaciones indican que un dilema educativo actual es la relación existente entre la educación personalizada y la inclusividad. Ainscow (2012, p. 48) indica cómo “mejorar la educación inclusiva significa aprender a cómo vivir con la diferencia y, en

efecto, a cómo aprender de la diferencia”. Sin embargo, se suele relacionar inclusión con esa diversidad, que en algunos momentos, no se concreta de forma personalizada sino individualizada, en concreto, el reconocimiento y visión de las NEE reflejan la actual importancia que se le da al término inclusión. En contraposición, Guerrero y Ahedo, (2020, p. 159) indican como la educación personalizada “es un modo de llevar adelante el proceso educativo que consiste en una adaptación a las peculiaridades de cada estudiante, como una especie de universalización de la estrategia seguida en el caso de las necesidades educativas especiales (NEE)” (p. 159). De esta forma, la educación personalizada responde en parte a las NEE ya que es una metodología educativa en la que se incide en que el alumno participe y consiga una entidad propia adaptándose la enseñanza a las necesidades del alumno y no el alumno a las necesidades de la enseñanza (Latorre-Coscolluela, Liesa-Orús, y Vázquez-Toledo, 2018).

Ambos enfoques educativos -personalizado e inclusivo- potencian el reconocimiento y la atención a la diversidad entre los escolares (Braun, 2019). Sin embargo, hay que matizar que el enfoque inclusivo surge como consecuencia de la educación personalizada y con un recorrido educativo desde inicios del siglo XX con la preocupación de atender de forma individualizada al estudiante y que, posteriormente se llegaría a una personalización del alumno (Hoz, 1970)

El desarrollo de metodologías, la revolución tecnológica del siglo XXI aplicada a la educación y la implicación del profesorado posibilitan el diseño de didácticas y diferentes estrategias que ayudan en el aprendizaje y se organiza teniendo en cuenta al alumnado (Coll, 2018). Este aspecto se aprecia en la educación personalizada, además de que esta no se enmarca en una corriente filosófica, o psicológica o pedagógica concreta, sino que está abierta a todas las corrientes razonables que integren a toda la persona. De esta forma, el estudiante es el protagonista de sus aprendizajes en el proceso educativo; los maestros actúan como guías o bien mediadores seleccionando estrategias y técnicas adecuadas para estimular a los alumnos a construir sus propios conocimientos (Mateos, Macías y Arteaga, 2017).

El término personalización se ha interpretado, en algunas ocasiones, con la individualización. Coll (2018) indica que llevar a cabo la personalización en los estudiantes requiere detectar su proceso de aprendizaje para que el propio alumno pueda tomar decisiones sobre su aprendizaje teniendo en cuenta los objetivos, alternativas e intereses. Este aspecto no resulta fácil en la ecología del aprendizaje ya que considera y asienta sus bases en un modelo de escolarización de forma universal, dando prioridad esencial a la educación formal y escolar para el desarrollo de las personas sin considerar las diferencias entre éstas. La atención a las necesidades específicas de cada alumno facilita el proceso de enseñanza aprendizaje, ya que a pesar de que el aprendizaje se puede dar y creemos que se da de forma colaborativa, el producto de este, es decir el desarrollo de competencias es un resultado individual.

En contraposición, la individualización es un concepto que aísla al alumnado pues centra su interés único en este y en su proceso de aprendizaje sin tener en cuenta las características del entorno en el que se desenvuelve (Tsina, et al., 2020). Sin embargo, se debe indicar que se realiza esa atención concreta con cada alumno para que pueda adquirir e ir mejorando en relación a la competencia de “aprender a aprender”. Esto comporta que se atienda debidamente al alumno, escuchando y promoviendo sus propuestas de aprendizaje y la forma de evaluar recurriendo a esa información y recursos que nos brindan las nuevas tecnologías, lo que estimula que el alumno sea capaz de realizar sus propios aprendizajes adaptando estos a sus características, motivaciones y preferencias. Según López, et al. (2020, p. 36): “Aprender a aprender supone la capacidad de organizar y regular el propio aprendizaje de manera cada vez más eficaz y autónoma en función de los propios objetivos, del contexto y de las necesidades”.

Marco empírico

El estudio presentado aquí, como ya se ha mencionado, forma parte de una investigación mayor. La finalidad de este artículo es presentar el consenso en algunos de los aspectos conceptuales, más relevantes, referidos a la educación personalizada. Para ello, se incluye tanto una aclaración terminológica, destacando las diferencias con algunas definiciones análogas. Así como, sus objetivos primordiales, principios básicos en cuanto a los elementos fundamentales de la educación y su importancia. Para responder a este objetivo se diseñó un estudio basado en el método Delphi que permitiese el consenso teórico tras la consulta de reputados teóricos de la educación personalizada y posterior operativización de los elementos mencionados: conceptualización, finalidad de la personalización de la educación principios básicos e importancia.

“El método Delphi se define como una técnica de investigación consistente en la producción de conocimiento a cargo de un panel de expertos que, anónima y colaborativamente, emiten su opinión sobre cuestiones referidas al tema de investigación” (Santos-Caamaño, Vázquez-Cancelo y Rodríguez-Machado 2021, p. 25).

Ortega (2008) indica cómo la metodología Delphi permite el acceso a un número significativo de expertos en el entorno académico, profesional, y social del objeto de estudio pudiendo establecerse así una serie de conclusiones acerca de cómo mejorar el entorno académico para los alumnos. Reguant y Torrado (2016) precisan al respecto de esta premisa: “los expertos en esta metodología definen conceptos precisando y referenciando autores relevantes del tema con el fin de obtener la opinión de consenso más fiable del grupo consultado” (p. 88).

De las conclusiones extraídas en estos estudios es posible afirmar que gracias a la metodología Delphi se pueden recoger todas las aportaciones de los expertos acerca de la educación personalizada y los conceptos derivados de esta: personalización, individualización e inclusión.

El método Delphi es una técnica prospectiva de análisis del entorno que sirve para obtener información de tipo cualitativo con la que poder llegar a una serie de conclusiones (Cruz-Ramírez, et al., 2020). Es un proceso que de forma sistemática e iterativa, combina la consulta a expertos y el posterior análisis, a fin de producir la mejor aproximación y si es posible, al consenso de un grupo de expertos frente a un tema (Cabero e Infante, 2014). El proceso es anónimo, de manera que se evitan las posibles influencias que determinados expertos puedan ejercer en otros. La retroalimentación controlada y sintetizada permite la recogida de datos por parte de los expertos a lo largo de las distintas rondas en las que se estructura el proceso, finalizando con una evaluación de las respuestas del grupo, y la producción de estadísticos de tendencia central, de tal forma que garantice que todas las opiniones individuales sean tomadas en consideración en el resultado final (Pinto-Molina, et al. 2021). De hecho una de las conclusiones de la revisión sistemática del empleo del método Delphi, llevada a cabo por Cañizares y Suárez (2022) refiere a uno de los problemas del uso del método “en la incorrecta aplicación de la metodología y en las falencias al llevar a cabo todas las acciones necesarias para asegurar su rigor científico” (p. 538)

Uno de los objetivos que persigue esta metodología es indagar sobre un tema específico (obtención de opinión experta) del cual no se dispone de información previa o por falta de claridad en el trabajo de investigación. Lo que es coincidente con la finalidad de este trabajo. Lograr el consenso teórico hace que sea muy apropiado el método, considerando que existe la posibilidad de contactar con expertos del tema, que mediante la consulta reiterada podrán producir esta conceptualización consensuada.

Después de haber seleccionado el método y comprobado que se ajusta a las necesidades del estudio, se escogió un comité científico que siguió cada una de las siguientes fases:

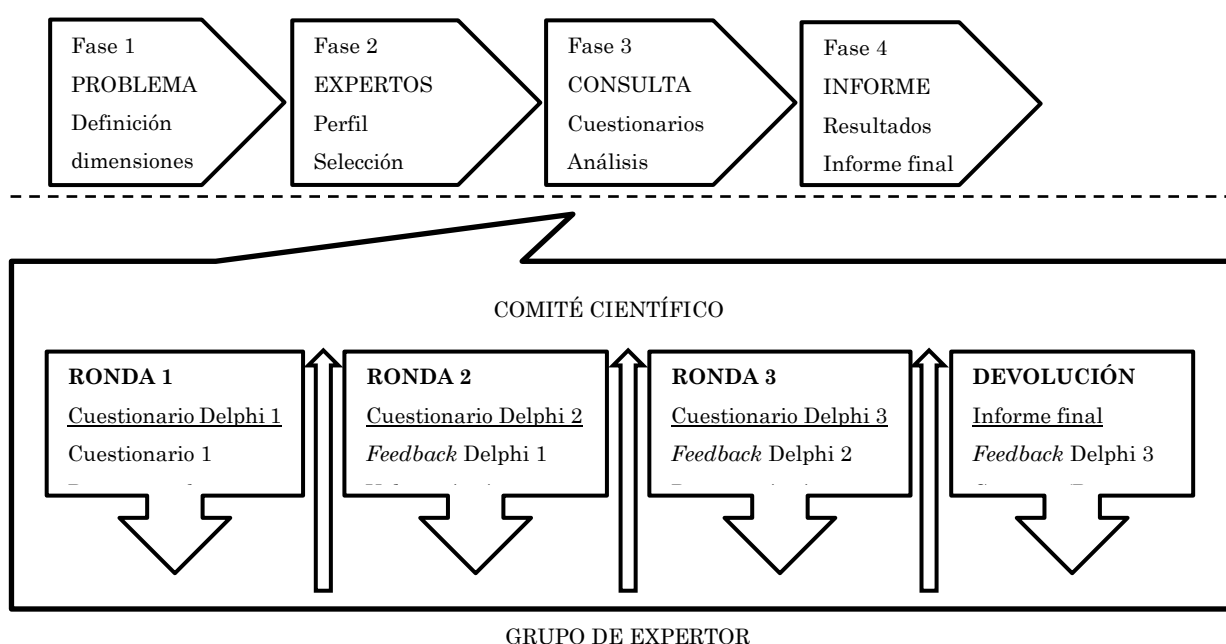


Figura 1. Fases del proceso y Esquema de la Rondas (Adaptación de Pozo et al., 2007)

Las siguientes tareas se realizaron en cada una de ellas:

- En la Fase 1: se acota el problema y sus dimensiones, se definen los objetivos.
- En la Fase 2: se define el perfil y cantidad de participantes. Se concretan los criterios de selección y se hace un primer contacto con los candidatos, de esta forma se conforma el grupo de informantes.
- En la Fase 3: se diseña el cuestionario inicial en base a las dimensiones que comprende el problema y se concreta en 3 el número de rondas así como el tipo de consulta para cada caso. El primer instrumento comprende preguntas abiertas; la segunda consulta incluye el *feedback* de la primera ronda para una primera valoración; la tercera consulta contiene un segundo *feedback* y la solicitud de la priorización de los ítems por orden de importancia.
- En la fase 4: se analizan los resultados de la última ronda y se formaliza el informe de devolución final con los ítems del consenso y las principales razones de disenso.

Participantes

Un aspecto fundamental es la elección de los expertos para dotar de calidad a la investigación. En este caso, se ha procurado que el grupo de participantes represente una amplia pluralidad de opiniones, para que, de esta forma, las conclusiones puedan ser útiles a la comunidad internacional de profesionales, usuarios e investigadores educativos.

En este informe han participado: Académicos especialistas en educación, académicos especialistas en educación personalizada, profesionales vinculados a la educación personalizada bien sea por su trabajo en escuelas en las que se trabaja con el modelo o bien asesoran instituciones, sistema educativo, etc. sobre el tema.

Existe una serie de expertos internacionales que han querido participar en el Informe para incluir una perspectiva universal y amplia. De esta forma, se seleccionaron inicialmente 30 candidatos por vía telefónica, de los que 17 respondieron afirmativamente. Sin embargo, finalmente participaron 14 de ellos durante todo el proceso. Es un número aceptable tal como señala Linstone y Turoff (2002) ya que de esta manera se establece un mínimo de participantes de 10 reduciendo el error y mejorando la fiabilidad con el aumento del tamaño del grupo.

Tabla I - Distribución de expertos según factores de perfil

Perfil	Cantidad	Porcentaje
Vinculados a la personalización	Académicos 8 Profesionales 6	57.14% 42.86%
Expertos en:	Personalización 10 Educación 4	71.43 % 28.57%
Tradición Pedagógica	3 Anglosajona 11 Hispana	21% Anglosajona 79 % Hispana

Sexo	5 Mujeres 9 Hombres	36 % Mujeres 64 % Hombres
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Elaboración propia 2022

Una vez configurado el grupo de expertos se inició el camino hacia el consenso, para lo cual se diseñaron una serie de consultas en tres etapas, siguiendo un formato similar al utilizado en otros estudios del ámbito educativo (Linstone y Turoff, 2002).

Instrumento

El instrumento utilizado para iniciar las rondas de consulta fue un cuestionario de preguntas abiertas, agrupadas en 4 bloques: Conceptualización, finalidad y principios básicos e importancia.

Criterios de análisis

Se siguió un proceso de análisis y valoración tras cada ronda de preguntas garantizando la rigurosidad de la información obtenida. Adicionalmente, la devolución a los expertos tras cada ronda, incluyó la posibilidad de réplica, lo que es otro elemento que garantiza la correcta interpretación y valoración de las respuestas.

El análisis se realizó con la ayuda del NVivo categorizando el contenido de las respuestas obtenidas por pregunta

Se definieron los criterios para concretar el grado de consenso y estabilidad necesarios. Interesa el máximo nivel de acuerdo, así que se establece en 80% el mínimo de grado de convergencia de las opiniones individuales y una homogeneidad en las respuestas con un índice de variación inferior al 0.8, en un rango de 0 a 1. Estos índices de acuerdo se establecen fruto de recomendaciones de Linstone y Turoff (2002) para estudios en educación. Otro elemento a considerar para tomar decisiones acerca de la consulta, se refiere a la estabilidad, es decir, el hecho de que no haya una variabilidad significativa, en las opiniones de los expertos entre una ronda y otra. Parafraseando a López-Gómez (2018) la consideración de los datos sobre la escasa probabilidad de que aumente el acuerdo a partir de la tercera ronda. Por otra parte, se ha considerado también el criterio práctico, de no alargar el proceso y cansar excesivamente a los expertos participantes. Finalmente se ha optado por hacer 3 rondas de consulta.

Resultados

Primera ronda Delphi

Para iniciar el proceso de consulta se envió el cuestionario, con 5 preguntas abiertas divididas en las 4 dimensiones operativizadas y que son de interés para este artículo. Tras el recibo del cuestionario inicial respondido, emergieron las primeras ideas que daban respuesta a las preguntas

formuladas. En este primer análisis destaca un elevado número de ideas comunes o puntos de coincidencia entre las respuestas recabadas.

Aun así, las respuestas de este primer cuestionario fueron muy diversas, fruto de la gran variedad de perfiles de los expertos, y por tanto, fue laborioso conseguir una buena síntesis del contenido. Tras el análisis, se categorizaron las ideas, se organizaron y se reescribieron, de forma que se agruparon las ideas comunes, reflejando así las ideas expresadas por más de un experto. Para ello se utilizó una terminología común con la finalidad de facilitar su comprensión y mantener la unidad de significados..

En la tabla 2 se muestra la distribución de los bloques, el enunciado general de las cuestiones incluidas en cada uno, el número de categorías e ideas obtenidas, coincidentes y no coincidentes en el grupo.

Tabla II - Distribución de bloques, enunciados y nº de categoría e ítems

Enunciado	Cantidad de ideas surgidas de la consulta
BLOQUE 1. Conceptualización	
Objetivo 1: Consensuar una definición de personalización en educación.	
1.1. Escribe al menos tres diferencias entre los siguientes términos aplicados a la educación:	53
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Personalización e Individualización - Personalización e Inclusión - Personalización y ... 	
1.2. Explica qué entiendes por:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Enseñanza Personalizada - Aprendizaje Personalizado - Entorno Personalizado de Aprendizaje - Educación Personalizada 	
BLOQUE 2:Importancia	
Objetivo 2: Profundizar en la importancia de la personalización en educación.	
2.1 Enumera y justifica las principales razones por las que la educación debería ser personalizada.	10
BLOQUE 3: Finalidad	
Objetivo 3: Conocer la finalidad de personalizar la educación.	

3.1 Específica y argumenta los principales objetivos que busca la personalización de la educación.	4
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BLOQUE 4: Principios básicos de la personalización de la educación

Objetivo 4: Tener una lista de principios o criterios que sirvan de guía y evaluación para una personalización eficaz.

4.1. Escribe unos principios básicos en referencia a los siguientes componentes en una situación personalizada de la educación:	39
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- La escuela
 - Aspectos organizativos
 - Currículum, Metodología y Evaluación
 - El papel del profesorado y estilo de enseñanza
 - Orientación educativa
 - La familia
 - La tecnología
 - La sociedad
 - Los medios de comunicación y entretenimiento
 - Otros
-

Reelaboración a partir de Moreno, 2020 pp. 19-20

Segunda ronda Delphi

En la segunda consulta, se exponen todas las ideas surgidas de la primera ronda, tanto las coincidentes como las no concordantes. A fin de establecer el consenso entre los participantes, se solicita a cada uno que valore cada una de las ideas propuestas en una escala de 0 a 6, ponderando su nivel de acuerdo con cada una de las ideas presentadas. Al finalizar el cuestionario se añadió una pregunta abierta con el fin de permitir a los participantes sugerir aclaraciones o modificaciones en algunas ideas. Tras el segundo cuestionario se obtienen las valoraciones medias de cada ítem/idea y la recogida de los comentarios para la modificación de algunas ideas.

Tercera ronda Delphi

A partir del nivel de acuerdo obtenido por cada idea, y dado por el grupo de expertos, se procede a la última ronda o etapa de priorización. Se recogen una gran cantidad de sugerencias para realizar algunos cambios en las ideas. De esta forma, se decidió realizar una revisión de algunas de las ideas surgidas y solicitar a los expertos una segunda valoración.

El *feedback* de la segunda ronda -es decir, la tercera consulta- incorporó, las ideas que habían superado el nivel mínimo de consenso requerido: el 80%, así como las medias obtenidas por cada una. Se incluyeron las modificaciones solicitadas por los expertos y se pidió que las valoraran.

Para todas las ideas incluidas en esta consulta se solicitó la priorización por importancia para cada pregunta, siendo el 1 la idea que ocupa el primer lugar y así sucesivamente.

Una vez finalizadas las tres etapas, los participantes recibieron un informe final con la relación de opiniones consensuadas y los estadísticos de tendencia central y dispersión necesarios para valorar la calidad del consenso.

El informe final, documento que ha sido utilizado ampliamente para elaborar esta comunicación (Moreno, 2020), contiene un listado de las 101 ideas fruto de las respuestas que iban reflejando los expertos y que superaron las condiciones de consenso en la segunda o tercera ronda. Las opiniones están organizadas por preguntas y priorizadas según el ranking alcanzado, y van acompañadas con la media del ranking y la media de consenso, en ambos casos se añade el correspondiente grado de homogeneización de las respuestas (coeficiente de variación).

Durante las tres rondas de consulta se procedió de la siguiente forma: de las 107 ideas obtenidas del primer cuestionario, 11 se eliminaron, 66 se aceptaron por superar el mínimo consenso del 80% y 30 se revisaron y modificaron en función de lo comentado por los expertos, y se incorporaron al tercer cuestionario para una segunda valoración. Finalmente se llegó a un total de 96 ideas con el nivel de acuerdo mínimo y una dispersión aceptable (CV menor al 0,3). De las 96 opiniones consensuadas, 56 superan el 90% de consenso, hay 37 entre 85% y 89% de consenso y sólo 3 ideas por debajo de ese rango.

Se puede distinguir dos disensos significativos entre expertos. El primero se da entre académicos y profesionales de la educación y es referente a la conceptualización. Los académicos opinan que el aprendiz es el protagonista, defienden la participación del alumno en decisiones sobre objetivos de aprendizaje y su evaluación, mientras que los profesionales creen que el docente es quien debe asumir esta responsabilidad, desplazando el énfasis de protagonismo hacia el docente.

Otro punto de controversia no menos importante se produce entre académicos y especialistas en personalización, ya sea desde el ámbito académico como profesional. En este caso las diferencias se producen en los principios de aplicación del modelo personalizado y específicamente en la orientación, la tecnología, la sociedad y los medios de comunicación. En los aspectos mencionados, los especialistas los consideran imprescindibles para una personalización real mientras que, los académicos no especialistas tienden a desconectar estos aspectos del modelo educativo.

A continuación se reproducen las 34 ideas de acuerdo que han alcanzado 6 puntos o menos de media de priorización y 90% o más puntos de consenso. Para cada idea se muestran el Ranking de importancia y las medias de priorización y consenso junto a sus respectivos coeficientes de variación.

Tabla III - *Distribución de bloques, enunciados y n.º de categoría e ítems (Elaboración propia)*

Idea/opinión/respuesta	Priorización			Consenso	
	R	M	CV	M	CV
BLOQUE 1 CONCEPTUALIZACIÓN					
Individualización					
En personalización, el docente tiene un rol de guía y reconoce e impulsa la capacidad del alumno y alumna para tomar decisiones sobre su propio aprendizaje, de forma progresiva. El alumno aprende a asumir la responsabilidad de lo que aprende y a establecer, monitorear y alcanzar metas a lo largo de su camino de aprendizaje.	1	4,4	0,8	90%	0,14
La personalización supone un enfoque más global e integral, que hace no sólo referencia al aprendizaje de contenidos; aprovecha las sinergias del grupo y de las diferencias entre los individuos para estimular, enriquecer, mejorar, transformar y hacer crecer las capacidades, intereses y motivación de cada alumno, gracias a la interacción con su grupo, a través de debates, proyectos y propuestas diversas.	2	4,8	0,57	92%	0,12
La individualización se proyecta en el cultivo de cierta singularidad personal. La personalización, junto al cultivo de la singularidad, aspira a hacer efectiva la participación y la solidaridad en un contexto de interacción social.	3	5,3	0,52	90%	0,2
En personalización se ajusta la atención educativa a las necesidades, características, intereses, objetivos, talentos, y expectativas de cada alumno y alumna.	4	5,2	0,6	92%	0,12
Inclusión					
Una educación personalizada es necesariamente inclusiva pero no al revés. Se puede incluir para homogeneizar no para cultivar esas trayectorias personales. Y de la misma forma incluir en un enfoque personalizado no implica hacer que los alumnos con desarrollos atípicos se acerquen lo más posible al desarrollo “normal” sino fomentar en ellos sus propias capacidades, en algunos casos diferenciadas y muy potentes, además de crear entornos de aprendizaje personalizados que les faciliten el acceso	1	4,9	0,73	90%	0,12

a aquellas competencias que les resultan menos favorables.					
La inclusión busca eliminar todas las barreras que dificultan o impiden el acceso al aprendizaje, sean cuales sean la naturaleza y el origen de esas barreras. La personalización es un planteamiento educativo que busca el pleno desarrollo de cada persona mediante un aprendizaje con sentido y valor personal.	3	5,3	0,59	90%	0,12
Inclusión implica crear entornos de aprendizaje y desarrollo que permiten a cada alumno aportar desde sus capacidades. Favorecer que el entorno se adapte a las necesidades, motivación, intereses y capacidades de cada alumno.	4	5,5	0,57	90%	0,09
Incluir es hacer partícipe a todos de una educación de calidad. Hacerles sentir miembros indispensables y valorados de la sociedad. Esto implica personalizar y una visión integral de la persona y su desarrollo.	7	6,0	0,56	92%	0,14
Enseñanza Personalizada					
Implica entender al profesor como guía, orientador y facilitador del aprendizaje de conocimientos, estrategias, valores y actitudes, de forma que el alumno los pueda procesar e integrar de modo personal, original, propio y único.	3	5,4	0,48	92%	0,18
El docente deja de ser un distribuidor de contenidos, para convertirse en un gestor del aprendizaje. La evaluación de los alumnos, ya no se centra solo en puntuar al final del proceso, sino también en ofrecer una retroalimentación a lo largo del mismo. El profesorado se centra en ofrecer guía y herramientas de desarrollo y crecimiento, con el foco puesto en propiciar que cada alumno desarrolle un sentimiento de competencia positivo.	4	5,6	0,55	90%	0,13
Aprendizaje personalizado					
Ayuda a cada alumno a identificar y desarrollar las habilidades que necesita para mejorar su propio aprendizaje.	1	5,3	0,32	95%	0,09
Es un aprendizaje experiencial, que ayuda a dar sentido y reconstruir la experiencia personal de cada alumno, aportándole un valor que le trasciende y enriquece. Implica el uso de metodologías de indagación, así como motivación y responsabilidad personal. El pensamiento es la herramienta pedagógica básica que da unidad al aprendizaje.	2	5,3	0,49	94%	0,12

Requiere la intención y decisión de la persona, promueve aprendizajes consolidados y eficaces, de contenidos complejos. Es un aprendizaje integrado, que establece un entramado de relaciones significativas que da unidad al conjunto de conocimientos, aptitudes y valores asimilados. Un modelo de aprendizaje personalizado integra además las diversas fuentes de la experiencia de la persona, las diversas capacidades, perceptiva, reflexiva, creativa, retentiva y expresiva.	3	5,9	0,49	90%	0,18
Enfoque que se adapta al ritmo, intereses, preferencias, contexto y necesidades del alumno. Los objetivos, el contenido y el método de instrucción puede variar de un alumno a otro. Las intervenciones y el apoyo personal se basan en evidencias objetivas para asegurar que cada aprendiz progrese adecuadamente.	3	6,0	0,59	92%	0,12
Entorno personalizado de aprendizaje					
Una organización del entorno que persigue favorecer, mediante la puesta en marcha de un conjunto de actuaciones, estrategias y recursos, que los participantes realicen aprendizajes que tengan sentido y valor personal para ellos. Es necesario que cada alumno conozca, reconozca y domine sus intereses y las estrategias que le ayudan a aprender mejor.	1	5,4	0,48	91%	0,12
El conjunto de elementos culturales, relaciones sociales y ayudas pedagógicas que, tanto dentro como fuera de la escuela, hacen que la experiencia de aprendizaje de cada alumno sea personal.	4	6,0	0,62	90%	0,17
Educación personalizada					
Busca el máximo desarrollo de las cualidades personales de cada educando a través del desarrollo de proyectos con sentido y valor personal, y de su capacidad para compartirlo con otros.	2	5,7	0,45	90%	0,16
Tiene como objetivo educar personas singulares, autónomas, abiertas, responsables, solidarias y resilientes capaces de autosuperarse y perseverar por ellos mismos.	3	5,8	0,49	90%	0,17
BLOQUE 2 IMPORTANCIA					
Educación en y para la libertad exige una educación personal que permita el desarrollo de la propia	1	4,4	0,59	91%	0,12

identidad y la formación de ciudadanos capaces de pensar críticamente, frente a un mundo que se auto-destruye y necesita pensadores críticos que busquen soluciones solidarias y sostenibles.					
Al mejorar el autoconocimiento de talentos, intereses, competencias personales y puntos débiles, el alumnado puede ser más consciente, comprometido, innovador y realista. A su vez puede crecer más seguro de quién es y qué puede ofrecer a su comunidad.	3	5,2	0,5	95%	0,08
La dignidad humana tiene carácter universal y atañe a cada ser humano. Cada persona encuentra su plenitud en el desarrollo de sus potencialidades y en ser reconocido como alguien a respetar. La universalidad de la dignidad humana es el fundamento más consistente para el reconocimiento de una educación personal, es una cuestión de respeto. Porque cada alumno es singular y único y necesita descubrir sus valores, talentos, estrategias y sobre todo su sentido personal para continuar aprendiendo y creciendo como persona.	5	5,4	0,56	92%	0,14
El aprendizaje para que sea real debe basarse en la reconstrucción de una experiencia personal. Se puede apoyar, ayudar y estimular pero no sustituir. El significado de las ideas y maneras de hacer, de comunicar, sentir y valorar, y el sentido que los aprendices otorgan a lo que aprenden son las dos caras de la misma moneda, su aprendizaje personal.	6	5,7	0,53	92%	0,12
BLOQUE 3 OBJETIVOS					
Educación de personas íntegras comprometidas con la mejora personal y social. Favoreciendo el conocimiento propio, la configuración de la propia identidad (valores y dignidad) y apertura a los demás y al mundo (solidaridad, compromiso), para ir decidiendo de forma consciente y crítica el propio proyecto personal de vida.	1	5,3	0,53	90%	0,12
BLOQUE 4 PRINCIPIOS BÁSICOS					
Principios de personalización en cuanto a la escuela					
Fomenta la participación, el pensamiento crítico y la creatividad. Incorpora contenidos culturalmente sensibles y espacios para la reflexión y la resolución de conflictos o problemas que les afectan.	1	4,4	0,57	92%	0,12
Mantiene a todos los alumnos en altas expectativas, pero el modelo y las estrategias permiten la flexibilidad	2	4,4	0,67	92%	0,12

de incluir con respeto y dignidad a cada aprendiz según su contexto y singularidad.					
Promotora de la iniciativa y autonomía personal. Reconoce y acepta la capacidad de cada alumno y alumna para tomar decisiones sobre sus propios procesos de enseñanza y aprendizaje o normas de convivencia, y trabaja con ellos y ellas el desarrollo de esta capacidad. Incorpora la voz del alumnado al diseño y desarrollo de las actividades de enseñanza, aprendizaje y escolares.	3	4,5	0,81	94%	0,12
Principios de personalización en cuanto a la evaluación					
Una evaluación integrada al aprendizaje que evalúa el progreso y esfuerzo del alumno más que el resultado. Continua, basada en la metacognición, el reconocimiento del error y unos objetivos claros y consensuados. Diversificada con auto y co-evaluación dejando la calificación para el final del proceso, cuando hay evidencias de que se ha aprendido.	3	5,5	0,55	94%	0,09
Principios de personalización en cuanto al rol del docente					
Fomenta la reflexión sobre el aprendizaje y lo conecta e integra en la vida real y la comprensión del mundo.	1	4,3	0,63	96%	0,1
Confía plenamente en la posibilidad de crecimiento y superación de cada uno de sus alumnos. Lo muestra reconociendo cada pequeño logro y con una actitud amable y optimista	2	5,0	0,49	95%	0,11
Principios de personalización en cuanto a la orientación educativa					
Orientación personal. Tutoría individualizada orientada al autoconocimiento y a descubrir los propios talentos más allá de lo puramente cognitivo, con el objeto de conseguir una madurez y desarrollo holístico de cada alumno. Incluye el acompañamiento en el desarrollo de un pensamiento crítico y el cuestionamiento por el sentido, como preparación para la vida adulta.	1	4,0	0,63	96%	0,08
Principios de personalización en cuanto a la familia					
Colaboración entre escuela-familia. La familia participa de forma activa en la formación y toma de decisiones de sus hijos en colaboración con los profesores. Tiene la responsabilidad de cooperar con la escuela para que ésta tenga una información más rica sobre el perfil del alumno y de aportar a sus hijos momentos, experiencias	1	5,6	0,38	94%	0,12

y guía en determinados aspectos que puedan exigir de un aprendizaje individual, tanto para trabajar dificultades como para estimular fortalezas.

Los padres y madres pueden participar en la organización de eventos escolares ya sea culturales, lúdicos, sociales o académicos.

Principios de personalización en cuanto a la tecnología

Permite desarrollar las tareas de acompañamiento de cada alumno y alumna tanto en sus trayectorias escolares como de aprendizaje, y a su vez pueden ser un gran apoyo al docente a través de herramientas de gestión del currículum, la evaluación y el aprendizaje, cooperación entre el equipo docente o comunicación con las familias.	1	5,6	0,57	92 %	0,12
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Principios de personalización en cuanto a la sociedad

La personalización se adecua a las nuevas necesidades sociales educando ciudadanos autónomos y responsables capaces de aprender a aprender, con pensamiento crítico y unos valores y habilidades que les permitirán contribuir de forma positiva en su comunidad y sociedad.	1	5,6	0,53	90%	0,21
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Principios de personalización en cuanto a los medios de comunicación

La saturación de información actual exige una educación del sentido crítico necesario para cuestionarse y evaluar su fiabilidad, con mentalidad abierta y buscando la verdad con imparcialidad.	1	5,8	0,52	94 %	0,12
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Fuente: Moreno, Ana (2020). Informe Delphi de expertos. Personalizar, un modelo para una educación de calidad en el siglo XXI. Colección "Impuls Educatió Reports". Barcelona: Impuls Educatió.

Conclusiones

En el inicio se concretó como objetivo de este artículo, llegar a un consenso en cuanto a lo que se entiende por personalizar en educación y cuáles son sus objetivos primordiales, principios básicos en referencia a los elementos fundamentales de la educación y su importancia. Fruto del trabajo del grupo de expertos, tras el procesamiento y análisis de sus respuestas, se han obtenido las siguientes conclusiones.

El **concepto** de la educación personalizada hace referencia a una forma de educación que busca el desarrollo de todo el potencial del alumnado y tiene como objetivo educar a cada estudiante en su singularidad, autonomía y apertura a los otros, como persona capaz de autosuperarse y perseverar. Reconoce su propia identidad, fomentando su protagonismo y autonomía en el proceso de

aprendizaje y en el diseño de su trayectoria personal, con el acompañamiento conjunto de la familia y el colegio.

Su **importancia** radica en su contribución al desarrollo personal, pero además encierra un gran contenido social que se expresa a través de la estimulación de un aprendizaje global, que integra las distintas áreas cognitivas, socio afectiva y psico-motriz, potencia la singularidad, la participación y solidaridad social. Se trata de un aprendizaje experiencial, reflexivo y progresivo, lo que conduce a un aprendizaje significativo.

Estableciendo algunas relaciones con conceptos semejantes la educación personalizada comporta dar una respuesta a la diversidad, atendiendo a cada alumno y sus necesidades. Por este motivo, una **educación inclusiva** debe partir de la educación personalizada ya que busca realizar agrupamientos que ayuden a los alumnos, ponen en marcha distintas metodologías, y flexibilizan los tiempos y espacios en el aula. Por otra parte, respecto a la **educación individualizada** comparte con la personalización el trabajo con cada alumno de forma individual. No obstante, la educación personalizada aspira a ser efectiva la participación y la solidaridad en un contexto de interacción social.

Se sustenta en valores personales de libertad, desarrollo identitario y pensamiento crítico y la dignidad humana, que se refleja en el respeto que se aprende a través del modelaje, para consigo mismo y para con el conjunto social.

El principal **objetivo** de la educación personalizada es el logro de personas íntegras, capaces de decidir y aprender por sí mismas y autodeterminadas a ello, comprometidas con la mejora personal y social.

Por último, los expertos han remarcado cómo los **principios básicos** sirven de guía y evaluación para una personalización eficaz, esto comportaría que el currículo sea flexible, diversificado y vehículo de reto y transformación de las personas. Las metas deberían ser consensuadas en términos de competencias. Los contenidos deberían ser clave, aplicables a las diferentes situaciones y problemas adaptándose al contexto y a la singularidad del estudiante. Es relevante un aprendizaje que permita seguir aprendiendo.

La personalización de la enseñanza implica un cambio de roles en los sujetos participantes del proceso, muy alineado con los nuevos modelos educativos, de tal forma que el docente tiene un rol de guía, orientador y facilitador del aprendizaje. La persona que aprende, el alumno, alumna, es un líder de su propio aprendizaje, procesa, e integra de modo personal, original, propio y único, aprende a asumir responsabilidades, tomando las decisiones que conciernen a su proceso. Se trata de desarrollar y consolidar la competencia de aprendizaje autónomo acompañado de un sentimiento

de competencia positiva. Utiliza las sinergias grupales que se hacen efectivas a través de diferentes estrategias de aprendizaje colaborativo como debates, proyectos, entre otros, para estimular y enriquecer capacidades, al tiempo que permite el desarrollo personal y la contribución singular.

La evaluación, está orientada a la construcción y a la integración del saber. Se deberían escoger las estrategias evaluativas más adecuadas en función de los objetivos, las necesidades y del contexto, en el marco del Diseño Universal del Aprendizaje (UDL), garantizando que se adaptan a las características diferenciales de los distintos alumnos en el aula. El objetivo de la evaluación sería integrar el progreso y esfuerzo del alumno, no centrándose únicamente en el resultado. Además, la evaluación debería basarse en la metacognición, en el reconocimiento del error y en unos objetivos claros y consensuados; también debe incluir a los diferentes agentes, utilizando auto y coevaluación además de la heteroevaluación. La calificación debe dejarse para el final del proceso, cuando hay evidencias de que se ha aprendido.

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LA ÉTICA DEL CUIDADO COMO CLAVE DE RELACIÓN EDUCATIVA

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Abstract The ethics of care emerges as an alternative paradigm to the economic and political social order that has brought us to this point in time. In this study we address the necessary deconstruction of care that is functional to the economic logic, as well as to the educational relationship marked by success, personal triumph and neglect of the other. At the same time, we articulate an educational proposal based on care as the key to a new educational relationship charged with a sense of transforming reality. Care in this way will be the bearer of a way of inhabiting the Earth, or else the human species will be in serious danger of extinction. The new generations are sensitive to this new situation.

Keywords Care, educational paradigm, ethics, attachment, values

Resumen En el cambio de época que transitamos emerge la ética del cuidado como paradigma alternativo al orden social económico y político que nos ha traído hasta aquí. En el presente estudio abordamos la necesaria deconstrucción del cuidado funcional a la lógica economicista, así como a la relación educativa marcada por el éxito, el triunfo personal y la desatención al otro. En paralelo se articula una propuesta educativa centrada en el cuidado como clave de una relación educativa novedosa y cargada de sentido transformador de la realidad. El cuidado así será portador de una manera de habitar la Tierra, o de lo contrario la especie humana correrá serio peligro de extinción. Las nuevas generaciones son sensibles a esta nueva situación.

Palavras-clave Cuidado, paradigma educativo, ética, vínculo, valores

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1. Tiempos de cuidados¹

En un momento histórico donde reclamamos cuidados en medio de las amenazas que nos acechan como especie humana, reclamo como educador el cuidado como nuevo paradigma de civilización y, por tanto, educativo.

Durante esta última década han crecido notablemente los estudios e investigaciones acerca del cuidado en los diferentes ámbitos de la convivencia. Es un término que nace en la esfera de la atención sanitaria y del trabajo social, y poco a poco ha inundado el resto de parcelas, también la educativa. La eclosión de la pandemia del covid 19 elevó el cuidado a la categoría ética por excelencia, y en ese estado de postración planetaria nos convencimos de aquellas palabras que Leonardo Boff viene predicando en el desierto de la incredulidad desde hace no pocos años: “o cuidamos o perecemos como especie” (Boff, 2002)

En efecto, el cuidado saltó las barreras de las clases sociales, de los territorios, de las identidades particulares y de los grupos de interés, para hacernos sentir miembros de la misma especie. Y es la especie humana la que corre serio peligro de extinción, habida cuenta que la pandemia, así como la violencia y el peligro de la guerra nuclear eclipsan la gran amenaza que se cierne sobre nosotros: el cambio climático.

Es en este tiempo cuando hemos sido conscientes de los descuidos que hemos ido implementando en nuestro habitar sobre el planeta Tierra. Descuidos que hemos trasladado al mundo educativo. Entiendo por descuido la desconexión con lo real, la des-vinculación con lo vivo, de tal suerte que se ha fomentado una triple des-vinculación:

- *La desvinculación con uno mismo*: que alienta la dispersión y la distracción individual y la ausencia de reflexión. El resultado educativo es la incentivación de un aislamiento cada vez mayor. El deterioro de la salud mental en no pocos adolescentes, durante estos dos últimos años, parte de la incapacidad educativa para ayudar a reflexionar sobre los acontecimientos de la vida que estamos atravesando en este momento como humanidad. La magnitud de lo vivido excede la experiencia de saber estar en uno mismo, que en este tiempo es mínima.
- *La desvinculación con los otros*, desde una tradición donde el “yo pienso”, “yo hago”, “yo digo”, se articula como nudo generador de actividades. En ese escenario resulta muy difícil adentrarse en la relación como elemento nuclear de nuestra condición humana. Sin

¹ El encargo que se me ha propuesto para escribir parte de lo mucho ya reflexionado y trabajado en dos obras que he escrito recientemente: *Es nuestro momento, El paradigma del cuidado como desafío educativo*, Fundación SM, Madrid, 2020 (traducción en portugués: *É o nosso momento. O paradigma do cuidado como desafio educativo*. IPAV & Fundación SM., 2021) y *Tiempo emergente. Meditaciones desde la ética del cuidado*, Khaf, Madrid, 2021.

experiencia de vínculo con el otro se extravía la responsabilidad: no hay nudo que me ate al otro. Al decir de Lévinas solo la responsabilidad me anuda al otro, desde la experiencia de que el otro me reclama y me solicita (Lévinas, 1991) La desvinculación con los otros es la cuna del dominio y el sentido posesivo hacia esos otros que finalmente pierden la condición de sujetos.

- *La desvinculación con el planeta*, en tanto que la condición de propietarios ha prevalecido sobre la de moradores. El planeta es nuestra casa común y los descuidos que pueden concentrarse en los efectos de cambio climático que ya percibimos en nuestra vida cotidiana, no son más que los efectos de cientos de años en los que el ser humano, especialmente en nuestro occidente depredador, ha entendido que todo vale con tal de crecer económicamente. El PIB ha desbancado cualquier otro tipo de medida de crecimiento humano y de desarrollo sostenible.

Con todo, la persistencia de los descuidos ha alumbrado un tiempo de cuidados sobre los que debemos ser cautelosos y críticos. El mercado todo lo integra, y de la misma forma que la solidaridad se convirtió en objeto de consumo acrítico durante los años 80 y 90 del pasado siglo, en este momento el cuidado es absorbido por el sistema, suavizando cualquier arista crítica y haciendo del cuidado un mero mensaje de marketing. La compañía de seguros más importante de España tiene como lema “Te cuidamos”, al tiempo que no pocas empresas que hacen negocio con las residencias de personas mayores, cambian el nombre de sus empresas por otros nombres que comienzan con el prefijo “cui”, de cui-dar.

Del mismo modo, en el campo educativo y tras la pandemia, aparece el cuidado como reclamo casi publicitario. Reclamo para clientes, no para ciudadanos. Por eso, lo primero que hemos de hacer, desde el punto de vista educativo, es desenmascarar las falsas concepciones del cuidado que surgen entre nosotros, dentro y fuera de la esfera educativa. Es preciso dejar de alimentar ese cuidado bonachón, insípido, que no cuestiona ni transforma.

Con alegría he podido ir comprobando cómo durante estos últimos años en muchos centros educativos el cuidado se está tomando en serio como un nuevo modo de entender las relaciones educativas. Nace una nueva sensibilidad más cuidadosa con lo real, que teje relaciones más auténticas y que busca fuentes de un cuidado necesario. Y, al mismo tiempo, quizá no se toca fondo aún del todo. Es decir, no se llega a comprender que el cuidado emerge en este tiempo como una enmienda a la totalidad del tipo de vida que estamos viviendo y que nos conduce a una catástrofe planetaria. Hay mucha buena voluntad y quizá falte la perspectiva de fondo que atesora el cuidado cuando se afronta de modo sistémico.

Es Walter Benjamin, antes de la II Guerra Mundial, quien formula el término “avisador de fuegos”, y que representa la necesidad de que alguien realice esa llamada de atención sobre los riesgos que está tomando nuestra civilización aparentemente imbatible. El cuidado aparece entonces como ese avisador, que no es profeta de calamidades, sino testigo de una revolución personal y colectiva que debe comenzar por el acto educativo.

2. La educación que deviene en meritocracia

Durante el confinamiento originado por la pandemia, el filósofo y escritor argentino Hugo Mújica expresó en una entrevista televisada que, al *escuchar* lo que estaba sucediendo en el planeta, encontraba un mensaje inapelable: la vida era estrecha tal como tal veníamos viviendo. Esa estrechez tiene que ver con dimensiones de la realidad que se complementan: se trata de la descripción de un tipo de desarrollo y de civilización que ha doblado su apuesta por la acumulación sin criterio, la producción indefinida y el consumismo desmedido haciendo la guerra a la vida, a los recursos naturales del planeta.

Esta manera de entendernos ha necesitado un tipo de educación funcional, incapaz de cuestionar este sistema de vida y de convivencia. Una educación en la que la mayor parte de nosotros ha crecido y ha bebido de ella. Cuando a mis 16 años estudiaba mi último curso de la etapa escolar, pendiente de las carreras universitarias con futuro y las notas que exigían para entrar en ellas, me encontré con un poema de José A. Goytisolo que, cantado por Paco Ibáñez, me ha acompañado desde entonces. Su título es tierno: “Me lo decía mi abuelito”; su contenido es absolutamente revolucionario y disidente.

Representa la crítica feroz a un tipo de educación que busca ante todo ser los primeros, pese a quien pese, cueste lo que cueste, haciendo del éxito personal la clave de una vida ... ¿feliz? Esa es la cuestión. Retengo unos versos bien expresivos: “¡Anda muchacho/dale duro!/la tierra toda el sol y el mar/son para aquellos que han sabido sentarse sobre los demás”. Palabras duras, despiadadas. El mérito va aparejado a ser fuerte y no mostrar ninguna debilidad. “Sentarse sobre los demás” es la síntesis de una educación que alienta el darwinismo social, y el triunfo del fuerte sobre el frágil. Esta apuesta da alas al individualismo posesivo que entiende que los demás son o pueden ser objetos a los que puedo manejar a mi antojo. Los otros son aquellos que están a mi disposición.

Ciertamente, el esfuerzo, la constancia y pulir las capacidades personales forman parte de todo proyecto educativo. El problema es la orientación que otorgamos a la educación: hacia qué tipo de persona y para qué tipo de sociedad educamos. Si confundimos excelencia con meritocracia o competencias personales con la competitividad de abrirse camino, utilizando cualquier medio a nuestro alcance, estamos alimentando el tipo de sociedad no solo del que venimos sino el que

propicia, en el fondo, desastres ecológicos como el que estamos sufriendo como humanidad que habita en un planeta herido.

Todo está relacionado: educar para el éxito, la adoración al dios mercado, la veneración del dinero como lo único necesario, el triunfo que va dejando a otros menos espabilados orillados en la cuneta y los trabajos que perpetúan esa lógica infernal van configurando una espiral perversa construida por seres anónimos, desvinculados y en permanente estado de excitación por ganar y desentenderse de la casa común que habitan.

Especial cuidado hemos de prestar a las voces masculinas que han alentado esta cultura patriarcal, dominada por los valores que fomentan la conquista y el poderío. El puño cerrado encima de la mesa es su símbolo y la cultura del cowboy su referente. En todo este entramado de personas, estructuras y procesos se cultiva una cultura que elogia al más fuerte y se olvida no solo de los más frágiles, sino que olvida que todos somos frágiles en un mundo frágil. En este contexto, las generaciones de varones de las últimas décadas hemos continuado este orden de cosas ya absolutamente desfasado, pero del que somos producto y copartícipes, al mismo tiempo.

Una vez más encontramos en el cuidado la clave de acción que nos devuelve a la esencia de lo que somos; y nos impulsa a educar haciendo de la colaboración y de la convivencia un arma de construcción intensiva y cordial. Es en el juego del saludo, del reconocimiento cotidiano, del pedir permiso, pedir perdón y dar las gracias donde quizá podamos encontrar algunos de los mimbres que necesitamos para repensar una educación que haga justicia a las verdaderas necesidades del ser humano. Una educación que busque no tanto ser los primeros, sino caminar juntos, construir juntos, y convivir en medio de la pluralidad de culturas, procedencias y situaciones.

3. El cuidado como cambio de paradigma educativo

El cuidado es mucho más que una manera de tratar bien a los demás, con ser ese un objetivo básico y elemental. Es una forma de relación con la vida que vivimos, a partir de los vínculos que generamos, de los que recibimos y en los que nos hallamos como seres vivos. El cuidado conlleva una predisposición personal basada en el respeto, la confianza y la colaboración. Con todo, el cuidado es mucho más que una actitud o el cultivo de un determinado valor. Es un suelo renovado sobre el que asentar propósitos, relaciones, estructuras y modos de comprendernos como seres humanos. Por eso, me atrevo a decir que el cuidado es el eje de un nuevo paradigma de civilización y, por tanto, de educación.

Etimológicamente, *paradigma* es una palabra que significa modelo, patrón, guía. Es el mundo científico el que ha utilizado esta expresión y de ella bebemos. Hoy día, paradigma es un término que se utiliza con excesiva frecuencia y no siempre de modo adecuado.

Sin duda, el paradigma del progreso es el que ha guiado a nuestra civilización durante siglos. Y el progreso no solo es bueno, sino que a una parte de la humanidad nos ha tocado la buena suerte de vivir mejor que nunca. El problema es que a ese progreso le hemos añadido el adjetivo de “infinito” o “ilimitado”, y nos ha hecho creer que todo vale con tal de progresar.

La educación que nace bajo el paraguas del progreso infinito igualmente articula su propio paradigma basado en el éxito individual, en la inserción acrítica en el mercado laboral, en la competitividad y en la falsa creencia de que *más es mejor*. En él se ha asentado la meritocracia tratada en el punto anterior. Este paradigma ya toca techo. Las anomalías y problemas que suscita ya no pueden ser solucionadas desde el mismo paradigma que las ha creado. El maestro en cambios organizacionales, Marshall Gold Smith, acuña una expresión bien interesante: “Lo que nos trajo hasta aquí no nos llevará hasta allí”. En términos globales, el calentamiento global, la desigualdad creciente entre Norte y Sur, o expresado con las palabras del papa Francisco, los gritos de la tierra y los gritos de los pobres solicitan una nueva alianza con la vida y entre los seres humanos. (papa Francisco, 2015)

Por otra parte, el nuevo paradigma que creemos debe acompañar este cambio de época, es el paradigma centrado en el cuidado de nosotros mismos, de los demás y del planeta. Para ello no vale asumir los pilares del paradigma del progreso desbocado. Ni el crecimiento económico indefinido, ni el consumo desaforado, ni la competitividad abusiva, ni la mercantilización de la vida nos conducen al cuidado necesario. Hay que elaborar otros cimientos y buscar otras estrategias. La alternativa no proviene de la confrontación, sino de la atención a la irrupción de un nuevo tiempo y una nueva manera de vivir y convivir.

Nos encontramos en la transición entre lo viejo que acaba y lo nuevo que nace. Un tiempo apasionante que nos coloca en estado de vigilia. A finales de siglo XX el escritor checo Václav Havel escribió, al caer el muro de Berlín: “Creo que existen buenas razones para sugerir que la era moderna ha terminado. Hoy, muchas cosas indican que vamos hacia un periodo transicional, en el que parece que algo está a punto de salir y algo distinto está naciendo dolorosamente. Es como si algo estuviera desmoronándose, descomponiéndose y agotándose, mientras que algo distinto, todavía vago, estuviera emergiendo de los escombros” (Sharmer, 2017).

De los escombros puede surgir, aunque de forma vaga, poco a poco la alternativa de un nuevo paradigma que nos vincule como humanidad. Y este nuevo paradigma no vendrá por el hecho de que combatamos y critiquemos el paradigma del progreso indefinido, sino en la medida en que vayamos cuidando los espacios que habitamos y en los que trabajamos, que cuidemos nuestras relaciones y la casa común que nos alberga. Es decir, en la medida que *Cuidado* sea nuestro compañero de camino.

Ciertamente vivimos en una transición tan inestable como incierta. Entre lo viejo que muere y lo nuevo que nace se encuentra ese periodo que podemos denominar como “interregno”, que al decir de Gramsci es el momento en el que aparecen los monstruos que acaparan nuestra atención. En medio de la incertidumbre en la que nos hallamos y de los miedos ante un futuro inminente desconocido, surgen los fantasmas de los autoritarismos en las distancias cortas (en forma de abusos, acoso, violencia machista, también entre nuestros alumnos adolescentes). Mientras, en las distancias largas, las propuestas políticas más autoritarias y totalitarias se abren paso prometiendo seguridad y libertad individual. Son propuestas ganadoras que bajo la apariencia de seguridad se erigen en monstruos que todo lo acallan.

El pedagogo brasileiro Paulo Freire decía que las personas nos adaptamos al mundo transformándolo. Es un aprendizaje biológico que tiene enormes consecuencias. La realidad es lo que vivimos y también lo que puede llegar a ser. Desplegar posibilidades aún inéditas, pero que podemos acariciar, forma parte de ese encargo educativo y existencial al que el mismo Freire se refirió con el término *inédito viable*. Es nuestra forma de combatir pacíficamente los monstruos que el cambio de época nos está dejando.

El paradigma del cuidado, desde el punto de vista educativo, será ese inédito viable que podemos ir construyendo sin necesidad de destruir nada de lo que nos ha traído hasta aquí. Basta con dejar ir y abandonar comportamientos, aprendizajes, y vocabulario que expresen situaciones de dominio, conquista o éxito a cualquier precio. También habrá que dejar ir estructuras, sistemas y relaciones que apunten el progreso indefinido que conduce a su propio fracaso.

4. La educación como relación ética

Antes que programaciones y disciplinas, la educación es un acontecimiento ético que pone en marcha un nuevo comienzo, porque es capaz de generar en el alumnado respuestas imprevisibles por audaces; propuestas inéditas por humanizadoras y sustentadoras de la vida. En este tiempo de incertidumbre la pandemia interrumpe nuestro diario vivir e irrumpe la ética del cuidado como modo responsable de responder lúcidamente a este apagón colectivo al que hemos asistido como humanidad. La educación se despoja de planes y programas y atiende lo que sucede. Por su parte, la ética del cuidado no promueve ninguna virtud sino que se expresa como relación educativa, como lugar desde el cual encontrarnos y como entramado vital que nos sustenta. Partimos no del cuidado que damos sino del cuidado recibido y que rescatamos de nuestra frágil memoria. Somos personas gracias a los cuidados recibidos. Desde la ética del cuidado aventuramos un cambio radical en nuestro modelo educativo.

Probablemente, ninguna reforma educativa emprendió la necesaria reforma de la educación. Las reformas educativas han ido reparando, remodelando y mejorando elementos que pertenecen al

mismo sistema. La ética del cuidado contiene la semilla de un nuevo modo de enfrentar el acto educativo; se configura en palanca que acciona estructuras, contenidos educativos, relaciones, modelos de aprendizaje y de evaluación, metodologías, pedagogías y didácticas renovadas. Por ello, la ética del cuidado nos obliga a retomar las preguntas educativas clásicas.

En efecto, en este momento de encrucijada urge no solo hacer, sino preguntarse de nuevo aquellas cuestiones que a veces damos por supuestas y que conforman el *abc* de la educación. Repasemos esas preguntas básicas.

- El *qué* de la educación hace referencia a los contenidos educativos. En muchas ocasiones los sistemas educativos se han basado casi exclusivamente en responder a esta pregunta. Llega la batalla curricular y con ella dirimir qué entra y qué no entra como materia. Ante el cambio climático y el reto de la reconfiguración de nuestro modo de habitar en l plantea, algunas voces hablan de incluir una asignatura sobre Medio Ambiente, u otra sobre los Cuidados. Probablemente, con ser iniciativas loables, se queden cortas. El *qué* de la educación reclama contenidos transversales y saberes compartidos. La fragmentación de disciplinas debe dar paso a una nueva fase de acceso al conocimiento, que pasa por la articulación de contenidos interdisciplinares. Al mismo tiempo, se impone el ensanchamiento del saber integrando la sabiduría que nace de vivirse conectado fuentes sapienciales, espirituales y experienciales y que constituyen una fuente de conocimiento por explorar. Cuando en muchos colegios del planeta se va instaurando la puesta en marcha de un tiempo de silencio en cada aula al comienzo de cada jornada de trabajo, ese hecho se impone como un primer contenido no tangible, que predispone en un marco de cuidado insospechado.
- El *qué cómo* de la educación. Es la pregunta por los procedimientos y por los medios educativos. En la sociedad del conocimiento las nuevas tecnologías han entrado en la escuela dinamizando procesos, metodologías y hasta modelos pedagógicos. Reconociendo su indudable valor, todo ello nos ha sumergido progresivamente en el paradigma tecnocrático que el papa Francisco denuncia en *Laudato Si'*, y que en el ámbito educativo se expresa en que “tenemos demasiados medios para unos escasos y raquíticos fines” (LS 203). Revalorizar los *cómos* y los medios nos ha de hacer preguntarnos por nuestros fines, por el valor real que damos a cada cosa: qué valor real le damos al respeto, por ejemplo, como valor finalista y qué valor real le damos los medios, ya sea un código ético o un protocolo de prevención de abusos. En muchas ocasiones y con deseos respetables los medios construidos se convierten en auténticos absolutos que paralizan la vida de los centros o introducen factores de sospecha no deseados, por ejemplo, en el campo de la prevención de abusos en los colegios cuando el excesivo celo por los medios (protocolos) inciden en el fortalecimiento de una cultura de la sospecha que no es lo más conveniente.

- El *para qué* de la educación. Son los fines educativos, esos que normalmente damos por supuestos. Valoramos la educación integral, apostamos por ella porque nada humano nos es ajeno, incluida la dimensión espiritual y trascendente de la persona. Y además educamos para la inserción crítica en un tipo de sociedad plural, hospitalaria y justa. No basta preparar para insertarse en el mercado de trabajo. El cambio climático y la pandemia del covid-19 son señales que nos alertan en una educación que vaya más allá de la lógica del mercado y alumbre personas capaces de sentir y pensar otras relaciones, otras organizaciones y otro mundo por construir. El para qué nos alerta del tipo de sociedad que estamos construyendo desde el colegio, y no es una pregunta para el futuro, sino que es el reto que vivimos en la urgencia del presente. Desde esa urgencia al futuro no vamos, sino que lo traemos: traemos el futuro que emerge desde el cuidado.
- El *desde dónde* de la educación. Probablemente la pregunta más olvidada y menos respondida. Toca la fuente de nuestro ser y de nuestro hacer. ¿Desde dónde educamos? Es la pregunta por el lugar consciente desde el cual vivimos y educamos; y apunta a la conciencia de que los seres humanos no estamos desconectados de las criaturas ni de la vida. Articular la fuente de vida que haga del vínculo con lo vivo una referencia reverencial fundamental, constituye un desafío educativo ineludible para los próximos años. Entonces entenderemos que el acto educativo contiene una indudable cara espiritual, porque el cuidado no es una didáctica, ni una metodología ni un contenido educativo, sino una manera de estar en la realidad que parte de un salto evolutivo personal y colectivo. Para Einstein los problemas que hemos generado solo pueden ser resueltos en un nivel de conciencia superior. Este nivel de conciencia tiene que ver más con la sabiduría que con nuevos conocimientos, con reconocer qué es lo prioritario en el discurrir de nuestra vida y conectarnos con ello.

Por tanto, no habrá cambios como civilización si no hay salto espiritual personal y colectivo hacia una autocomprensión de la vida desde el cuidado que hemos recibido. Resulta imposible modificar un sistema deshumanizado sin un cambio profundo de conciencia. Es la misma vida y su capacidad para hacerla habitable la que nos solicita hacernos con una nueva forma de ordenar la realidad y de instalarnos en ella. A eso le llamamos cambio de paradigma, como venimos insistiendo. Y accedemos a él a partir de un salto interior, ese que va más adentro en la espesura de lo real.

La tarea educativa que pone en el centro el cuidado de la vida ha de responder una a una las preguntas indicadas. Y de modo especial habría que prestar más atención a aquellas preguntas que determinan sentido y dirección: es decir, el *para qué* y *desde donde* educar.

Todas estas indicaciones, que pueden resultar alarmantes, solo se sostienen desde la lógica del cuidado. Aquí descubrimos la carga revolucionaria de un cuidado que ensancha la vida al tiempo

que reduce los impactos negativos que vertimos sobre nuestra casa común. El coste de esta apuesta directamente recae sobre nuestra forma de vida. Somos conscientes de que educamos en un escenario económico donde las futuras generaciones van a vivir peor que sus mayores, con menos oportunidades o tal vez con otras diferentes y con más conocimientos. Y en esa dirección el cuidado compromete un modo de vida donde la felicidad no va estar regida por el embudo del tener sino por incrementar experiencias y espacios de cuidado mutuo.

La ética se aleja de las prescripciones normativas que han construido el edificio de la moral, a veces tan distante de la verdadera compasión. La ética del cuidado nace del entramado humano y de la relación de todos con todos; asumimos que la interdependencia global representa una constante antropológica y ha de ser una de las palancas de nuestro actuar. Todo en el universo es relación y nada ni nadie queda fuera de la relación. En este pozo surge la ética como respuesta incierta ante el sufrimiento de todo lo vivo que yace desvinculado o roto. La desvinculación no es una idea: toma cuerpo de migrante naufragando en el Mediterráneo; se expresa en quienes no encuentran trabajo o son expulsados de sus casas; en todas aquellas personas que no llegan a fin de mes, en los niños y niñas explotados y en las mujeres maltratadas. La desvinculación acontece en el consumismo desaforado, en la vida acelerada o en la violencia contra la naturaleza. Entonces, la ética del cuidado responde a cada situación aquí y ahora, cada rostro demanda una respuesta en una situación única, personal e imprevisible, que conecta con situaciones colectivas igualmente deterioradas e injustificables. La ética del cuidado sale al encuentro del otro en la certeza de que, si bien no sabemos a veces qué hacer, sabemos que algo hemos de hacer y confiamos en llevarlo hacia adelante.

Reconocemos, con Freire, que si la educación no lo puede todo, alguna cosa fundamental puede la educación. Y esa otra cosa que puede es generar un pensamiento crítico y una capacidad de respuesta adecuada al desorden establecido en que vivimos. Greta Thunberg se dio a conocer en un pequeño discurso en la Cumbre sobre el cambio climático celebrada en Polonia en 2018. Allí dijo: “si las soluciones dentro del sistema son tan imposibles de encontrar, quizá deberíamos cambiar el propio sistema; os habéis quedado sin excusas, y nos estamos quedando sin tiempo”. Los tímidos aplausos y las miradas de perplejidad de la clase política allí presente auguraban -paradójicamente- lo adecuado de aquellas palabras.

Apremia el cambio de paradigma que no se logra criticando solo el actual sino poniendo las bases y trenzando iniciativas de otro alternativo. La ética del cuidado nace como aportación a este nuevo modo de entendernos como especie humana y de habitar la casa común. Queremos direccionar la educación hacia el cuidado porque ya no podemos apuntalar por más tiempo la sociedad del rendimiento, la búsqueda del éxito personal a cualquier precio o el hambre de consumismo.

“Somos la especie en peligro de extinguirlo todo”, rezaba una de las pancartas que los estudiantes sacaban a la calle en las movilizaciones de otoño de 2019. Nos encontramos ante una nueva generación: más concienciada que la adulta, más preparada y con más ganas de promover un cambio local y global. No la defraudemos.

5. Valores que acompañan al cuidado

La educación es un acontecimiento en el que la presencia del otro nos trasciende como educadores y frente al cual asumimos una responsabilidad de respuesta, hospitalidad, cercanía y buen trato. La relación educativa es, ante todo, una relación ética que proporciona suelo para desarrollar valores que humanizan y acompaña en la búsqueda permanente de sentido.

Como educadores nos encontramos no ante una obra por hacer sino ante personas que nacen a la vida con nuestra ayuda. En ese trance, los planes previos hay que relativizarlos; asistimos al milagro de un inicio. Cada vida es un absoluto al que acompañamos desde el respeto y el cuidado. El filósofo Joan Carles Mèlich (2006:33) nos recuerda que:

“Educar es cuidar del otro, es hacerse cargo de él, acompañarlo, acogerlo. Por eso en toda educación hay ética. Son inseparables una de otra. Educar es dar si esperar nada a cambio. En este “dar” educativo es un “darse”. En la relación educativa no solamente se da algo sino que también se da alguien. Y esto es la ética”

La educación es un modo de acción que ayuda a que el otro sea alguien, con capacidad para nombrar sus preferencias, gustos y necesidades con libertad. El acontecimiento de la educación hace posible que quepa esperar del otro lo inesperado, lo imprevisible. Por eso, la relación entre profesor y alumno no es meramente técnica ni estratégica, sino sapiencial y ética. El cuidado aterriza necesariamente ese modo de relación.

La inspiración socrática de educar como forma de extraer las mejores posibilidades de humanización, constituye uno de los acontecimientos éticos centrales de la educación como ejercicio del cuidado. Algo semejante expresa Miguel Ángel en relación con su obra *El David*; como escultor, Miguel Ángel se limitó a quitar el mármol sobrante para que ese David saliese al exterior, para dejar ver todo lo que había en su interior, porque él ya estaba allí. Freire solía decir que la obra del educador se asemeja a la del escultor. Quien educa es un esteta que se esfuerza en ver lo que cada alumno porta por sí mismo, porque cada alumno ya está ahí: solo hay que aprender a verlo y reconocerlo. No se trata de escupir a nuestro antojo para modelar “mi” alumno; al contrario, se trata de ayudar a que salga y aparezca el otro en su mejor versión, en su más alta posibilidad de realización humana, permitiendo que sea él mismo, ella misma.

Ética del cuidado y educación como acontecimiento ético tienen un nexo fundamental. Tradicionalmente, la ética del cuidado, en vinculación con la educación del carácter, tiene su fundamento en el tratamiento del cuidado como virtud. En nuestro caso nos apartamos de este punto de vista, y nos situamos, junto con Nel Noddings, en una clave eminentemente relacional. La ética del cuidado “se centra más en la relación que en el agente, y se ocupa más de la relación de cuidado que del cuidado como virtud” (2009:22). No se trata de inculcar unos valores o unas virtudes. Más bien, el cuidado ayuda a crear las mejores condiciones que estimulen a los alumnos a dar lo mejor de sí mismos. En esa dinámica relacional, tanto los receptores como los agentes del cuidado contribuyen a mantener la relación educativa de ida y vuelta.

El cuidado se desmarca de la esfera de los principios a partir de los cuales se derivan actitudes y comportamientos deseables. No nos encontramos ante una nueva teoría ética. El cuidado forma parte de la entraña de lo humano, es un elemento constitutivo de lo vivo y abunda en la conservación de la vida que desarrollamos y con la que nos relacionamos. Por eso entendemos el cuidado en clave relacional y en esa medida la educación es un ámbito de cuidado fundamental.

Entre las mejores condiciones de posibilidad que generan la riqueza del cuidado en las tramas relacionales en nuestros marcos educativos, destacamos tres valores indispensables. Son las tres R del cuidado.

- *El respeto*, que nace de la sabiduría de saber estar y mantener la distancia adecuada. Respetar es anclarse en una proximidad que no agobie ni invada, al tiempo que exige salir de la zona confortable de la indiferencia o la lejanía que nada afecta. Cada alumno afecta y me afecta. El respeto se construye con la capacidad de escucha, saber esperar, observar sin anular.
- *El reconocimiento*, que es el arte de legitimar al otro como un otro tan absoluto como yo, tan digno como yo; esa legitimación provoca visibilizar al invisible, llamar por su nombre al que es tratado desde el apodo del menosprecio, saludar al señalado por lo que sea. Nadie es indigno de reconocimiento. En ese acto recuperamos al otro, esté donde esté, y lanzamos un cable de seguridad de inigualable aprecio.
- *La reconciliación*, como camino de resolución de conflictos, cuando se pueda dar. El cuidado se enfrenta a la visión punitiva del conflicto donde la sanción pone fin a las situaciones de difícil resolución. La vía restaurativa no esconde el conflicto y lo entiende como un elemento cotidiano de la vida de las personas y de la convivencia, también en la escuela. Las relaciones pueden estropearse y, al mismo tiempo, mediante procedimientos adecuados, pueden salir fortalecidas y reconciliadas. Ese será un signo de cuidado supremo.

El cuidado atraviesa las estructuras de la escuela, tonifica los procesos educativos y provoca un perfil de educador determinado. No estamos ante una moda pasajera o ante un reclamo efímero. Tomarse en serio el cuidado en la educación significa abandonar la meritocracia como forma de instalarnos en la realidad; es decir, abandonar el paradigma del progreso individualista y posesivo que nos ha traído hasta aquí. Y, al mismo tiempo, el cuidado nos invita a generar un paradigma alternativo a partir de la nueva sensibilidad más ecologista, más igualitaria y responsable, que al menos yo atisbo en las generaciones más jóvenes.

6. Sin olvidar la justicia

Tradicionalmente, se ha enfrentado la ética del cuidado a la ética de la justicia. La primera se ha entendido como una práctica que quedaba relegada al ámbito privado y doméstico y se ejercía fundamentalmente por las mujeres que quedaban al cuidado de sus hijos y de los mayores, mientras que los hombres organizaban la sociedad en la plaza pública desde la ética de la justicia. Esta división hoy resulta insostenible. La ética del cuidado alienta una forma especial de fomentar una ética de la justicia y tanto el cuidado como la justicia son indispensables en la vida pública.

Cuidado y educación se hermanan en la construcción de otro mundo posible desde acciones concretas que tienen que ver con el cuidado de la palabra, saludar al otro, pedir perdón, resolver pacíficamente los conflictos, movilizarse ante el cambio climático. Porque el mundo no es, sino que está siendo, nos recuerda Freire. Y el cuidado se vincula con la indignación ante la injusticia y ante aquello que nos hace gritar “¡no hay derecho!” Cuidado y justicia no se excluyen; al contrario, son dos caras de la misma moneda de humanización de nuestro mundo.

En términos educativos abogamos por una educación que promueva una *ciudadanía ecosocial*, que la entiendo como un proceso por el que los participantes en una actividad o proyecto ecosolidario se implican en la construcción de la justicia y del cuidado de la vida. Los vínculos con uno mismo, con los demás y con el planeta reclaman una convivencia que integre al alumnado, no solo en una sociedad justa, sino en un planeta habitable. Nos encontramos ante el reto de educar en la interdependencia y la ecoddependencia, no de forma teórica sino experiencial. Somos interdependientes, es decir, nos necesitamos unos a otros para vivir en sociedad. La convivencia justa que promueve la humanización ha de ser la clave de bóveda de una sociedad que responda a las necesidades de los más frágiles, de los que están orillados en el camino. Al mismo tiempo, la ecoddependencia nos permite comprendernos como un nudo de relaciones direccionado hacia todo el universo vivo, donde todo está conectado y del que somos tan solo un hilo de vida frágil en un contexto cambiante.

Este enfoque, donde el cuidado y la justicia se hermanan en el mismo acto educativo, contiene algunas características significativas:

- *Estar en la realidad*: sentirla y no solo saberla por los libros. Y para sentirla hay que salir del colegio, es preciso hacer experiencia de lo que ocurre en el barrio, en el pueblo, en la ciudad. El colegio forma parte de un ecosistema que debe conocer el alumnado y de esa forma poder realizar un mapeo de las necesidades que existen en el lugar que habitan: necesidades de personas, necesidades medioambientales.
- *Colaborar con organizaciones ecosolidarias* que trabajan en el territorio y que promueven acciones solidarias entre los más vulnerables o actividades que recomponen el cuidado de la naturaleza.
- *Proponer acciones mancomunadas entre colegios y organizaciones* a través de los proyectos de Aprendizaje y Servicio, que constituyen un indudable cauce de aprendizaje significativo a través del servicio a la comunidad, mientras que ese servicio se constituye en una suerte de aprendizaje inédito que proviene de la experiencia adquirida.

La justicia tiene un enfoque experiencial, como el cuidado. Probablemente se llega a la experiencia del cuidado desde la experiencia del descuido con uno mismo, con los demás y con el planeta. Y es esa desvinculación la que solicita cambiar la manera de estar en la realidad. El cuidado promueve un nuevo tipo de persona reconciliado con su esencia, que es la relación. Del mismo modo, a la justicia no se llega por las teorías o modelos de justicia, sino a partir de la experiencia de injusticia, del sufrimiento de las vidas que nos rodean y ante las cuales se pasa de manera indiferente o acelerada. La justicia promueve un nuevo tipo de sociedad, ajustada a las necesidades y capacidades de las personas, y donde las personas se sientan y comprendan a sí mismas como parte de la Tierra que habitan.

En medio de tanta incertidumbre, una cosa tenemos clara: son los jóvenes que hoy están en nuestros colegios y universidades los que en pocas décadas han de tomar de forma obligatoria decisiones sobre el consumo de alimentos, de energía y de organización de nuestra sociedad, y así ayudarán a configurar modos de vida más ajustados a las posibilidades reales. Quizá se llegue a esta situación porque el descuido se haya convertido en un viaje sin retorno. Esperemos que no. Pero estas nuevas generaciones reclaman el cambio que haga posible la vida vivible. Y ello pasa asumir el cuidado en el corazón de la nueva civilización que emerge.

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OS MECANISMOS DO MÉRITO ESCOLAR E A PROMOÇÃO DAS (DES)IGUALDADES

THE MECHANISMS OF ACADEMIC MERIT AND THE PROMOTION OF (IN)EQUALITIES.

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Abstract The concept of merit has been a fundamental aspect of the school culture since the widespread implementation of mass education and is a thought-provoking topic because the pursuit of distinction can lead to problems. In a competitive environment where students are judged based on the recognition of their abilities by the school, systems for selection and exclusion of the "weaker" students are established. The entry and/or retention in designated honor or merit and excellence boards is defined to encompass only a small minority, leaving the majority of students excluded from these possibilities, often by mere tenths of a point. This creates a stratification mechanism that is not necessarily tied to the traditional formula of merit, which includes the intelligence quotient, emotional quotient, and individual work. This text takes an exploratory approach and forms part of a larger study with the goal of understanding how the regulations in the public schools and groups in Porto regulate this issue. Through content analysis, we aim to understand how access to public recognition is regulated and find that there has been a regression in national legislation, confirming that distinction is only available to a small minority and relegating the majority of students to a lower status in the school.

Keywords Merit; certification; segregation; inequalities; exclusion

Resumo A conceptualização do mérito faz parte da cultura escolar desde a generalização da escola de massas e é um tema interpelante na medida em que a luta pela distinção se pode tornar um problema. De facto, num contexto de competição entre os alunos de acordo com o reconhecimento escolar das suas capacidades instituem-se dispositivos de seleção e tendencial exclusão dos "mais fracos". A entrada e/ou permanência nos designados quadros de honra [ou quadros de mérito e excelência] abrange, por definição, apenas uma pequena minoria, estando a maioria dos alunos

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necessariamente excluída desta possibilidade, por vezes, por meras décimas, operando-se um dispositivo de estratificação que não tem, necessariamente a ver com a suposta fórmula clássica do mérito [quociente de inteligência (QI)+quociente emocional (QE)+Trabalho individual = Mérito]. O presente texto assume uma natureza exploratória, integra uma investigação mais ampla e pretende compreender/interpretar de que forma os regulamentos internos das escolas e agrupamentos estatais da cidade do Porto regulamentam esta matéria. Através de uma análise de conteúdo procura-se perceber de que forma está regulamentado em termos normativos o acesso ao reconhecimento público, concluindo-se que houve uma regressão na legislação nacional e confirmando-se que a distinção apenas abrange uma pequena minoria, relegando a maioria dos alunos para um estatuto de menoridade escolar.

Palavras-

-chave Mérito; certificação; segregação; desigualdades; exclusão

Introdução

O tema deste trabalho incide no estudo da cultura meritocrática nas escolas portuguesas. Fazendo o conceito de mérito parte da dinâmica escolar instituída, ao nível do reconhecimento das realizações conseguidas pelos alunos, permitindo-lhes acesso a oportunidades geradoras de maior prestígio, quer ao nível das escolhas dos cursos a seguir no ensino secundário, quer ao nível do acesso ao ensino superior, os quadros de valor e de excelência são a expressão da distinção escolar, e configuram essas oportunidades para um número reduzido de alunos. De facto, a grande maioria dos alunos fica privada deste acesso podendo começar a gerar-se um autoconceito de perdedores ou incapazes.

Neste artigo, que se integra num estudo mais amplo, pretendemos identificar e analisar que forma a regulamentação nacional e a regulamentação de cada escola trata a questão da inclusão nos quadros de honra e excelência.

Breve revisão narrativa de literatura

Uma das finalidades centrais da escola é certamente a formação de cidadãos competentes, conscientes, colaborativos, criativos e comprometidos. Para além do plano individual, cabe à escola criar comunidade, desenvolver mecanismos que permitam aos alunos serem reconhecidos e distinguidos em função das suas capacidades, conhecimentos, talentos e resiliência. Contudo, como refere Bellat (2006), apesar de existirem diversas oportunidades, designadamente de acesso à escolarização, tal não significa que sejam as mesmas para todos (seja no acesso, na frequência, no sucesso e no usufruto dos bens educacionais), ou seja, nem todos os alunos conseguem atingir os objetivos de realização pessoal ou de acesso a determinados cursos ou determinadas instituições.

Como referem Palmeirão & Alves (2019, p. 7) “o sistema educativo estruturou-se no mito de que dar o mesmo a todos no mesmo espaço e tempo era cumprir um ideal democrático”. Sabemos, contudo, que esta prática igualitária tem vindo a reforçar as desigualdades sociais.

Sendo certo que a escola é, no plano ideal, uma dinâmica de promoção de aprendizagens que requerem método, trabalho e persistência, a cultura meritocrática considera que o sucesso pode estar ao alcance de todos os que trabalham, cumprem os deveres escolares, e se integram na cultura escolar. No entanto, há muitos fatores que complexificam esta suposta igualdade, sendo o mérito, o valor e a excelência resultados que nem sempre dependem da vontade individual dos alunos. E quando assim é, a distinção pode ser um real problema educativo. Neste sentido, torna-se pertinente questionar o efeito do credencialismo e da meritocracia escolar na sociedade – uma sociedade democrática, mas que gera desigualdades sociais ilegítimas e que podem influenciar o percurso de vida dos jovens.

O credencialismo, na educação, consiste na obtenção de diplomas que atestam a obtenção de determinado nível de estudos de cada indivíduo e que funcionam como credenciais de acesso a determinados lugares na estrutura ocupacional. Vários autores estabelecem a relação entre o credencialismo e o papel da educação e o seu posterior impacto na produtividade laboral. Collins (1979), defende que a questão da outorga das credenciais, no contexto laboral, serve mais como justificação do pagamento salarial dos trabalhadores do que uma evidência das suas capacidades para executar os cargos ou funções. Não existe forma de, *a priori*, testar a capacidade dos indivíduos para execução de determinadas tarefas no mercado de trabalho, antes do momento de contratação, baseando-se, então, os empregadores nas credenciais que os trabalhadores entregam. Este momento dedutivo parte do princípio que quanto mais educação um indivíduo tiver, terá, a partida, mais capacidade para exercer determinadas tarefas, ditas requererem mais qualificação e que lhes permite a obtenção de salários mais altos do que aqueles trabalhadores que não têm credenciais educacionais tão elevadas. Assim, o credencialismo “cumprir um papel ideológico de legitimação destes processos com base na hipertrofia dos requisitos educacionais que alicerçam uma “meritocracia” puramente formal” (Martins, 1990, p. 5).

Neste contexto, Pires (2005), refere que a escola “seria um instrumento essencial, pois seria por via dela que o mérito de cada um seria desenvolvido e manifestado” (Pires, 2005, p. 2) substituindo a estrutura aristocrática por uma estrutura meritocrática:

se numa estrutura aristocrática os elementos que pertencem ao grupo dominante terão apenas que ser reconhecidos como pertencentes a esse grupo para legitimar a sua posição social, numa estrutura *meritocrática* uma das formas cada vez mais generalizadas para o reconhecimento universal do mérito é a certificação que a escola realiza para o comprovar, a forma mais específica das quais é o *diploma*. Este passa a ter assim uma importância crescente, não só como comprovativo das competências adquiridas durante a vida escolar, mas ainda como *credencial*

de acesso às ocupações diferenciadamente prestigiadas. Porém, a explicação de como o uso do diploma intervém neste processo de acesso às ocupações e, em consequência, na estruturação e estratificação social, pode ser vista de diferentes maneiras.

No entanto, esta hipótese de democratização de oportunidades acaba por ser invalidada pela realidade da produção do mérito que tem uma composição muito ligada ao capital cultural e social. Isto é: a construção e o reconhecimento do mérito é um fenómeno complexo e que vai muito além da ação e da vontade individual.

Ainda no sentido da importância do credencialismo na vida escolar e posteriormente na vida laboral, Sandel (2020) problematiza a questão das desigualdades referindo que apesar de vivermos na utopia de que caminhamos para um futuro cada vez mais igualitário e com menos desigualdade, a realidade está longe de o confirmar. Por detrás de um discurso político baseado na retórica da igualdade de oportunidades, há numerosos fatores que a configuram como ficção.

Max Weber (2004) nos seus estudos sobre estratificação social, afirma que quanto mais alta for a posição dos indivíduos na sociedade, maior será o acesso a bens materiais, tal como a sua relação com o “poder”, mencionando que as classes sociais mais altas, não se traduzem apenas na quantificação dos bens, mas também no seu prestígio e reconhecimento social.

No mesmo alinhamento,

Parsons (1970, 1974), destaca que a mobilidade e estratificação sociais passam a ser mais influenciadas por variáveis ligadas a aspectos de status adquirido (em especial, a educação), e menos influenciadas por variáveis relacionadas à origem socioeconómica do indivíduo. À medida que o nível dos requerimentos educacionais cresce com o desenvolvimento socioeconómico, qualificações educacionais se tornam mais importantes para alocação ocupacional, e para o processo de estratificação social como um todo. (Helal, 2015, p. 253)

Face a estes mecanismos reguladores das posições sociais, é relevante problematizar os conceitos de equidade e justiça. Por exemplo, Rawls (2003) defende que os indivíduos constroem os seus saberes e as suas capacidades de acordo com o meio em que estão inseridos, quer no contexto do meio social quer ao nível das instituições académicas por que optaram, ou seja, os indivíduos aprendem e tornam-se *experts* de acordo com os que lhes foi fornecido para desenvolver as suas capacidades, considerando que o indivíduo adquire capacidades com ajuda social e através da aprendizagem que foi desenvolvendo ao longo da sua vida.

Por outro lado, Dubet (2015) problematiza a questão da desigualdade de acesso às universidades, apontando algumas características que provam a ineficácia desse sistema, como o facto de, no caso das universidades, os recursos económicos, a não *gratuidade dos estudos* serem fatores determinantes na desigualdade de acesso. Por mais modesto que possa ser o preço das propinas,

existem muitas outras despesas que levam a que muitos jovens não consigam suportar economicamente os seus estudos; a atribuição de bolsas que podem auxiliar os jovens no pagamento dos custos de frequência são atribuídas também em função do suposto mérito escolar aferido pelas classificações obtidas.

Neste contexto, Dubet (2009), segundo Ribeiro (2014), refere que

o acesso às raras posições vantajosas, nessas sociedades, independentemente de transmissão por herança ou por fatores relativos às circunstâncias fixas (ser ou não de família nobre, por exemplo). Não havendo posições fixas por nascimento, os indivíduos precisam competir, recorrendo ao seu próprio esforço, para alcançar posições vantajosas. Diante dessa situação, para Dubet (2009), a escola passou a cumprir a função de organizar tal competição. E o mérito cumpre aí um papel articulador entre a igualdade fundamental dos indivíduos e a hierarquia das posições. Essa é, para o autor, a razão pela qual a justiça meritocrática tornou-se o princípio fundamental central da justiça escolar. (Ribeiro, 2014, p. 1100)

Outros autores, como Robert Frank, na sua obra “Success and Luck” (2016) relaciona o reconhecimento do mérito ao fator “sorte”, referindo que o facto de se nascer num contexto familiar financeiramente bem posicionado pode influenciar o acesso a oportunidades que permitam lutar pelo reconhecimento meritório.

Pressupõe-se, de acordo com os autores apresentados, que a questão da (des)igualdade de oportunidades e a sua relação com o mérito deve continuar a ser problematizada, tal como refere Luigino Bruni (2018),

Based on merits and school grades, we have built a whole social and economic system that is caste based and hierarchic, where the first places were taken by those who responded best in this merit system and the lowest ones by those who performed worst at school. And so, doctors, lawyers, and university professors have had much better wages and social conditions than workers and peasants; currently, in this new wake of Palagian meritocracy, workers who, by working day and night, keep the streets and sewers clean receive salaries that are hundreds of times lower than those of the managers of the companies for which they work. (Bruni, 2018, p. 127)

A situação pandémica vivida (CoViD-19) evidenciou uma intensificação das desigualdades, nomeadamente em contexto escolar. Segundo o Relatório do Estado da Educação de 2020, é necessário realçar que, mesmo tendo as escolas condições para auxiliar os seus alunos ao nível dos recursos didáticos, nem todos esses alunos tinham um local com acesso à internet ou condições habitacionais que permitissem assistirem às aulas a distância. Mesmo assim, fomos assistindo a um discurso político de garantias que o ensino a distância foi maioritariamente eficaz. Esta problemática leva-nos a questionar se efetivamente o discurso utópico, antes da pandemia, de que caminhávamos para um país com igual acesso às mesmas oportunidades, sofreu apenas um

retrocesso com a pandemia ou se a situação pandémica intensificou um problema que já existia. O relatório do Estado de Educação 2020 constata, ainda, que as desigualdades foram acentuadas com a pandemia, referindo que “as diferenças socioeconómicas tornaram-se mais visíveis: é muito diferente utilizar um computador próprio num espaço com condições de privacidade ou ter de partilhar mesa e dispositivos com irmãos ou pais em teletrabalho.” (p. 8). Ainda no mesmo sentido, Arménio Rego, num artigo de opinião publicado pela Revista Líder (2021), evidencia que as desigualdades sociais condicionam o reconhecimento meritório dos alunos, uma vez que pode tornar-se impossível pessoas com salários baixos investir na educação dos seus filhos.

Ora, não existirá um contrassenso entre o que se pretende de uma escola inclusiva e o que se assiste em escolas reguladas por uma cultura meritocrática? De facto, os quadros de valor e excelência adotados pelas escolas, acabam por contribuir para uma segregação/estratificação dos alunos de acordo com as classificações escolares atribuídas, deixando a larga maioria dos alunos de fora desta distinção.

Portanto, sendo a meritocracia uma ideologia que estrutura a política educativa e impera nas escolas, e que apenas uma elite pode ter acesso, é necessário questionar a pertinência da distinção dos alunos através de um mérito medido e aferido, sobretudo, pelas classificações escolares resultante dos testes escolares.

Goldthorpe (2003) apresenta um esquema sobre a teoria da educação baseada na meritocracia, no âmbito dos estudos realizados por Daniel Bell (Figura 1) e problematiza a ineficácia do sistema meritocrático, apresentando alguns exemplos concretos de pesquisas realizadas.

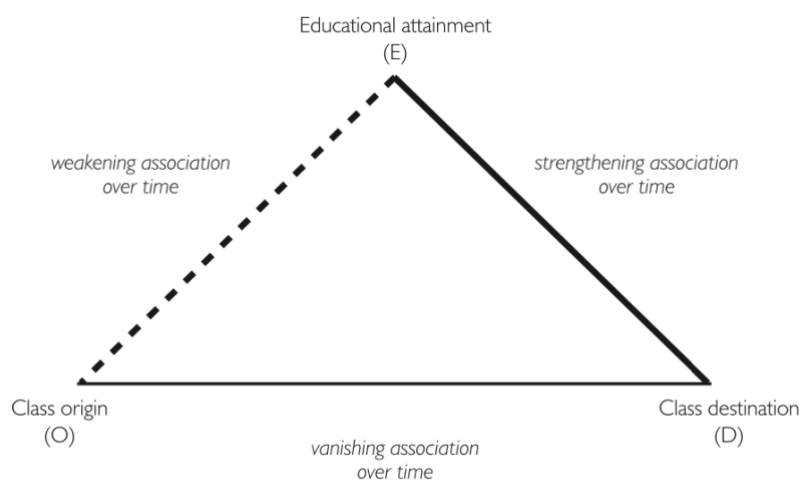


Figura 1 – The theory of education-based meritocracy. Goldthorpe, J. (2003). (p. 234)

Esta teoria relaciona três dimensões, que se vão alterando ao longo do tempo: a origem da classe social dos indivíduos, o nível educacional e a classe social depois do processo (classe de destino).

Uma das relações (OE), refere-se à relação da origem das classes sociais dos indivíduos e o nível educacional, onde, segundo a teoria, os recursos devem ser disponibilizados e explorados no seu máximo, independentemente da sociedade onde estão inseridos, promovendo desta forma uma igualdade educacional de oportunidades; outra relação estabelecida pelo autor (ED), relaciona o nível educacional e a classe de destino dos indivíduos, com base na realização individual e na sua qualificação; a última relação (OD), associa a classe de origem com a classe de destino, mostrando, mediada por meio da educação, o intuito desse distanciamento diminuir, através da promoção da igualdade de oportunidades. No entanto, perante uma teoria que à primeira vista transmite uma ideia de eficácia, o autor questiona o porquê de uma educação baseada na meritocracia, não funcionar de forma eficaz. Como base justificativa da ineficácia do sistema meritocrático, o autor refere as pesquisas efetuadas em países como a Suécia, onde as crianças nascidas nas classes sociais mais altas apresentam mais capacidades e têm mais probabilidade de lograrem no seu percurso académico do que as crianças pertencentes às classes mais baixas, mencionando que existe uma grande influência sociocultural no desempenho académico dessas crianças - “the Swedish research simply demonstrates a phenomenon that is generic to modern societies – and one that the theory of education-based meritocracy does not allow for” (Goldthorpe, 2003, p. 235). Para explicar a relação do desempenho educacional e as classes de destino, o autor usou duas referências investigativas: crianças nascidas na Grã-Bretanha em 1958 e crianças nascidas, igualmente na Grã-Bretanha, mas em 1970, e conclui que: “for men and women alike, the points are less strung out for the 1970 cohort (assessed in the 1990s) than for the 1958 cohort (assessed in the 1970s). Or, in other words, education has less effect on class of destination for individuals in the earlier cohort – directly contrary to what the theory of education-based meritocracy would predict.” (Goldthorpe, 2003, p. 237). Em função destes resultados, o autor apresenta uma explicação baseada na existência de empregos com diferentes tipologias, nomeadamente empregos que valorizem outros talentos, além das capacidades cognitivas, as quais o autor chama de “qualificações formais”, como os ligados à comunicação e à arte. Perante este facto, a cultura meritocrática escolar, baseada no apuramento de capacidades mais esforço, não surte efeito nos empregos que exigem capacidade de comunicação e interação humana, podendo os empregadores desvalorizar os resultados académicos em detrimento das capacidades de interação social. Em última análise, o autor apresenta a relação entre as três dimensões (OED), em que a teoria transmite “the higher the level of education, the weaker the association between class origins and destinations” (Goldthorpe, 2003, p. 238) e corrobora que a educação é efetivamente um meio que permite a ascensão académica e profissional dos jovens, mas a posição social continua a ser relevante: se os jovens que são economicamente bem inseridos na sociedade não conseguirem lograr nos estudos, eles continuam em vantagem relativamente aos jovens provenientes de classes mais desfavorecidas, tal como refere o autor

who do not to very well in school rarely end upon the factory floor or self-stacking. Instead, one would expect to find them in jobs with far better career prospects in up-market hotels, restaurants and boutiques, travel and estates agents and customer service departments – where

their accents, manners and personal style can have real productive value (Goldthorpe, 2003, pp. 238 – 239).

Por outro lado, os efeitos que os quadros de mérito exercem sobre os alunos, nomeadamente os que entram nos quadros de excelência, também podem ser enganadores. Sandel (2020), refere que “even a fair meritocracy, one without cheating or bribery or special privileges for the wealthy, induces a mistaken impression – that we made it on our own” (Sandel, 2020, p.14), ou seja, o caminho que os jovens percorrem para serem distinguidos, não lhes pertence de todo só a eles, mas também aqueles que lhes forneceram todo o suporte para conseguirem lograr, sejam os pais, os conselheiros, os explicadores, etc.. Sandel (2020) menciona ainda que “for the more we think of ourselves as self-made and a self-sufficient, the harder it is to learn gratitude and humility. And without these sentiments, it is hard to care for the common good” (Sandel, 2020, p. 14). Esta sensação de pertença e de uma certa “arrogância” dos alunos que foram distinguidos, pode influenciar a forma como se comportarão perante a sociedade. No mesmo alinhamento, Herrería (2021), refere que os alunos

esclavizados por la obsesión de unas notas perfectas y un curriculum immaculado y polivalente, ellos o sus padres diseñan su infancia y juventud con el único objetivo de entrar en las universidades con mejor puntuación em rankings. Y así es lógico que el estrés, la ansiedad y las visitas a los terapeutas crezcan de manera alarmante entre los hijos de las familias adineradas (Herrería, 2021, p. 32).

Enquadramento normativo e empírico do mérito escolar

Os quadros de valor e de excelência nas escolas públicas, privadas e cooperativas, foram instituídos através do Despacho-Normativo n.º 102/90, com o intuito de “criar condições de promoção do sucesso escolar e educativo, valorizando a dimensão humana do trabalho escolar” (p. 3729). Os objetivos deste Despacho passam pelo reconhecimento dos alunos, grupos de alunos, turmas ou escolas, que se distinguiram, não só pelos resultados obtidos na avaliação interna, mas também pelo seu desenvolvimento e capacidade de ultrapassar dificuldades. Conclui-se que a distinção pelo mérito parte equação “ $QI + QE + \text{esforço} = \text{mérito}$ ” por parte dos alunos, mas vai além disso e promove o valor da colaboração, da entreaajuda, da interação entre pessoas e grupos. Neste sentido, os alunos ou grupos de alunos, turmas ou escolas, têm o direito de trabalhar em função da possível distinção, não só por escola ou agrupamentos de escolas, mas também no âmbito regional e/ou nacional. Assim, o quadro de valor “*reconhece os alunos que revelam grandes capacidades ou atitudes exemplares de superação das dificuldades ou que desenvolvem iniciativas ou ações, igualmente exemplares, de benefício claramente social ou comunitário ou de expressão de solidariedade, na escola ou fora dela*” (Art.º 2º). O quadro de excelência “*reconhece os alunos que revelam excelentes resultados escolares e produzem trabalhos académicos ou realizam atividades de excelente qualidade, quer no domínio curricular, quer no domínio dos complementos curriculares*” (Art.º 3º). A definição dos critérios para a constituição de possíveis listas de alunos distinguidos, parte da escola, nomeadamente do trabalho cooperativo entre Diretores, Coordenadores e Conselhos de

Turma, desde que sejam tidos em conta os “*domínios cognitivo, cultural, pessoal ou social*” (Art.º 1º), através da concretização de um regulamento próprio. As condições mínimas de candidaturas aos quadros preveem a média anual de 5, para os 2º e 3º ciclos do ensino básico e média de 16 no ensino secundário (Art.º 5º). A organização dos quadros de valor e excelência regionais é feita através da candidatura dos conselhos pedagógicos das escolas e apesar dos critérios serem semelhantes ao das escolas, são alvo de um critério mais rigoroso (Art.º 6º). A organização dos quadros de valor e de excelência no âmbito nacional, reconhece os alunos que estiverem cumulativamente nos quadros regionais por ciclo, quer no ensino básico quer no ensino secundário (Art.º 7º). Relativamente aos prémios atribuídos ao nível das escolas, são da responsabilidade de cada escola definir os prémios a atribuir, enquanto a nível regional cabe à direção regional de educação atribuir os prémios e no âmbito dos quadros de valor e de excelência de nível nacional, cabe à Direção Geral do Ensino Básico e Secundário, ao Gabinete de Educação Tecnológica, Artística e Profissional e à Direção-Geral de Extensão Educativa (Art.º 8º, 9º, 10º e 11º) cujas competências foram entretanto assumidas por outros organismos.

Entretanto, esta matéria veio a ser regulamentada pelo Estatuto do Aluno e Ética Escolar instituído pela Lei n.º 51/2012, de 5 de setembro, e estabelece os direitos e os deveres dos alunos, bem como o comprometimento dos encarregados de educação na vida escolar.

Relativamente ao Artigo 7º, referente aos direitos dos alunos, as alíneas d), e) e h) fazem referência ao reconhecimento pelo mérito, nomeadamente no que diz respeito ao desempenho dos alunos e ao seu desempenho escolar, de carácter cognitivo e social. O Artigo 9º referente à atribuição de prémios de mérito, enuncia os critérios que são necessários para obtenção desse reconhecimento, e são eles:

- a) *[os alunos que] revelem atitudes exemplares de superação das suas dificuldades;*
- b) *[os alunos que] alcancem excelentes resultados escolares;*
- c) *[os alunos que] produzam trabalhos académicos de excelência ou realizem atividades curriculares ou de complemento curricular de relevância;*
- d) *[os alunos que] desenvolvam iniciativas ou ações de reconhecida relevância social.* (p. 5105)

Analisando estes dois documentos oficiais, verifica-se que existem semelhanças no que ao reconhecimento meritório diz respeito. Institui-se em ambos os documentos a oportunidade de os alunos através do seu desempenho académico e participação cívica poderem usufruir de distinção pelo mérito. No entanto, ressaltam algumas diferenças: no Despacho-Normativo n.º 102/90, a oportunidade de entrada nos quadros de valor e de excelência dirige-se, não só a alunos no seu contexto individual, mas podem ser igualmente distinguidos grupos de alunos, turmas ou escolas. Já o Estatuto do Aluno, prevê esse reconhecimento no contexto individual dos alunos não fazendo referência a obtenção de prémios por mérito a grupos ou escolas. Por outro lado, o Despacho-Normativo n.º 102/90 define claramente as condições de acesso aos quadros de mérito através de

classificações quantitativas, nomeadamente média anual de 5 valores para os 2º e 3º ciclos e média de 16 para o ensino secundário, enquanto o Estatuto do Aluno, não faz referência aos quadros de excelência, apesar de entregar a responsabilidade de distinção pelo mérito aos agrupamentos/escolas. Tal facto, acaba por se refletir na redação e implementação do regulamento interno dos agrupamentos e escolas não agrupadas do Porto, em análise secção seguinte (tabelas 1 a 16). Anote-se, por fim, uma evolução normativa que elege o mérito como uma realização individual e pessoal, perdendo-se o efeito colegial, grupal e organizacional.

A regulamentação do mérito nos quinze Agrupamentos de escolas e quatro escolas não agrupadas da cidade do Porto: apresentação dos dados

Tabela 1 – Agrupamento de escolas 1

AE 1
<p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 74º, 75º e 76º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <p>- Quadro de mérito:</p> <p>atitude exemplar de superação das suas dificuldades;</p> <p>bons resultados escolares;</p> <p>produção de trabalhos académicos de excelência ou realizem atividades curriculares ou de complemento curricular de relevância;</p> <p>desenvolvimento de iniciativas ou ações de reconhecida relevância social.</p> <p>Quadro de mérito é organizado anualmente, contemplando o Quadro de Excelência e o Quadro de Valor.</p> <p>Entrega de um diploma aos alunos dos Quadros, havendo a possibilidade de recompensa monetária, desde que auxiliem a continuação do percurso escolar do aluno.</p> <p>- Quadros de excelência (aplica-se a alunos do 4º ao 12º ano)</p> <p>1º ciclo (4º ano) – menção qualitativa de Muito Bom em todas as áreas curriculares no final do 3º período;</p> <p>2º e 3º ciclos – média igual ou superior a 4,5 e nenhum nível inferior a 3 a todas as disciplinas, incluindo oferta complementar;</p> <p>Ensino Secundário – média igual ou superior a 17,5, não podendo o aluno apresentar nenhuma classificação inferior a 14 valores;</p> <p>Ensino secundário em regime modular – média dos módulos, igual ou superior a 17,5, mas nunca inferior a 14.</p> <p>- Quadros de mérito (aplica-se a alunos do 1º ao 12º ano):</p> <p>atitude exemplar de superação das suas dificuldades;</p> <p>iniciativas relevantes no âmbito da solidariedade social;</p>

manifestação de espírito de interajuda;
alunos a quem foram atribuídos prémios resultantes da participação em nome do Agrupamento em concursos externos ou em provas no âmbito do desporto.

Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção:

Professor titular / Diretor de turma seleciona e apresenta ao Conselho de Turma

Tabela 2 – Agrupamento de Escolas 2

AE 2
<p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 159º, 160º, 161º e 162º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Quadros de excelência <p>1º ciclo – Menção “Muito Bom” a português, matemática e, cumulativamente a menção de “Muito Bom” a estudo do meio ou inglês;</p> <p>Restantes ciclos – média interna de 5 valores desde que não obtenham nível inferior a 3;</p> <p>Ensino Secundário – média interna igual ou superior a 18 valores e sem nenhuma classificação inferior a 10 valores</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Quadros de mérito: <p>atitude exemplar de superação das suas dificuldades;</p> <p>apoio escolar e pessoal a colegas em situação problemática;</p> <p>participação no programa de mentoria;</p> <p>iniciativas relevantes no âmbito da solidariedade social;</p> <p>envolvimento em trabalhos e projetos para a valorização da escola;</p> <p>participação assídua e pontual nos órgãos de gestão da escola para que foi eleito.</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção:</p> <p>Conselho de Turma</p>

Tabela 3 – Agrupamento de escolas 3

AE 3
<p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 157º, 158º, 159º, 161º e 162º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Quadros de excelência: <p>Ensino básico: média global de nível 4,5;</p> <p>Ensino secundário: média global ou superior a 16 valores;</p> <p>Anos terminais de ciclo, com avaliação externa (3º ciclo do EB) e anos de Exames Nacionais (11º e 12º anos do ES), o cálculo da média global deverá incluir os resultados da 1ª fase, para os alunos internos, das PFC, ou PFNE (9º ano), ou dos EFN (11º e 12º anos) –</p>

<p>tratamento de dados efetuado pela Direção com acompanhamentos dos Coordenadores, Diretores de Turma, ou de Concelho de docentes, dos ciclos respetivos</p> <p>- Quadros de mérito:</p> <p>Ações exemplares dentro do recinto escolar, reconhecidas por docentes, assistentes operacionais e pelos pares;</p> <p>Ações de âmbito social de relevo;</p> <p>Ações de âmbito social de relevo, reveladas por um órgão representativo da instituição onde a ação foi realizada, podendo assumirem as seguintes categorias:</p> <p>- Quadro de Mérito desportivo</p> <p>- Quadro de Mérito artístico</p> <p>- Quadro de Mérito científico</p> <p>Manifestações excecionais de cooperação e solidariedade, reconhecidas por entidades credenciadas, a alunos ligados a entidades de promoção de voluntariado ou que com elas cooperaram;</p> <p>Postura cívica e consciência humanista notáveis.</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção:</p> <p>1º ciclo:</p> <p>Professor(a) titular da turma - Conselho de Turma; Gabinete de Apoio ao Aluno e à Família, Biblioteca e/ou outras estruturas de apoio – Aprovação do Diretor</p> <p>4º ano:</p> <p>Professor(a) titular da turma deve fazer registo do louvor nos PIA</p> <p>Anos intermédios (7º, 8º e 10º anos):</p> <p>Conselho de Turma</p> <p>Anos terminais de ciclo (EB e ES):</p> <p>Coordenações de Diretores de Turma; Conselho de Turma; Diretor</p>
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Tabela 4 – Agrupamento de escolas 4

<p>AE 4</p> <p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 157º, 158º, 159º, 161º e 162º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <p>- Quadros de excelência:</p> <p>1º ciclo:</p> <p>- Média anual de Muito Bom;</p> <p>- Boa assiduidade;</p> <p>- Comportamento exemplar individual e nas relações entre pares;</p> <p>2º e 3º ciclos:</p> <p>- Classificação interna de nível 5;</p>
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<p>- Ausência de níveis inferiores a 3;</p> <p>- Ausências de faltas injustificadas;</p> <p>- Ausência de qualquer comportamento passível de aplicação de medida corretiva;</p> <p>- Comportamento exemplar individual e nas relações entre pares;</p> <p>Ensino Secundário:</p> <p>- Classificação interna de média igual ou superior a 16;</p> <p>- Ausência de classificações inferiores a 12</p> <p>- Ausências de faltas injustificadas;</p> <p>- Ausência de qualquer comportamento passível de aplicação de medida corretiva;</p> <p>- Comportamento exemplar individual e nas relações entre pares;</p> <p>- Quadros de valor:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">Alunos que evidenciem atitudes, capacidades ou iniciativas ímpares:</p> <p>Na superação de dificuldades;</p> <p>No envolvimento e empenho em iniciativas ou ações, individuais ou em grupo, que conduzam à organização, dinamização e divulgação de projetos dos quais resulte enriquecimento cultural ou patrimonial dos alunos e da escola em geral;</p> <p>No respeito pela diferença;</p> <p>No exercício da cidadania, no comportamento e no relacionamento com todos os membros da comunidade escolar.</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção:</p> <p>Professores titulares, Conselho de Turma – aprovação do Conselho Pedagógico</p>

Tabela 5 – Agrupamentos de escolas 5

<p>AE 5</p>
<p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 50º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <p>- Ao 1º ciclo não são atribuídos prémios de mérito escolar</p> <p>- São atribuídos por cada ano de escolaridade três prémios:</p> <p>Prémio de Excelência – alunos com os melhores resultados escolares;</p> <p>Prémio de Progressão Escolar – alunos que revelem ter progredido mais em termos de aprendizagens e atitudes;</p> <p>Prémio “Viver a Escola” – alunos com melhor participação em atividades extracurriculares do PAA.</p> <p>- Prémio de Excelência:</p> <p>Ensino básico – alunos com média de todas as disciplinas igual ou superior a 4,5, exceto EMRC, não podendo ter nenhuma classificação inferior a 4;</p>

Ensino Secundário – alunos com média de todas as disciplinas igual ou superior a 17, exceto EMRC, não podendo ter nenhuma classificação abaixo de 14.

- Prémio de Progressão Escolar:

Aluno com maior diferença positiva entre a média de classificações no 3º período e a média das classificações no 1º período, excluindo as classificações de EMRC;

Havendo mais que um aluno candidato, é escolhido o aluno que tiver maior diferença positiva entre a média das classificações no 2º período e a média de classificações no 1º período, excluindo as classificações de EMRC;

Alunos no Ensino Articulado, a classificação das disciplinas do currículo geral não frequentadas é substituída pela classificação das disciplinas da componente de ensino artístico especializado.

Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção:

Conselho Pedagógico

Tabela 6 – Agrupamento de escolas 6

AE 6
Artigos Regulamento interno: 204º, 205º, 206º, 207º e 208º
Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:
- Quadros de excelência:
1º ciclo:
- Nível final de Muito Bom, em todas as áreas disciplinares, exceto a uma, na qual não podem ter nota inferior a Bom
2º e 3º ciclos:
- Média mínima de 4,5 e nenhum nível inferior a 4
Cursos de Educação e Formação:
- Média mínima de 4,5 e prova de Aptidão Final e Estágio com média de 4,5
Ensino Secundário:
- Média final de 16 valores e nenhuma classificação poderá ser inferior a 14 valores
- Quadros de valor:
Alunos que evidenciem atitudes, capacidades ou iniciativas ímpares:
Qualquer expressão de Solidariedade, designadamente o voluntariado em favor da comunidade em que está inserido;
Realização de atividades que beneficiem a comunidade escolar;
Situações de dinamização do funcionamento do Agrupamento;
Promoção da imagem do Agrupamento no exterior.
Desenvolvam iniciativas ou ações de reconhecida relevância social.

Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção: Professores titulares e Diretores de Turma - Conselho de Turma
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Tabela 7 – Agrupamentos de escolas 7

AE 7
Artigos Regulamento interno: Subsecção VII Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção: - Prémios de mérito e excelência: 4º ano do 1º ciclo e 2º e 3º ciclos, devem destacar-se por ações concretas e explícitas indicadoras de: - Espírito de entreatajuda; - Solidariedade; - Defesa do ambiente; d) Coragem; - Autocontrolo; - Tolerância; Atribuído prémio de mérito aos alunos que cumulativamente ao referido anteriormente obtenham: - Média de 4,7, sem nenhum nível inferior a 3 Menção honrosa: - Alunos ou grupos de alunos Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção: Conselho de Turma ou qualquer órgão de gestão ou estrutura de coordenação e supervisão pedagógica – aprovação do Presidente do Conselho Geral

Tabela 8 – Agrupamentos de escolas 8

AE 8
Artigos Regulamento interno: 88º Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção: - Mérito escolar: Prémio de excelência, melhor aluno de ciclo/curso; Prémio de mérito, melhor aluno de cada ano de escolaridade; Alunos que se distinguem em projetos e atividades da escola. Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção: Sem referência

Tabela 9 – Agrupamentos de escolas 9

AE 9
<p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 113º, 114º e 115º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Menção de Excelência: <p>4º ano do 1º ciclo:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Nível 5 a Português e Matemática na avaliação interna e externa <p>2º e 3º ciclos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Nível 5 em todas as classificações, exceto uma que poderá ser de nível 4 <p>Ensino Articulado</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Considerado apenas como um nível a média das classificações atribuídas às disciplinas da área de música (Classe de Conjunto, Formação Musical e Instrumento) <p>Ensino Secundário:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Média interna igual ou superior a 18 valores e nenhuma classificação poderá ser inferior a 16 valores- Menção de Mérito e Louvor: <p>Ter revelado atitudes exemplares de superação das suas dificuldades;</p> <p>Ter produzido trabalhos académicos de excelência;</p> <p>Ter representado com mérito o agrupamento;</p> <p>Ter desenvolvido iniciativas ou ações de reconhecida relevância social.</p> <p>Após cinco anos consecutivos no Quadro de Excelência de Escola no 2º e 3º ciclos do EB tem direito a uma menção de mérito.</p> <p>Após três anos consecutivos no Quadro de Excelência de Escola no ES tem direito a uma menção de mérito.</p> <p>Se figurar no Quadro de Excelência do 5º aos 12º anos, o aluno tem direito a uma Menção de Distinção por Percurso Académico Notável.</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção:</p> <p>Sem referência</p>

Tabela 10 – Agrupamentos de escolas 10

AE 10
<p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 157º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Quadros de excelência: <p>1º ciclo:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Comportamento exemplar individual e nas relações entre pares;

<p>2º e 3º ciclos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Comportamento exemplar individual e nas relações entre pares; <p>Ensino Secundário:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Classificação interna de média igual ou superior a 16;- Quadros de valor: Alunos que evidenciem atitudes, capacidades ou iniciativas ímpares: <p>Na superação de dificuldades;</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção:</p> <p>Professores</p>

Tabela 11 – Agrupamentos de escolas 11

<p>AE 11</p> <p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 123º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Reconhecimento do mérito: <p>1º, 2º, 3º e 4º ciclos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Média de classificação final igual ou superior a Bom nas disciplinas de Português e Matemática <p>2º e 3º ciclos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Classificação média final igual ou superior a 4,5 e sem nenhum nível inferior a 3; <p>Ofertas educativas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Média final igual ou superior a 17, sem módulos em atraso; <p>Mérito ético e moral:</p> <p>Solidariedade com os colegas;</p> <p>Assiduidade e pontualidade;</p> <p>Traga sempre o material;</p> <p>Empenhamento em ações meritórias em favor da comunidade.</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção:</p> <p>Professores titulares/Diretores de Turma</p>
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Tabela 12 – Agrupamentos de escolas 12

<p>AE 12</p> <p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 58º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Menção Honrosa – 2º e 3º ciclos: <p>Alunos que revelem um comportamento, empenho e relacionamento exemplares, independentemente dos níveis atingidos, com exceção de um nível.</p>

<p>- Quadro de Honra – 2º e 3º ciclos: Média igual ou superior a 4 e um comportamento, empenho e relacionamento exemplares</p> <p>- Menção de Excelência – 2º e 3º ciclos: Classificação final nível 5 em todas as áreas disciplinares e Satisfaz Bem nas áreas disciplinares não curriculares, juntamente com comportamento/atitudes exemplares</p> <p>Anualmente serão atribuídos prémios aos alunos que se distingam nas atividades de Educação Física e Educação Artística, de acordo com normas específicas aprovadas pelo Diretor do Agrupamento, por proposta do respetivo grupo disciplinar.</p> <p>Para valorizar o desempenho global das turmas será atribuído, no âmbito do Projeto DESAFIA-TE, no fim de cada período, um prémio à turma melhor classificada no Concurso Ganha o Desafio. As normas de atribuição são aprovadas pelo Diretor do Agrupamento após parecer do Conselho Pedagógico.</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção: Conselho de Turma</p>
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Tabela 13 – Agrupamentos de escolas 13

AE 13
<p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 88º, 89º, 90º, 91º, 92º e 93º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <p>- Quadros de excelência:</p> <p>1º ciclo (3º e 4º anos)</p> <p>- Cumpram deveres de assiduidade, sem nenhuma falta injustificada;</p> <p>- Sem medidas sancionatórias;</p> <p>- 3 classificações mínimas de “Muito Bom” e 2 de “Bom”</p> <p>2º e 3º ciclos:</p> <p>- Cumpram deveres de assiduidade, sem nenhuma falta injustificada;</p> <p>- Sem medidas sancionatórias;</p> <p>- Média igual ou superior a 5 e nenhuma classificação pode ser igual ou inferior a nível 4</p> <p>- Quadros de Valor – 3º aos 9º anos:</p> <p>Cumpram deveres de assiduidade, sem nenhuma falta injustificada;</p> <p>Sem medidas sancionatórias;</p> <p>No 1º ciclo, tenham obtido, na classificação final do ano letivo em curso, classificação igual a “Muito Bom” na área curricular de Educação Cívica;</p> <p>Alunos do 2º e 3º ciclos, tenham obtido, na classificação final do ano letivo em curso, classificação igual a nível cinco na área curricular de Educação Cívica;</p> <p>Revelaram um esforço exemplar para superação de dificuldades;</p> <p>Produziram trabalhos académicos de excelência ou realizem atividades curriculares ou de complemento curricular de relevância;</p>

<p>Dinamizaram ou participaram em ações promovidas pela Escola, que revelem solidariedade para com os elementos da comunidade escolar ou fora dela;</p> <p>Dinamizaram ou participaram em iniciativas ou ações promovidas pela Escola, que conduzam à organização, dinamização e divulgação de projetos dos quais resulte enriquecimento cultural ou patrimonial dos alunos e da Escola.</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção:</p> <p>Professores titulares/Diretores de Turma e Conselhos de Turma</p>

Tabela 14 – Agrupamentos de escolas 14

<p>AE 14</p> <p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 128º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Prémios de mérito:- Alunos que preencham um ou mais dos seguintes requisitos: <p>Revelem atitudes exemplares de superação das suas dificuldades;</p> <p>Alcancem excelentes resultados escolares;</p> <p>Produzam trabalhos académicos de excelência ou realizem atividades curriculares ou de complemento curricular de relevância;</p> <p>Desenvolvam iniciativas ou ações de reconhecida relevância social.</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção:</p> <p>Sem referência</p>

Tabela 15 – Agrupamentos de escolas 15

<p>AE 15</p> <p>Artigos Regulamento interno: 201º e 202º</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Quadros de excelência:- Atribuídos aos 2 melhores alunos de cada ano de escolaridade, do 4º ao 9º ano: <p>3º período do 4º ano: número de menções de muito seja superior ao número de menções Bom (devem constar obrigatoriamente Português e Matemática);</p> <p>2º e 3º ciclos – ter classificações não inferiores a 4 no 3º período;</p> <p>9º ano – ter no mínimo uma classificação igual a 3 nas provas finais do 9º ano;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Quadros de Honra – 4º ano do 1º ciclo e 2º e 3º ciclos do EB, devem respeitar cumulativamente as seguintes condições:- Sem faltas injustificadas;- Sem nenhuma ocorrência disciplinar;- Que tenham colaborado com empenho nas atividades escolares e manifestado valores cívicos, como o respeito e a solidariedade.
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<p>Cumulativamente com:</p> <p>4º ano</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sem nenhuma menção inferior a Bom no 2º e 3º períodos; - 3º período, o número de número de menções Muito Bom seja superior ao número de menções Bom (sendo uma delas, pelo menos Português ou Matemática); <p>2º e 3º ciclos:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sem nenhuma classificação inferior a 3 em qualquer dos períodos; - No 3º período, a média das classificações de todas as disciplinas em que está inserido deve ser igual ou maior que 4. <p>- Quadro de Esforço Comportamental: Aluno que mais evoluiu, nas atitudes e valores, desde o início do ano letivo até ao final do mesmo.</p> <p>- Quadro de Esforço Académico: Aluno, por cada ano de escolaridade do 2º aos 3º ciclos, com maior diferença positiva entre a média das classificações do 3º período e a média das classificações do 1º período</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção: Professores titulares/Diretores de Turma – aprovação do Conselho Pedagógico</p>

Tabela 16 – Escolas não agrupadas

Escola 1
<p>Artigos Regulamento interno: Sem referência</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção: Sem referência</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção: Sem referência</p>
Escola 2
<p>Artigos Regulamento interno: Sem referência</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção: Sem referência</p> <p>Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção: Sem referência</p>
Escola 3
<p>Artigos Regulamento interno: Sem referência</p> <p>Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção: Sem referência</p>

Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção: Sem referência
Escola 4
Artigos Regulamento interno: Sem referência Conceptualização do mérito e Critérios de Seleção: Sem referência Entidades envolvidas no processo de seleção: Sem referência

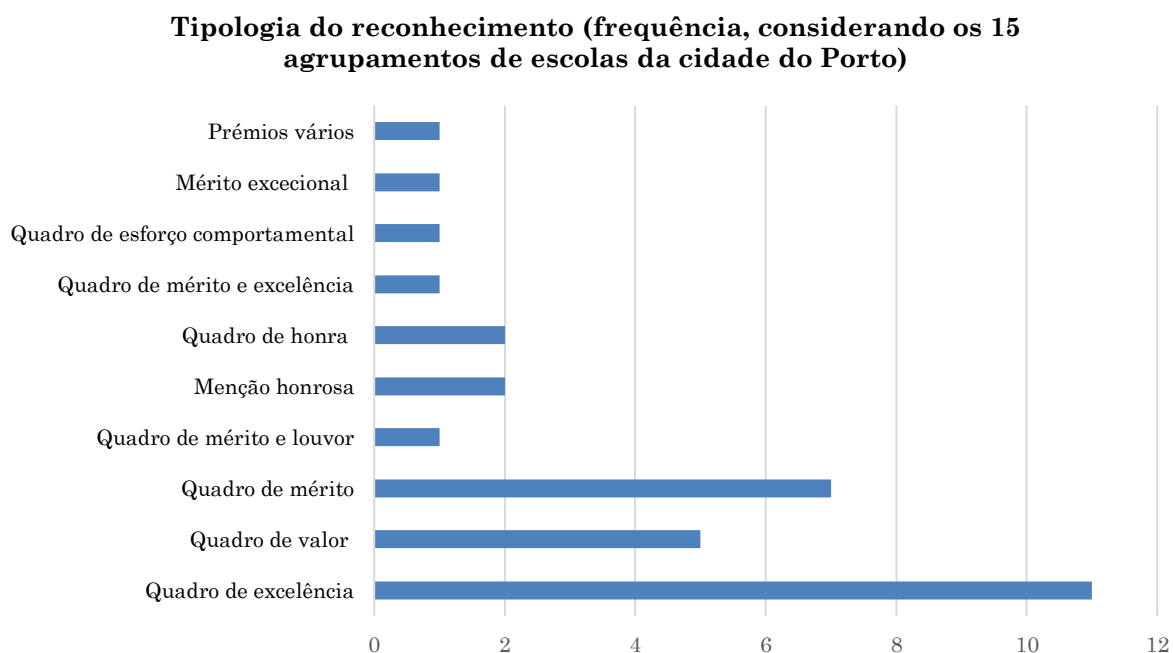
Sistematização, discussão e problematização dos dados

Ao analisarmos os regulamentos dos 15 agrupamentos de escolas e 4 escolas não agrupadas, importa discutir e problematizar as dimensões seguintes:

i) Da tipologia e abrangência da distinção

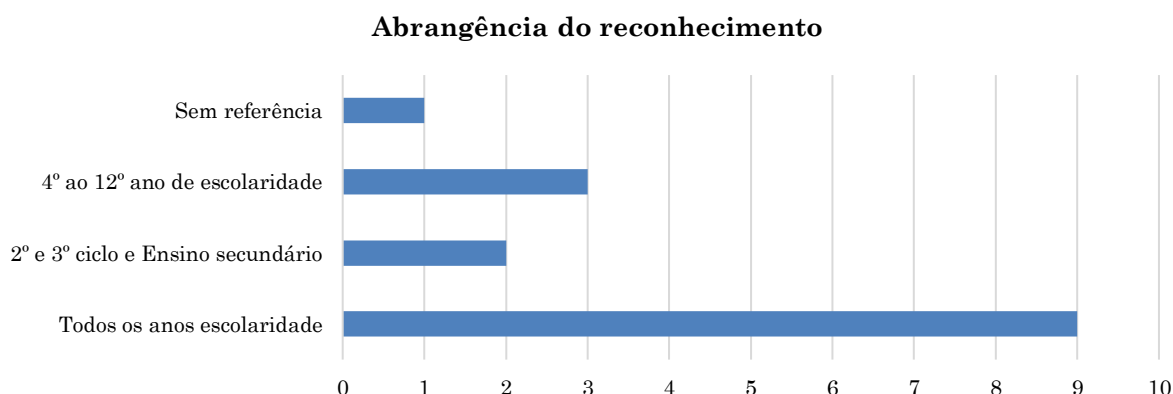
Nos regulamentos analisados surgem as seguintes categorias da distinção que se apresentam no gráfico 1:

Gráfico 1 – tipologia do reconhecimento



Quanto aos destinatários do reconhecimento do mérito e excelência, observamos, no gráfico 2, uma grande abrangência:

Gráfico 2 – Abrangência do reconhecimento



Como primeira nota, deve registrar-se que os Regulamentos Internos dos 15 Agrupamentos de Escolas regulamentam de forma relativamente detalhada os termos de atribuição da distinção. Mas as escolas não agrupadas não fazem qualquer referência a dispositivos de reconhecimento meritocrático. Esta ausência discursiva não significa, necessariamente, que estas escolas não adotem procedimentos explícitos ou implícitos de distinção. De qualquer forma, esta ausência tem, pelo menos, um valor simbólico.

Como segunda nota, importa referir que a excelência é predominantemente académica sendo resultante dos resultados escolares.

1º ciclo (4º ano) – menção qualitativa de Muito Bom em todas as áreas curriculares no final do 3º período;

2º e 3º ciclos – média igual ou superior a 4,5 e nenhum nível inferior a 3 a todas as disciplinas, incluindo oferta complementar;

Ensino Secundário – média igual ou superior a 17,5, não podendo o aluno apresentar nenhuma classificação inferior a 14 valores; (AE 1)

1º ciclo – Menção “Muito Bom” a português, matemática e, cumulativamente, a menção de Muito Bom” a estudo do meio ou inglês;

Restantes ciclos – média interna de 5 valores desde que não obtenham nível inferior a 3;

Ensino Secundário – média interna igual ou superior a 18 valores e sem nenhuma classificação inferior a 10 valores (AE 2)

Ensino básico: média global de nível 4,5;

Ensino secundário: média global ou superior a 16 valores; (AE 3)

2º e 3º ciclos:

Classificação interna de nível 5;

Ausência de níveis inferiores a 3;

Ensino Secundário:

Classificação interna de média igual ou superior a 16;

Ausência de classificações inferiores a 12; (AE 4)

Ensino básico – alunos com média de todas as disciplinas igual ou superior a 4,5, exceto EMRC, não podendo ter nenhuma classificação inferior a 4;

Ensino Secundário – alunos com média de todas as disciplinas igual ou superior a 17, exceto EMRC, não podendo ter nenhuma classificação abaixo de 14 (AE 5)

Nível final de Muito Bom, em todas as áreas disciplinares, exceto a uma, na qual não podem ter nota inferior a Bom

2º e 3º ciclos:

Média mínima de 4,5 e nenhum nível inferior a 4

Ensino Secundário:

Média final de 16 valores e nenhuma classificação poderá ser inferior a 14 valores (AE 6)

4º ano do 1º ciclo:

Nível 5 a Português e Matemática na avaliação interna e externa

2º e 3º ciclos:

Nível 5 em todas as classificações, exceto uma que poderá ser de nível 4

Ensino Secundário: - Média interna igual ou superior a 18 valores e nenhuma classificação poderá ser inferior a 16 valores (AE 9)

Como observam Torres, Palhares & Borges (2017), “um número crescente de escolas ou agrupamentos de escolas tem vindo a assumir, de forma mais ou menos explícita, a excelência académica como um dos objetivos centrais da ação” (Torres, Palhares & Borges, 2017, p. 87). Para eles, “a inscrição deste mandato na agenda normativa das organizações escolares é cada vez mais evidente, embora com ênfases, tonalidades e significados diferentes” (Torres, Palhares & Borges, 2017, p. 87). A análise dos regulamentos internos dos 15 agrupamentos confirma esta leitura.

Em algumas circunstâncias, a excelência académica tem de estar articulada com a distinção no exercício do ofício de aluno, como por exemplo:

Ausências de faltas injustificadas;

Ausência de qualquer comportamento passível de aplicação de medida corretiva;

Comportamento exemplar individual e nas relações entre pares. (AE 4)

Como terceira nota, registre-se que quase todos os Agrupamentos preveem a distinção ao nível de valores, atitudes e comportamentos que reconhecem essenciais para a vida em geral e para a vida escolar. A título de exemplo, pode referir-se:

atitude exemplar de superação das suas dificuldades (AE 1)

desenvolvimento de iniciativas ou ações de reconhecida relevância social. (AE 1)

atitude exemplar de superação das suas dificuldades;

apoio escolar e pessoal a colegas em situação problemática;

participação no programa de mentoria;

iniciativas relevantes no âmbito da solidariedade social;

envolvimento em trabalhos e projetos para a valorização da escola;

participação assídua e pontual nos órgãos de gestão da escola para que foi eleito. (AE 2)

Manifestações excepcionais de cooperação e solidariedade, reconhecidas por entidades credenciadas, a alunos ligados a entidades de promoção de voluntariado ou que com elas cooperaram;

Postura cívica e consciência humanista notáveis;

Ações exemplares dentro do recinto escolar, reconhecidas por docentes, assistentes operacionais e pelos pares;

Ações de âmbito social de relevo;

Ações de âmbito social de relevo, reveladas por um órgão representativo da instituição onde a ação foi realizada. (AE 3)

Alunos que evidenciem atitudes, capacidades ou iniciativas ímpares:

Na superação de dificuldades;

No envolvimento e empenho em iniciativas ou ações, individuais ou em grupo, que conduzam à organização, dinamização e divulgação de projetos dos quais resulte enriquecimento cultural ou patrimonial dos alunos e da escola em geral;

Respeito pela diferença;

No exercício da cidadania, no comportamento e no relacionamento com todos os membros da comunidade escolar. (AE 4)

Dinamizaram ou participaram em ações promovidas pela Escola, que revelem solidariedade para com os elementos da comunidade escolar ou fora dela;

Dinamizaram ou participaram em iniciativas ou ações promovidas pela Escola, que conduzam à organização, dinamização e divulgação de projetos dos quais resulte enriquecimento cultural ou patrimonial dos alunos e da Escola. (AE 13)

Como quarta nota, é de referir que a prática da distinção ocorre, em alguns casos, logo no 1º ciclo o que pode considerar-se problemático, seguramente em termos educativos pela segregação que introduz e provavelmente também em termos legais, onde a distinção académica é promovida, mas em termos de ciclo (e não de ano de escolaridade).

Não obstante esta presença e este reconhecimento, parece poder afirmar-se que na hierarquia do mérito, a excelência académica acaba por se distinguir, instituindo uma lógica de hierarquização, seleção e segregação.

O problema: a “tirania” do mérito e o reforço da desigualdade e da exclusão

A meritocracia, termo introduzido por Michel Young em 1958, na sua obra “The Rise of Meritocracy”, foi designado como “*movimento de superação da mentalidade aristocrática*” (Mazza & Mari, 2021, p. 18), e faz parte da dinâmica escolar um pouco por todo o mundo. Este ideal democrático de igualdade de oportunidades de acesso, frequência e sucesso escolares seria uma forma justa de substituir a antiga noção dos *herdeiros* baseada no nascimento e na ascendência de sangue. O prestígio, o estatuto e reconhecimento social seria justo se derivado de um ideal meritocrático em que o mérito é um investimento pessoal resultante do trabalho e persistência

aliados ao QI e QE de cada pessoa, sendo, assim, um “mecanismo do Estado para regular [e legitimar] desigualdades dentro dos sistemas sociais” (Mazza & Mari, 2021, p. 18).

Mas torna-se necessário colocar duas questões: a) o acesso aos quadros de mérito e excelência é o resultado de uma opção e de um trabalho individual que merece distinção? b) os outros alunos que não entraram nos ditos quadros de valor e excelência, como veem e sentem essa exclusão e que efeito tem no seu percurso escolar?

É certo, como sustenta Zimmerman (1997) que uma democracia deve promover a excelência na educação para sobreviver, mas a excelência deve ser procurada num contexto de preocupação com todos. Todos os estudantes devem buscar um nível de excelência que esteja ao seu alcance. E o mesmo autor sublinha que a sociedade deve oferecer oportunidades e recompensas para que os indivíduos possam desenvolver o seu potencial e tenham o melhor desempenho, mas considerando sempre o princípio de equidade.

De facto, considerando os principais normativos que deveriam regular a ação educativa (a começar pela Lei de Bases do Sistema Educativo) e os princípios fundadores de uma escola para todos (igualdade, liberdade, equidade, justiça, discriminação positiva...), fica a dúvida sobre a verdadeira importância de se categorizar os alunos de acordo com as suas aprendizagens que assumem, na maioria das vezes, uma denotação sobretudo cognitiva e académica.

Como mostra Sandel (2020), há uma relação entre estatuto social dos indivíduos e a obtenção do mérito. De facto, nem todos têm um contexto e um percurso escolar que lhes permita atingir o sucesso académico merecedor de distinção pública. As famílias de classes média e alta proporcionam aos seus filhos ferramentas, métodos e disposições que lhes permitem atingir o mérito. Importa ainda considerar com Bruni (2016) que o mérito só pode existir se existir demérito, ou, por outras palavras, só existem ganhadores se existirem perdedores. O problema reside no facto do número de perdedores, ou de não merecedores do mérito, ser maior. O mérito é para uma elite e gera, efetivamente, um número grande perdedores, e é necessário investigar e interpretar o efeito da ideologia meritocrática nesses dois mundos: a elite merecedora e a grande maioria perdedora. Como refere o autor (Bruni, 2016):

O mérito tem uma necessidade necessária de demérito. É uma realidade posicional e relativa: o mundo dos meritórios funciona se o mérito puder ser definido, regulado, hierarquizado, medido, posto em relação com o demérito. Acima do meritório deve haver alguém mais meritório e um menos meritório abaixo dele. (...). A gestão mais simples do demérito consiste em o apresentar como uma passagem obrigatória para o mérito, como uma etapa do caminho. Esta gestão funciona muito bem com os jovens, aos quais é mostrado o “delicioso monte”, dizendo-lhes que só o poderão escalar se souberem “crescer”, embora quem propõe este cenário saiba muito bem que na casa do mérito não

há muitos lugares. E, assim, quando chegam os primeiros fracassos e o mérito esperado não floresce conforme os objetivos pré-fixados, o milagre cumpre-se: o trabalhador foi educado para interpretar o próprio fracasso como demérito e, assim, dócil, aceita o seu triste destino.

Existe, portanto, uma clara hipocrisia na política e na prática educativa, na medida em que a ideologia da igualdade de oportunidades de acesso, de frequência, de sucesso e de usufruto dos bens educacionais está longe de ser praticada, sendo a meritocracia o artifício perfeito para perpetuar e acentuar as desigualdades sociais e gerar mecanismos de culpa e autoexclusão.

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ABANDONO OCULTO: UM FENOMENO SILENCIOSO

HIDDEN DROPOUT: A SILENT PHENOMENON

António Manuel Branco Oliveira*

Abstract We present the work developed in the PhD in Education Sciences, whose purpose was to understand what happens at school with students who, not being considered effective school leavers, remain enrolled in the education/training system without being engaged in their learning process, thus in hidden dropout.

We proceed to the theoretical framework, clarifying the key concepts – *Early leavers from education and training* (ELET), disengagement from school and hidden dropout –, we describe the adopted methodology and then the main results of the study developed are presented.

We explain the methodological option for a qualitative study, according to an instrumental, multiple case study, adopting a holistic perspective and grounded in the complexity paradigm. To ensure study validity, we used data triangulation, assembling data collection techniques such as documentary research and the questionnaire survey, but also instruments and techniques usually carried out on quantitative approaches. Data triangulation was also done by expanding sources of information and collecting data at different stages and moments. Procedures are mentioned, emphasizing the construction of an Hidden Dropout Student Profile and the design of an Hidden Dropout Identification Device (HDID) and the sample is presented.

The data collection and analysis provided by HDID allowed us to identify, characterize students in hidden dropout and set the severity level at which they are. The results lead us to conclude that there is hidden dropout in the school-context, as a result of a process of school disengagement, reflected in the strong contribution of the variables poor school performance, absenteeism and behavioral problems / indiscipline to the hidden dropout and ELET.

Keywords Hidden dropout, early leaving of education and training, school disengagement, HDID

Resumo Apresenta-se o trabalho desenvolvido no âmbito do Doutoramento em Ciências da Educação, que pretendeu compreender o que acontece na escola com os alunos que, não sendo considerados em

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situação de abandono escolar efetivo, permanecem matriculados no sistema educativo/ formativo sem se envolverem no seu processo de aprendizagem e, como tal, em abandono escolar oculto.

Procede-se ao enquadramento teórico, clarificando os conceitos convocados – Abandono Precoce de Educação e Formação (APEF), de desengajamento escolar e de abandono oculto – descreve-se a metodologia adotada e apresentam-se os principais resultados do estudo desenvolvido.

Explicita-se a opção metodológica por um estudo de cariz qualitativo, numa lógica de estudo de caso instrumental, múltiplo, adotando uma perspetiva holística e ancorado no paradigma da complexidade. Para garantir a validade do estudo, recorreremos à triangulação de dados, mobilizando técnicas de recolha de dados como a pesquisa arquivística ou documental e o inquérito por questionário, mas também instrumentos e técnicas próprias de uma abordagem quantitativa. Esta triangulação fez-se também pela utilização de variadas fontes de informação e pela recolha de dados em momentos distintos. Referem-se os procedimentos, enfatizando a construção de um Perfil de Aluno em Abandono Oculto e a conceção de um Dispositivo de Identificação do Abandono Oculto (DIAO) e apresenta-se a amostra.

A recolha e análise dos dados produzidos pelo DIAO, permitiu-nos identificar, caracterizar os alunos em abandono oculto e definir em que nível de gravidade se encontravam. Os resultados levam-nos a concluir que existe APEF e abandono oculto no agrupamento-contexto, fruto de um processo de desengajamento escolar, patente no forte contributo das variáveis fraco desempenho escolar, absentismo e problemas de comportamento/ indisciplina.

Palavras-chave Abandono oculto; abandono precoce de educação e formação; desengajamento escolar; DIAO

Introdução

Na sequência de investigação anterior, que se traduziu na tese de doutoramento “Abandono oculto: as realidades por detrás das estatísticas” (2019), este artigo pretende evidenciar os seus principais resultados e conclusões e, concomitantemente, dar a conhecer o fenómeno do abandono escolar oculto, isto é, a constatação de que existem alunos que estão em abandono escolar, não efetivo, mas oculto dentro da própria escola.

A experiência profissional enquanto docente do ensino básico possibilitou o contacto próximo com uma realidade que os números das estatísticas e os relatórios nacionais e internacionais não expressam. Efetivamente, o alargamento da escolaridade obrigatória até aos 18 anos de idade (2009) se, por um lado, criou condições para a redução da taxa de abandono escolar precoce, por outro, ao obrigar todos a frequentar a escola levou a que nela permaneçam alunos com: percursos educativos marcados por retenções; trajetórias escolares erráticas, isto é, presenças nas aulas seguidas de períodos longos de ausência, regressando pontualmente; uma assiduidade “seletiva”, ou seja, faltas a umas disciplinas e presenças a outras ou que, sendo os alunos pressionados a ir às aulas, assumem comportamentos de indisciplina; e alunos que, estando em situação de abandono escolar precoce, regressam por pressão externa e voltam a faltar. Em suma, alunos que “andam” na escola, mas não se “escolarizam”, alunos que não querem aprender (Charlot, 2015).

Ambicionando revelar a existência concreta destas realidades, que são o percurso educativo de cada aluno que está na escola porque tem de estar e que as estatísticas ignoram, encetou-se um estudo com o objetivo de “compreender o que acontece na escola com os alunos que, não sendo considerados em situação de abandono escolar efetivo, permanecem matriculados no sistema educativo/formativo sem se envolverem no seu processo de aprendizagem, embora reúnam e manifestem, em diferentes graus, um desengajamento face à escola, como que incubando o abandono efetivo que, mais cedo ou mais tarde, tem muitas probabilidades de ocorrer e que designámos de abandono oculto” (Oliveira & Azevedo, 2019, p. 153).

O levantamento do “estado da arte” e a revisão de literatura tornaram imperativo apurar os conceitos que subjazem ao nosso estudo e solidificar o quadro teórico. Deste modo, perante conceitos e fenómenos que se entrecruzam e sendo o conceito de abandono oculto algo recente na investigação educacional, tornou-se pertinente clarificá-lo, distinguindo-o dos conceitos de desengajamento escolar e de abandono escolar precoce.

Tomando como referência o enquadramento teórico e a clarificação concetual produzida, explicitou-se quer a natureza do estudo, o objeto de estudo e as questões de investigação, quer ainda os métodos e técnicas de recolha e análise de dados, isto é, o enquadramento metodológico do trabalho empírico. Por fim, da aplicação da metodologia definida resultou a recolha de diferentes e múltiplos dados que, enformados pelo enquadramento teórico e pelo paradigma de investigação que assumimos, foram objeto de análise e discussão, possibilitando a apresentação das principais conclusões.

Quadro teórico/ theoretical framework

Sendo um fenómeno global, o abandono escolar precoce foi assumindo uma multiplicidade de definições e expressões consoante a localização geográfica. Foi nesse contexto que, no âmbito da estratégia “Europa 2020”, a União Europeia propôs a adoção de uma forma comum de se exprimir o abandono escolar, surgindo a designação Abandono Precoce da Educação e Formação (APEF). Apesar de ser utilizada como indicador de abandono escolar numa determinada faixa etária, isto é, “a percentagem de pessoas (entre os 18 e os 24 anos) que deixou de estudar sem ter completado o secundário” (Eurostat, 2014), entendemos que corresponde à deteção e expressão da concretização de um fenómeno que se iniciou anteriormente, por vezes muito cedo, num processo contínuo de desengajamento e, nesse sentido, adotaremos a designação APEF para nos referirmos a abandono escolar precoce.

No contexto português, na última década, potenciada pela conjugação da referida estratégia da União Europeia com o alargamento da escolaridade obrigatória e com a generalização da oferta de ensino profissional, constata-se uma redução gradual e significativa da taxa de APEF, situando-se

atualmente, segundo dados da plataforma PORDATA relativos a 2021, nos 5,9%, bem abaixo da meta de 10% estabelecida pela UE para 2020. Todavia, esta expressiva e estatisticamente comprovada redução do APEF origina questões que nos parecem carecer de resposta, concretamente, saber o que acontece com os alunos que antes abandonavam precocemente a escola e que, agora nela se mantêm através de um processo automático de matrícula.

Esclarecendo o conceito de APEF, os autores que aportámos ao nosso estudo (Jimerson et al., 2000; Ferrão e Honório, 2001; Potvin et al., 2007; Rumberger e Lim, 2008; Thibert, 2013; Comissão Europeia, 2015, etc.) convergem no sentido de se tratar de um fenómeno atualmente percebido de uma forma mais holística e menos dicotómica, mais como processo e menos como resultado, fruto da interação de uma multiplicidade de fatores (pessoais, sociais, económicos, educativos e familiares). Neste sentido, procurando compreender este processo, diversos autores assinalam um conjunto de características que, não sendo deterministas, podem ser determinantes na decisão de abandonar, considerando-os preditores de APEF: o fraco desempenho escolar, concretamente a retenção e, sobretudo, a retenção repetida; os problemas de comportamento, mormente a indisciplina; e o absentismo, muitas vezes resultante de problemas gerados no interior da escola (rotulagem, *bullying*, baixo sentimento de pertença,...) (Jimerson et al., 2000; Ferrão e Honório, 2001; Canavarró, 2004; Potvin et al., 2007; Rumberger e Lim, 2008; Thibert, 2013).

Na mesma linha, autores como Tomaszewska-Pekala et al. (2017) associam o abandono escolar precoce a um outro fenómeno, o desengajamento escolar, defendendo que o APEF é “apenas” uma etapa, a visível, de um longo processo de desengajamento face à escola. Procurando explicitar a sua posição, Tomaszewska-Pekala et al. (2017) confrontam-nos com a polissemia do conceito de desengajamento escolar: Fredericks et al. (2004) consideram que este é uma construção assente em três dimensões (emocional, comportamental e cognitiva), como tal, multidimensional; Skinner et al., (2009), por seu turno, referem que o desengajamento escolar resulta da interação entre vários fatores internos e externos; Hancock e Zubrick (2015) colocam-nos perante um fenómeno multifacetado, com vários matizes e, nesse sentido, difícil de definir; acrescentam ainda que veem o desengajamento como inseparável de engajamento, como extremidades opostas do mesmo percurso (Hancock e Zubrick, 2015); na mesma linha, Christenson, Reschly e Wylie (2012), descrevem o engajamento escolar como uma meta-construção equivalente à “cola”, uma vez que conecta contextos, como a família ou os pares, ao aluno e a resultados como a pertença escolar, a motivação ou as aspirações; por fim, numa perspetiva longitudinal, Lessard et al. (2008), de Bowers e Sprott, (2012) e de Van Caudenberg et al. (2017) veem o desengajamento escolar não como algo localizado no tempo, mas como fenómeno que vai ocorrendo ao longo da vida, ou seja, o aluno vai sendo confrontado com múltiplos desafios que gradualmente o vão “desengajando”.

Seja em que sentido for, para Enguita et al. (2010) este não é um problema superficial, pelo contrário, é complexo e afeta os alunos de forma distinta e com graus de intensidade e resultados

diferentes. Trata-se, deste modo, de um fenómeno multiforme para o qual não existe consenso terminológico (2010) e que resulta de um “processo acumulado e progressivo de desengajamento (Martínez et al. 2010, p. 122).

Deste modo, os estudos referidos, embora de carácter e de origens diferentes, revelam dois aspetos significativos para a compreensão do APEF e da sua relação com o desengajamento escolar: i) trata-se de um fenómeno complexo, com uma diversidade de fatores na sua génese e que é da interação entre eles que o abandono é gerado; ii) estamos perante um processo longo de gradual desengajamento face à escola, tantas vezes iniciado precocemente, e de difícil perceção antes da sua verificação efetiva (no APEF), por isso, oculto.

Esta ligação estreita entre APEF e desengajamento escolar torna imprescindível o esclarecimento do conceito de abandono escolar oculto – “terra de ninguém” que se estende entre as fronteiras do desengajamento escolar e as do APEF (Oliveira & Azevedo, 2019) – para o qual recorreremos a estudos realizados em diferentes contextos, procurando traços comuns que melhor o caracterizassem.

Em Israel, Rosenblum et al. (2008), ancorados em estudos de Lifshitz et al. (1998), referem-se a abandono oculto como sinónimo de frequência escolar irregular. As conclusões do seu estudo, levam os a sustentar que as estatísticas sobre o APEF não revelam toda a dimensão do problema e fazem notar que, apesar do “fenómeno de abandono oculto estar mais difundido do que o oficialmente relatado, a literatura sobre o tema é escassa” (Rosenblum et al. 2008, p.106). Também, Shimoni e Portnoy (2013) usam a expressão "abandono oculto" para se referirem aos alunos que, estando formalmente matriculados, manifestavam “sintomas ocultos” como: “absentismo, presença irregular na escola, fraco desempenho escolar, sentimento de alienação e de desengajamento do processo de aprendizagem, problemas de comportamento e problemas sociais na escola” (Shimoni & Portnoy, n.d., p.1). No entender destes autores, o alargamento da escolaridade obrigatória para os 17 anos com o objetivo de manter os alunos na escola e prevenir o APEF, teve um efeito perverso pois, dando ideia de uma aparente normalidade, as escolas mantêm matriculados alunos desengajados que de outro modo estariam em APEF.

Noutra latitude, nos Países Baixos, Fanoiki (2014) utiliza o conceito de abandono oculto para se referir aos “alunos que estão oficialmente matriculados na escola, mas que têm um engajamento escolar baixo” (p. 4), sendo um fenómeno que precede o APEF. A autora estabelece uma relação entre o abandono oculto e o apoio/suporte que o aluno perceciona, concluindo que o apoio/ suporte dos professores e da família são importantes fatores no engajamento escolar dos alunos, pois potenciam o seu sentido de pertença, a sua autonomia e a sua competência. Assim, Fanoiki (2014) a propõe a definição de medidas que possibilitem quer a deteção precoce dos alunos em risco ou em abandono oculto, quer o aumento do engajamento escolar.

Numa perspetiva distinta, na Albânia, no relatório que produz sobre a implementação do projeto “Hidden Drop-Out” (HDO), Sultana (2006) torna evidente que, embora os alunos estejam fisicamente na escola, “são um pouco como «fantasmas na sala de aula», presentes para os propósitos da chamada, mas não visíveis para o propósito da aprendizagem e da instrução” (Sultana, 2006, p.17). Neste sentido, conclui o autor que “os alunos em abandono efetivo ou oculto são na verdade «push-outs»: é a escola que seleciona, estratifica e diferencia...” (Sultana, 2006, p. 23) e, nesse sentido, o abandono oculto é produzido na e pela própria escola.

Os estudos referidos, olhando para o mesmo fenómeno de perspetivas diferentes, confirmam a constatação de Enguita (2011) de que nas escolas “abundam situações tecnicamente classificadas como absentismo, uma vez que o aluno continua matriculado, mas que em termos substantivos deveriam ser qualificadas como abandono” (Enguita, 2011, p. 740) – um abandono que permanece oculto. Na verdade, estes alunos não são considerados em situação de APEF, pois estão na escola; nem alunos em desengajamento escolar porque já não estão em “processo” – e o desengajamento refere-se ao “processo” em que o aluno se vai desconectando; mas sim, podemos afirmar, alunos em abandono oculto, expressando assim o “facto” ou “resultado” de que os alunos estão na escola, matriculados, mas efetivamente desengajados.

Explicitados os conceitos, suportado pelos autores e estudos referidos e face à constatação de que existem alunos que estão na escola, não estando ou, dito de outro modo, alunos que embora matriculados não estão envolvidos em qualquer processo de aprendizagem (Estêvão & Álvares, 2014), assumimos como conceito de Abandono [Escolar] Oculto: “alunos que permanecem na escola e prosseguem a sua trajetória escolar, embora reúnam e manifestem (em graus muito diversos) um desengajamento face à escola, como que incubando o abandono efetivo que, mais cedo ou mais tarde, tem muitas probabilidades de ocorrer.” (Oliveira & Azevedo, 2019, p. 38).

Metodologia/design

Face a um fenómeno complexo e multidimensional adotámos uma perspetiva que possibilitasse uma leitura deste nas suas múltiplas vertentes, nomeadamente, o paradigma da complexidade (Morin, 2002), na medida em que propõe “um pensamento complexo que reata, articula, compreende e que, por sua vez, desenvolve sua própria autocrítica” (Morin et al., 2003, p. 37)

Em termos metodológicos, optámos por um estudo qualitativo (Bogdan & Binkle, 1994; Almeida & Freire, 2003; Amado, 2014), numa perspetiva naturalista (Afonso, 2005), que possibilita descrever e compreender o fenómeno com maior profundidade (Bogdan & Binkle, 1994), recorrendo-se também ao conhecimento obtido de forma quantitativa, potenciando uma melhor compreensão e interpretação da realidade (Amado, 2014). Assumimos como estratégia de investigação o estudo de caso múltiplo holístico (Afonso, 2005), na modalidade de tipo instrumental (Stake, 2009), visando

fazer sobressair a complexidade dos fenómenos vivenciados e as interações geradas (Newby, 2014), bem como garantir uma “maior abrangência e plausibilidade na construção de teorias ou generalizações aproximativas mais sólidas” (Afonso, 2005, p.72).

Definimos como objetivo do estudo compreender o que acontece na escola com os alunos que mostram trajetórias características de abandono escolar efetivo mas que, como estão “dentro” da escolaridade obrigatória, não são considerados como tal, permanecendo matriculados no sistema educativo/formativo, mas desengajados. Não sendo detetados, nem identificados como alunos em abandono escolar, permanecem ocultos.

Consequentemente, são estes alunos em abandono oculto o nosso objeto de estudo, sobre quem quisemos saber (questões de investigação): i) Quem são estes alunos? Quais as suas trajetórias escolares? ii) Porque se vão alheando do seu processo de aprendizagem? Que motivos levam estes alunos a permanecerem no sistema educativo/formativo? iii) De que modo permanecem no sistema educativo, isto é: qual o seu percurso educativo? E como é que estão, sem estarem?

Procedimentos

Devido à complexidade do estudo e ao tempo disponível, na linha de Bogdan e Binkle (1994) e partindo dos critérios de seleção de casos preconizados por Stake (2009), escolhemos um contexto disponível para acolher o estudo, que nos facilitasse o acesso a casos que nos permitissem rentabilizar o que com eles se ia aprender. Assim, usámos um método de amostragem não probabilístico, pois a seleção não foi aleatória, mas deliberada, uma vez que se fundamenta em critérios predefinidos (Afonso, 2005). A escolha recaiu sobre um agrupamento de escolas inserido no Programa “Territórios Educativos de Intervenção Prioritária (TEIP)”, situado num contexto socioeconómico desfavorável da área metropolitana do Porto (desemprego, trabalho precário, pobreza estrutural, etc.) e marcado por problemas de insucesso escolar, indisciplina, absentismo e APEF (ora em diante agrupamento-contexto). Escolhido o campo empírico, seguiu-se a seleção dos “casos” que serviriam de base ao estudo. Em ambas as situações foram asseguradas, através do consentimento informado, as questões éticas, nomeadamente, o anonimato, a confidencialidade e a possibilidade de cessar a participação a qualquer momento (SPCE, 2020).

Dada a dificuldade em distinguir com exatidão as “fases” do desengajamento escolar e do abandono oculto, tornou-se imprescindível identificar as características que nos permitiriam selecionar os casos. Assim, mobilizando os conceitos de APEF, de desengajamento escolar e de abandono oculto, nomeadamente os seus preditores e as características dos alunos afetados por esses fenómenos (Fortin & Picard, 1999; Ferrão & Honório, 2001; Canavarro, 2004; Lewin, 2007; Rumberger & Lim, 2008; Rosenblum et al., 2008; Potvin & Dimitri, 2012; Thibert, 2013; Tomaszewska-Pekala et al., 2017; Shimoni & Portnoy, n.d.), optámos pela definição de um Perfil de Aluno em Abandono Oculto

(PAAO) no qual se clarificam as dimensões, as variáveis, e os indicadores que identificam um aluno em abandono oculto (Tabela 2).

Selecionámos, inicialmente, três dimensões que, em conjunto, são fortemente preditoras de APEF e concorrem para a identificação do abandono oculto: fraco desempenho escolar; absentismo; problemas de comportamento/ indisciplina. Definimos, ainda, uma outra dimensão, “características individuais de desengajamento escolar”, que nos pareceu relevante para identificarmos casos de alunos em processo de desengajamento. Complementarmente, uma vez que o registo destas características em contexto escolar nem sempre está disponível, optámos por tipificar um conjunto projetos/ações que implementam medidas pedagógico-educativas e que nos poderiam ajudar a identificar estes alunos (Tabela 1).

Tabela 1: Tipificação dos projetos/ações escolares potenciais reveladores de características individuais de desengajamento escolar

Tipo A	promovem o apoio e a orientação pessoal e escolar dos alunos, quer a nível comportamental, quer a nível das dificuldades de aprendizagem, como é o caso da tutoria;
Tipo B	privilegiam o envolvimento dos alunos no seu próprio percurso escolar, nomeadamente, através do planeamento, da monitorização do seu processo de aprendizagem e da promoção da aprendizagem cooperativa entre pares;
Tipo C	têm como prioridade combater o absentismo escolar, seja através da monitorização das faltas dos alunos, seja da consequente a conexão com as Comissões de Proteção de Crianças e Jovens em risco (CPCJ) ou outras instituições e organismos;
Tipo D	visam criar condições para um clima positivo de escola e de sala de aula, prevenindo a violência escolar e a indisciplina.

Para além de se identificarem alunos com características de APEF ou de desengajamento escolar, uma outra dimensão (APEF) pareceu relevante para possibilitar o prosseguimento do estudo: saber se existem ou não alunos já em abandono escolar precoce. Constatada a permanência na escola dos alunos identificados alunos com os traços indicados em cada dimensão, quisemos saber qual o seu grau de engajamento escolar. Assim, a última dimensão do PAAO recebeu o nome de um questionário, o SASAT – Success At School Assessment Tool (Jasińska-Maciażek & Tomaszewska-Pękała, 2017), cujo objetivo é precisamente recolher informações, perceções e opiniões dos alunos relevantes para o seu engajamento escolar, possibilitando-nos confirmar se esses alunos estariam em processo de desengajamento escolar ou já desengajados e, portanto, em abandono escolar oculto.

Tabela 2 - Quadro-síntese do Perfil do Aluno em Abandono Oculco (Oliveira & Azevedo, 2019, pp.57-58).

DIMENSÕES	VARIÁVEIS	INDICADORES
FRACO DESEMPENHO ESCOLAR	Baixo desempenho escolar	alunos com quatro ou mais níveis inferiores a 3 na pauta de final de ano letivo; alunos que ficaram retidos;
	Insucesso em disciplinas chave	alunos com nível inferior a 3, cumulativamente, às disciplinas de Português e Matemática;
	Retenção repetida	alunos que ficaram retidos mais do que uma vez ao longo do seu percurso académico;
	Total de retenções	número de retenções por aluno; ano(s) de escolaridade em que ocorreu;
ABSENTISMO	Frequência irregular	alunos com um número de faltas justificadas e injustificadas superior ao total permitido em todas as disciplinas (62 no 2.º ciclo e 68 no 3.º ciclo);
	Absentismo seletivo	alunos que excederam o número de faltas injustificadas a duas ou mais disciplinas;
	Absentismo efetivo	alunos com um total de faltas injustificadas a várias disciplinas três vezes superior (1/período) ao total (186 no 2.º ciclo e 204 no 3.º ciclo) e/ou alunos com alínea de retenção por faltas em pauta;
COMPORTEAMENTO/ INDISCIPLINA	recusa da autoridade/ supervisão	Ocorrência da infração à alínea f) do art.º 10.º da Lei n.º 51/2012;
	comportamentos antissociais	Ocorrência da infração às alíneas k), l), p) e q) do art.º 10.º da Lei n.º 51/2012;
	falta de autocontrolo e intimidação	Ocorrência da infração à alínea i) do art.º 10.º da Lei n.º 51/2012;
	desrespeito pelas regras e pelos membros da comunidade educativa	Ocorrência da infração às alíneas d), g), s), t) e u) do art.º 10.º da Lei n.º 51/2012;
	indisciplina na sala de aula	Ocorrência da infração às alíneas b), c), d) e g) do art.º 10.º da Lei n.º 51/2012;

	medidas disciplinares corretivas (MDC) e sancionatórias (MDS)	Ocorrências registadas de MDC; Ocorrências registadas de MDS.
CARACTERÍSTICAS INDIVIDUAIS DE DESENGAJAMENTO	dificuldades de aprendizagem	Sinalização para acompanhamento através de planos específicos que implementem medidas dos tipos A, B, C e D (cf. pp. 54-55); Ocorrências registadas nos documentos dos planos específicos que implementem medidas dos tipos A, B, C e D (cf. pp. 54-55);
	baixas aspirações / baixa autoestima	
	dificuldade de relacionamento	
	desmotivação/ desinteresse	
	pouco empenho/ participação	
	tédio nas aulas	
	desorganização / falta de hábito estudo	
	dificuldades de concentração	
	dificuldades de integração/ desorientação	
APEF	APEF efetivo	Alunos considerados em APEF nos documentos da escola, nomeadamente na pauta final.
QUESTIONÁRIO SASAT	Interação Aluno-Família	Pontuação registada nesta secção de questões e em cada questão.
	Interação Aluno-Escola	Pontuação registada nesta secção de questões e em cada questão.
	Aspirações/ expectativas dos alunos	Pontuação registada nesta secção de questões e em cada questão.

A definição deste PAAO tornou possível a criação de um dispositivo que nos permitisse detetar e identificar os alunos (casos), procurando então perceber as trajetórias de cada um e, conseqüentemente, obter as respostas que procurávamos.

Assim, surgiu o Dispositivo de Identificação do Abandono Oculto (DIAO), inspirado no sistema de triagem de Manchester, aplicado ao serviço de urgência dos hospitais, com a finalidade de recolher informação pertinente, identificar os “sintomas” (as variáveis do perfil criado) em cada aluno e fazer uma avaliação da gravidade da sua situação, sendo que quanto maior a gravidade, maior o risco do aluno estar em abandono oculto (Figura 1).

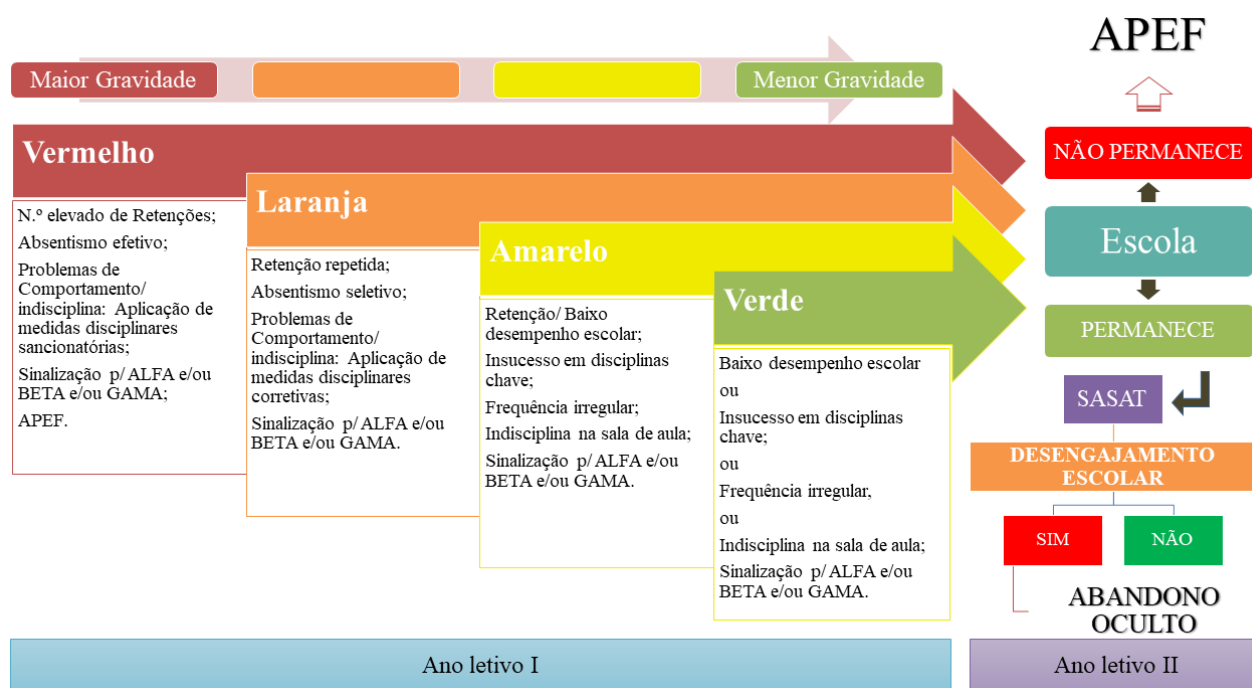


Figura 1 - Dispositivo de Identificação do Abandono Oculto (DIAO) (Oliveira & Azevedo, 2019, p.73)

A figura 1 permite-nos constatar dois momentos de aplicação do DIAO: um primeiro (ano letivo I) em que se identificaram os alunos nos quais foram detetados os “sintomas” descritos e os que foram dados como estando em APEF, distribuindo-se conforme a gravidade da sua situação; um segundo (ano letivo II) desenvolvido em etapas sucessivas e complementares: i) confirmação se os alunos identificados permaneceram/regressaram à escola ou se continuavam em APEF; ii) estando na escola, verificação da sua situação escolar e se estavam engajados ou desengajados, através do recurso à aplicação do questionário SASAT (Jasińska-Maciażek & Tomaszewska-Pękała, 2017); iii) determinação se o aluno está ou não em abandono oculto e qual o nível de gravidade.

Estando o DIAO organizado em níveis de gravidade, cada um deles, apresentando um conjunto de variáveis e uma vez que o abandono oculto, tal como o APEF ou o desengajamento escolar, resulta da interação de vários fatores, consideramos pertinente definir critérios de seleção que nos permitissem enquadrar cada aluno-caso em determinado nível de gravidade (tabela 3).

Tabela 3 - Critérios de seleção para cada nível de gravidade do DIAO (Oliveira & Azevedo, 2019, p. 120)

Nível de Gravidade	Critério(s) de seleção
Vermelho	alunos em APEF; alunos com pelo menos 2 das variáveis restantes.
Laranja	alunos com 1 variável do nível anterior; alunos com pelo menos 2 das variáveis deste nível.
Amarelo	alunos com 1 variável do nível anterior; alunos com pelo menos 2 das variáveis deste nível.
Verde	alunos com pelo menos 1 das variáveis deste nível ou do nível anterior.

A aplicação do DIAO exigiu o recurso a técnicas de recolha de dados frequentemente utilizadas na investigação naturalista, como a pesquisa arquivística ou documental e o inquérito por questionário, mas também uma abordagem quantitativa (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 1995; Afonso, 2005; Amado, 2014; Newby, 2014). Apesar de estarmos perante um estudo marcadamente qualitativo, as técnicas de recolha e análise de dados adotadas conduziram-nos a uma metodologia mista, pois os dados obtidos foram passíveis de uma análise quer qualitativa (a partir das categorias geradas pelo próprio DIAO), quer quantitativa (através dos programas *Microsoft Excel* e *SPSS - Statistical Package for Social Sciences*). Acrescenta-se que se criou um instrumento em Excel, no sentido de organizar a informação recolhida de acordo com as dimensões e variáveis do PAAO, nomeadamente a dos planos específicos para acompanhamento de alunos identificados com características individuais de desengajamento escolar (planos ALFA, BETA E GAMA).

No sentido de enfrentar o problema da ambiguidade, típica deste tipo de estudos, bem como de conferir validade científica ao estudo, recorreremos à triangulação dos dados recolhidos quer através do uso de técnicas diversificadas, quer multiplicando as fontes de informação. Para assegurar a qualidade dos dados procedemos a uma recolha em momentos distintos. Procurámos garantir também a fidedignidade e o anonimato (pelas autorizações, institucional e pessoal para o acesso aos dados dos sujeitos) e a representatividade (pela multiplicação do número de casos que foram objeto de estudo), assegurando a qualidade da investigação, bem como a hipótese de aplicabilidade e transferibilidade para estudos de caso similares (Amado, 2014).

Amostra

De um Universo de cerca de 800 alunos do 2.º e 3.º ciclos do Agrupamento-contexto, seguindo a estratégia de investigação definida, a aplicação do DIAO gerou uma amostra constituída por 120 alunos. Da nossa amostra, parte substantiva dos alunos-caso são do género masculino (n=74) e têm idades compreendidas entre os 11 e os 18 anos. Quanto ao ciclo que frequentam, 50% dos alunos (n=60) da amostra frequentam o 2.º ciclo e os restantes o 3.º ciclo. No entanto a divisão por ano de escolaridade não é tão homogénea: se no 2.º ciclo, dos 60 alunos-caso, metade frequentavam o 5.º ano e metade o 6.º ano; no 3.º ciclo, a maioria dos alunos-caso frequentavam o 7.º ano (n=41), seguindo o 8.º ano (n=14) e, por fim, o 9.º ano com 5 alunos.

Ainda que alinhados com a Comissão para a Igualdade e Contra a Discriminação Racial (CICDR) no respeito pela Declaração Universal dos Direitos do Homem e na defesa do “princípio da não-referência à origem étnica e racial, cor, nacionalidade, ascendência, território de origem, situação documental nas comunicações oficiais e internas” (CICDR, 2018, p. 88), dada a sua expressão, pareceu-nos pertinente incluir no estudo a referência a “etnias minoritárias”, feita de forma genérica e procurando eventuais efeitos que possam ter na sua origem a discriminação étnica. Assim, ainda caracterizando a amostra, dois aspetos relevantes: 23% da amostra é constituída por

alunos de etnia cigana (n=28) e 86 alunos têm apoio socioeconómico da Ação Social Escolar (ASE) e, desses, 59% com o escalão A (nível de apoio mais elevado).

Resultados e Discussão/ Findings and discussion

Aplicados os procedimentos enunciados, o DIAO gerou os resultados que podemos visualizar na tabela 4, viabilizando quer uma leitura global, quer uma leitura aprofundada dos resultados.

Tabela 4 - Quadro-resumo dos resultados da aplicação do DIAO (Oliveira & Azevedo, 2019, p. 141)

Nível de Gravidade	N.º de alunos							Faixa etária
	Identificados	ASE	Etnia Minoritária	Ano de Escolaridade	Variável	Situação Escolar em 2018/19	Características de	
Vermelho	53	A – 30 B – 3	22	5.º – 14 6.º – 14 7.º – 16 8.º – 8 9.º – 1	18 - APEF 36 - N.º Elevado de Retenções 36 - Absentismo Efetivo 12 - Processos Disciplinares (MDS) 29 - Sinalização Planos de Ação	17 – APEF 11 – Transferidos 25 – Matriculados: 6 - CEF 6 - PCA 13 - repetem plano estudos	24 (21) ¹	11 – 18 anos 34 casos entre 14 – 16 anos

Laranja	44	A – 30 B – 3	8	5.º – 10 6.º – 12 7.º – 15 8.º – 4 9.º – 3	12 - N.º Elevado de Retenções 3 - Absentismo Efetivo 5 - Processos Disciplinares (MDS) 16 - Retenção Repetida 23 - Absentismo Seletivo 13 - Participações de Ocorrência 21 - Faltas Disciplinares (MDC) 15 - Sinalização Planos de Ação	3 – APEF 3 – Transferidos 38 – Matriculados: 5 - CEF 3 - PCA 17 - repetem plano estudos 13 - novo plano estudos	23 (21) ¹	11 – 17 anos 24 casos entre 14 – 16 anos
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Amarelo	19	A – 15 B – 1	2	5.º – 4 6.º – 3 7.º – 9 8.º – 2 9.º – 1	5 - Retenção Repetida 2 - Absentismo Seletivo 1 - Faltas Disciplinares (MDC) 13 - Com 1 Retenção 15 - Baixo Desempenho Escolar 13 - Insucesso em Disciplinas-Chave 11 - Frequência Irregular 3 - Sinalização Planos de Ação	1 – APEF 3 – Transferidos 15 – Matriculados: 10 - repetem plano estudos 5 - novo plano estudos	6 (5) ¹	11 – 15 anos 10 casos entre 13 – 14 anos
Verde	4	A – 3 B – 1	1	5.º – 2 6.º – 1 7.º – 1	1 - Com 1 Retenção 1 - Frequência Irregular 3 - Sinalização Planos de Ação	4 – Matriculados: 4 - novo plano estudos	4	11 – 12 anos 4 casos

¹ Entre os alunos matriculados no ano letivo II

Numa primeira análise, uma constatação de facto: todos os alunos da amostra apresentam, em graus de gravidade diverso, risco de abandono oculto. Seguidamente, a partir precisamente do modo de funcionamento do “sistema de triagem”, os resultados evidenciam índices de gravidade muito elevados, pois cerca de 81% dos alunos (n=97) parece ter necessidade de “tratamento” emergente e urgente, ou seja, estão nos dois níveis mais graves de risco de abandono: vermelho (n=53) e laranja (n=44).

Um terceiro aspeto que se destaca é a influência que as duas variáveis introduzidas *a posteriori*, ou seja, a etnia e a situação socioeconómica parecem ter nas trajetórias destes alunos. Note-se que dos 86 alunos apoiados pela ASE, 66 estão nos dois níveis de maior gravidade e, desses, 60 são de escalão A. Também a pertença a uma etnia minoritária manifesta forte relevância no percurso

escolar destes alunos, repare-se: dos 33 alunos identificados, 30 estão nos dois níveis mais gravosos (22 no vermelho e 8 no laranja); e desses 27 (em 28) são alunos de etnia cigana.

Os resultados evidenciam, ainda, que as variáveis “absentismo” e “fraco desempenho escolar” – mormente o número elevado de retenções e a retenção repetida – parecem ter um forte impacto nos percursos dos alunos. Note-se que nos três níveis mais graves estas variáveis estão fortemente evidenciadas: se no nível vermelho se destacam o elevado número de retenções (n=36) e o absentismo efetivo (n=36); no nível laranja sobrepõem-se o número de alunos com retenção repetida (n=16) e com absentismo seletivo (n=23); já no amarelo destacam-se o número de alunos com pelo menos uma retenção (n=13) e com baixo desempenho escolar (n=15). Em diferentes graus e a diferentes níveis, conforme a literatura evidencia, é manifesto que estas duas variáveis potenciam o risco de desengajamento escolar, de abandono oculto e, naturalmente, de APEF.

Um quinto aspeto que se destaca nos resultados apresentados na tabela 2, é a faixa etária (entre os 14 e os 16 anos) em que se verifica o maior número de casos (n=58 nos dois níveis mais graves). Este resultado deveria merecer uma atenção redobrada, pois a maioria destes alunos-caso atingirão os 18 anos sem concluir o ensino secundário, podendo significar que, se nada for feito, estarão em risco de exclusão escolar e social, ou seja, de APEF.

Tomando em consideração a variável “características de desengajamento escolar”, expressa no DIAO pelo número de alunos sinalizados nos planos de ação ALFA, BETA e GAMA, e olhando somente para os 82 alunos matriculados no ano letivo II, constata-se que 51 apresentam características de desengajamento escolar, em concomitância com os outros “sintomas”, aumentando claramente o risco de abandono oculto.

Uma nota final: considerando os alunos que permaneceram na escola, a frequentar diversos percursos formativos, nos dois níveis de maior gravidade (n=63), aceitando que 13 destes alunos demonstram alguma resiliência, dado que iniciaram novo plano de estudos e, assumindo que, pelos “sintomas” que os restantes manifestam, evidenciam um desengajamento face à escola, como que incubando o abandono escolar efetivo, então podemos concluir que 50 alunos estão em abandono escolar oculto (42% da amostra inicial).

Conclusão/ Conclusion

Tendo em conta o objetivo que definimos, a primeira conclusão é clara: o abandono escolar oculto existe. O estudo tornou visível a existência de alunos que se “escondem” por detrás das estatísticas públicas e publicadas, que possuem características e percursos que se identificam com o APEF e que, provavelmente, estariam em abandono efetivo não fosse a obrigatoriedade legal de se manterem na escola até aos 18 anos.

A segunda conclusão complementa a primeira, isto é, estes alunos existem e têm um determinado perfil: apresentam condições de desvantagem socioeconómica e trajetórias educacionais caracterizadas por um fraco desempenho escolar, nomeadamente, um elevado número de retenções, traços de absentismo seletivo ou efetivo, problemas de comportamento e indisciplina e características individuais de desengajamento escolar (e.g. dificuldades de aprendizagem, baixa autoestima, desmotivação, desinteresse).

Podemos concluir que a obrigatoriedade de se manterem na escola até aos 18 anos é o principal fator que os leva a nela permanecer. Esta perceção resulta da constatação de que os alunos permanecem matriculados ao longo do seu percurso escolar, manifestando características evidentes de APEF ao longo de anos, mas apenas deixando formalmente a escola ao completarem os 18 anos. Aliás, o estudo evidenciou que, embora permaneçam na escola, os alunos vão-se alheando progressivamente, manifestando uma atitude de desinteresse e descrença face ao que a escola lhes pode dar e acumulando um conjunto de características que potenciam o desengajamento escolar.

Da apresentação e discussão de resultados anteriores, podemos ainda concluir que: i) a retenção e o absentismo, quando cumulativos, são poderosos preditores de trajetórias educacionais de desengajamento escolar e conseqüentemente abandono oculto e de APEF; ii) as condições socioeconómicas e a pertença a uma etnia minoritária potenciam o abandono oculto e o APEF; iii) este fenómeno manifesta-se, sobretudo, no 5.º, 6.º e 7.º anos de escolaridade e em alunos com idades compreendidas entre os 14 e os 16 anos, o que associado ao facto de que o APEF ocorre quando estes alunos atingem os 18 anos, nos leva a concluir que deixarão a escola sem obter as credenciais mínimas legais para a entrada no mercado de trabalho e para aceder a novas oportunidades de aprendizagem e formação, isto é, o ensino secundário ou equivalente ao ISCED 3 (Comissão Europeia, 2015).

Concluindo, resulta evidente que estes alunos em abandono oculto se mantêm na escola, fruto de um “círculo de ferro” normativo, sociopolítico, gerado em seu redor, que os impede de abandonar e os faz permanecer compulsivamente na escola, penalizando-os de muitos modos. Efetivamente, “além de permanecerem ocultos, o que evidencia desde logo um problema da maior gravidade, a escola tende a encontrar soluções (personalizadas) que não promovem suficientemente a sua inclusão, antes potenciam a lenta exclusão escolar (a maioria repete o mesmo ano de escolaridade, encaminham-se alguns alunos para percursos escolares menos qualificados)” (Oliveira & Azevedo, 2019, p. 155).

Assim, tendo-se constatado a realidade do abandono [escolar] oculto, emerge deste estudo a convicção de que, por um lado, a promoção da compreensão e alargamento do conhecimento deste fenómeno contribuirá para uma maior justiça escolar e social e, por outro, a deteção precoce destes

alunos através de dispositivos como o DIAO, facilitará o desenvolvimento e a implementação de medidas que previnam percursos de “exclusão silenciosa” e que potenciem o reengajamento dos alunos em abandono oculto (Shimoni & Portnoy, n.d.; 2013; Fanoiki, 2014; OCDE, 2017; Oliveira & Azevedo, 2019).

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EDUCATIONAL LEADERS AS PROMOTERS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SPANISH SCHOOLS

Joaquín Gairín* & Mireia Tintoré**

Abstract Presently, the subordination of schools to mandates of standardisation, competitiveness and selectivity reinforces educational inequalities and widens educational gaps. This conceptual article tries to recall the need to improve social justice in schools and describe the role of principals in this regard. The article offers an analysis of three topics related to leadership for social justice: (i) the importance of equity and social justice as a reference for educational leadership, (ii) the type of educational leadership that leaders require for social justice, and (iii) educational leaders as agents for inclusion and equity, and strategies to fight inequity. Based on the literature analysis, the results highlight that leadership for social justice is needed more than ever, given the increasing complexity and diversity in the school context. They also highlight that social justice is related to a more democratic, distributed, and transformational school leadership. And show that leaders who are agents of change can benefit from leadership for social justice as it proposes a direction for transformation, prioritising the values of equity, justice, commitment, and cooperation. The paper finishes by providing some examples of change in Spain and suggesting recommendations for promoting social justice.

Keywords Educational leadership; leadership for social justice; equity; inclusion; principals; high need schools

Introduction

The increasing complexity and diversity in educational systems worldwide highlighted numerous problems and injustices and brought leadership for social justice (LSJ) to the fore, making it one of the central topics of educational leadership at a global level (Ayers et al., 2009; Bogotch & Shields, 2014; Furman, 2012; Jean-Marie, 2008; Lindsey et al., 2011; Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Theoharis, 2007, 2009, 2010).

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Despite being an issue related to the history of humanity (Waite & Arar, 2020), the concern with SJ has become one of the central topics in educational leadership and management research in recent years (Gumus et al., 2020). Policymakers (Pont et al., 2008), educational leaders (González-González, 2014; Murillo & Hernández Castilla, 2011), and teachers (Pont, 2017) consider SJ a critical issue because, despite the advances, the achievement gap between students with different socioeconomic or ethnic backgrounds and opportunities is still vast. These inequalities – along with topics related to disability and learning difficulties (e.g., mental health concerns)- are significant barriers to educational progress.

It is essential to eliminate such disparities; thus, educational leadership and management can be crucial in making a fairer world (Oplatka, 2013; Robinson, 2017; Wang, 2016). The same applies to school leaders who are the ones who can take the concerns raised from the ground up and step forward on the path to fairer and more equitable schools (Robinson, 2017; Waite & Arar, 2020). The behaviours and practices of these school leaders are critical components to understanding and analysing leadership for social justice (LSJ) within schools (Flood, 2019). For this reason, the main objectives of the current research will be to explore some topics related to LSJ that we will describe more specifically in the next section, including the characteristics and practices of school leaders as promoters of social justice.

Objectives and Methodology

This conceptual study seeks to broaden the existing knowledge of LSJ by answering three questions that are the main objectives of this research (i) what is the importance of equity and inclusion for school leaders and leadership, (ii) what kind of educational leadership, and educational leaders, are needed to improve social justice in schools, and (iii) which strategies can use school leaders to promote equity and what are Spanish principals doing in this regard.

The analysis is based on the results from two reviews of the literature. One is the latest international and systematic review of the literature on equity, diversity, and inclusion in schools to date (Gumus et al., 2020). And the other is a review of the Spanish literature related to educational leadership (Tintoré & Gairín, 2022).

In the first case (Gumus et al., 2020), the authors applied bibliometric methods to map the literature on LSJ in education. They examined the Scopus database, searched for articles on this topic published in peer-reviewed journals until 2018, and selected 308 documents.

The essential reference sources for the Spanish literature review were the articles available in peer-reviewed journals listed in Scopus, Web of Science and InDICES-CSIC, published between 1990

and 2019, and based in Spain. Although the review analysed all kinds of topics related to educational leadership in Spain, we will only consider the 45 documents focused on SJ.

After analysing both reviews, as seen in the section that describes the state of the art, we delved into the three questions that guide our research using the information provided by the articles.

State of the art on SJ based on the results of the reviews

The systematic review on LSJ by Gumus and collaborators (2020) can be a good starting point to contextualise this paper and synthesise how research and practice related to LSJ has evolved and is currently positioned.

Gumus and co-authors' review covered from 1980 to 2019 and revealed that academic documents on educational LSJ were very scarce until 1996 when five papers per year were reached for the first time; this figure will not be repeated until 2003. From that moment on, the increase in the literature was continuous: between 2006 and 2014, the publication rate oscillated between 10 and 20 articles per year, and from that date, the figures moved between 20 and 30 publications per year. The authors also pointed out that the geographical scope of publication expanded from the initial area, basically Anglo-Saxon, to encompass a greater number of geographical regions, including more than 40 countries and all continents.

However, we cannot forget that LSJ depends significantly on context and circumstances (Oplatka & Arar, 2016; Waite & Arar, 2016) and, as the review did not describe the specific weight of Spanish academic publications, considering our objectives, we incorporated the results from a Spanish review of the literature (Tintoré & Gairín, 2022) into our study.

In Spain, the literature on LSJ has followed a similar evolution with a chronological delay: timid advances from 2000 until 2012. And a remarkable growth since 2013 and, especially, since 2016. It is interesting to note that, currently, LSJ is the most studied leadership model in Spain (Tintoré & Gairín, 2022).

Spanish literature on LSJ centred on themes like those cited by Gumus et al. (2020), so we classify them together. The documents focused on:

- (i) Characteristics and practices of inclusive leaders, especially addressing some forms of marginalisation such as socioeconomic, cultural, or ethnic vulnerability problems (Herrera-Pastor et al., 2019; León et al., 2018; Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2017, 2019; López Yáñez et al., 2013; Luque and Lalueza, 2013; Miller, 2016; Moral et al., 2018a, 2018b; Morales Ocaña et al., 2017) and in less quantity on physical disabilities or emotional vulnerabilities, even though there are exceptions (García-Rubio et al., 2014)

- (ii) How schools and school top or middle leaders can overcome barriers to be more inclusive, specifically:(a) the characteristics and practices of leaders who take care of equity and inclusion (b) the organisational or social problems that inclusive leaders face and how to solve them (i.e., building networks, seeking for support).
- (iii) The training of leaders to address SJ (see Table 1)

Table 1. Documents describing how educational leaders address inequity and marginalisation.

Characteristics and practices of inclusive leaders	Problems faced by inclusive leaders and ways to solve them	Leadership training to address social justice
Angelle & Torrance 2019; Fernández & Hernández, 2013; Gómez-Hurtado, 2016; Gómez Hurtado, & Delgado Algarra, 2018; Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2018; Hernández Castilla et al., 2013; Leithwood et al., 2020; Martínez-Valdivia et al., 2018; Moral, et al.,2018a,b; Murillo & Hernández-Castilla, 2011, 2014; Murillo et al., 2019; Valdés-Morales & Gómez-Hurtado, 2019	Amber and Martos, 2017; Azorín-Abellán, 2017, 2018; Civis-Zaragoza & Longás-Mayayo, 2015; Domingo-Segovia and Ritacco-Real, 2015; Flood, 2019; Furman 2012; Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2019; Longas-Mayayo et al., 2019; Luque & Lalueza, 2013; Moliner-García et al., 2016; Pàmies-Rovira et al., 2016; Slater et al., 2014; Silva et al., 2017; Theoharis, 2007; Tintoré, 2018; Tirado & Conde, 2016; Wang 2016	Arar, Beycioglu & Oplatka, 2016; Berkovich, 2014; Bogotch & Reyes-Guerra, 2014; Cambron-Mccabe & Mccarthy 2005; Moral et al., 2018; Furman 2012; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; León et al., 2018; Llorent-Bedmar et al., 2017, 2019; Sales et al., 2011; Slater et al., 2017; Tintoré, 2018

Source: by the authors, based on the analysis of the literature

From the information found in the documents in Table 1, we will try to respond to the three objectives of our research

Results

What is the importance of equity and inclusion for educational leaders and leadership

Education, like culture, health, or sports, is an activity that has a significant presence in all societies and is part of the political and social project characterising them. From this perspective, delving into the sense of education to improve its proposals and achievements cannot make us forget the intimate relationship with other aspects of the society where it develops.

Education must promote the integral development of each person and facilitate their socialisation process, and for this reason, it requires strong connections with families and the socio-cultural and economic environment. It is about considering the environment and interacting with it as a referential source and a space that benefits from the educational result. Unfortunately, and for decades, some academic centres have lived on the fringes of social reality and only recently and timidly have developed community projects (strategic environmental plans, opening of schools to the community, collaboration between institutions) and social projects (social responsibility, service learning, among others) (Tintoré & Gairín, 2022).

The cited connections are necessary to achieve educational purposes and are closely linked to social and economic development (OECD, 2006; Richmond et al., 2008; Bernard et al., 2009; Blancas, 2018). Strengthening educational institutions will be, in this regard, a key factor to increase the competitiveness of the social, economic, and productive structure and to promote the development of a competent and committed citizenry.

Social problems and challenges are, in this context, educational issues, just as educational issues must be considered as social problems. The pandemic linked to COVID-19 has shown the importance of schools for societies and the systemic relationships between education, health, family structure, and social context (Gairín & Mercader, 2021).

Educational development can contribute to social development and reduce social inequalities and injustices if we understand that these inequalities originated in the disparity of educational opportunities for various reasons (race, gender, culture, and socioeconomic level, among others) that can perpetuate or accentuate social exclusion. Their involvement should allow people to establish a responsible, open, and critical relationship with their environment, enabling them to move towards more just and equitable societies (Gairín & Rodríguez-Gómez, 2014, pp. 821-822).

The structural factors of the social and educational systems indeed influence educational development, but it is also true that its realisation passes through the action of the academic centres and the actors that interact there. In this sense, we speak of the social commitment of educational institutions and the transformative role that certain types of leadership can develop (Gairín, 2004a).

We cannot and should not forget that organisations are structures of and for society (Gairín, 2004b) and that their behaviour (the behaviour of all their people) has an ethical dimension that goes beyond the responsibility and individual behaviour of their staff (Colorado, 2020). Educational centres are spaces for social interaction that, respecting the social values of their environment, must promote new commitments to social improvement. The responsibilities include the fight for equity, inclusion and other aspects of SJ Educational centres, as social institutions, must necessarily contribute to the social and community development of their immediate context, being actively involved in reducing social differences (Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Tedesco, 2010; UNICEF, 2018) and assuming the social commitment that corresponds to them.

Fortunately, as Escudero (2005) reminds us, educational and social exclusion is not natural or episodic. Instead, it is a process developed and constructed in socio-educational contexts where school, personal and social elements intervene, and we can act to mitigate or combat the exclusion. Influencing social and community development promoting equity and SJ from educational processes is highly difficult if we cannot count on the involvement and commitment of local, political, civil and economic authorities in the context of action. General policies are indeed needed that include social obligations. However, it is also necessary that, in parallel, "there be ethical practices aligned at the level of authorities, territories, and educational centres" (Gairín & Rodríguez-Gómez, 2014, p. 823). From this perspective, promoting and impelling actions by schools, principals, and other community members against inequality is a matter of responsibility, courage, and commitment to constructing more just social realities. It also involves rebuilding some school realities by promoting social responsibility and organisational ethical commitment. Therefore, it is about advancing the relationships between social and educational commitment, which implies hard work that combines constant improvement in participation, equity and academic quality (Santos & Barca, 2009), directly linked to the SJ.

People's actions in educational centres are not neutral and are framed by specific values that are explicitly or implicitly present. Hence, it is necessary to highlight the ethical character of these institutions understood from a Levinasian perspective, based on otherness. Educational centres as organisations must stand next to the "other" and know that they have constituted thanks to that "other". As it is said from the personal perspective, "from the moment the other looks at me, I am responsible for them without even having to take responsibility concerning them; the responsibility for them rests with me. It is a responsibility that goes beyond what I do" (Lévinas, 2000, p. 80). Therefore, the issues of equity, inclusion and attention to diversity are not issues that an educational leader can or cannot address. Without them, one cannot be a true educational leader.

This perspective links with moral situations and ethical commitments and should compel school leaders to move from personal ethics to organisational ethics, from individual to collective values.

In other words, if the consideration of principals as agents of change who act on people cannot be separated from ethical considerations, neither must we separate organisational actions from the effects they also have on the people who interact with them.

What kind of educational leadership and educational leaders are needed to improve SJ in schools

LSJ will be the type of leadership that best responds to social problems. However, as many scholars have pointed out (Bolívar et al., 2013; González-González, 2008, 2014; Iranzo-García et al.; León et al., 2018; Moral et al., 2018a,b; Morales et al., 2017; Murillo et al., 2019; Sales et al., 2017, 2018), LSJ cannot be separated from other forms of leadership, such as pedagogical leadership and distributed leadership. The three leadership models provide the necessary elements to change educational organisations in an equitable and inclusive sense that attends at the same time to:

1. The empowerment and capacity building across the organisation (distributed leadership)
2. The improvement of academic and non-academic results of the students (pedagogical leadership)
3. The development of the conditions to promote each child so that all students can learn and use the skills necessary not to be left behind in our society (LSJ)

Once this point is made, let us delve into what LSJ is. Although a consensual definition has not been reached, and some authors considered LSJ as an umbrella term (Oplatka & Arar, 2016, p.360), several proposals coincide in considering LSJ as the ability of leaders to create a collaborative culture based on values of equity and inclusion, which helps students to develop their full personal and academic potential (Arar, 2015; Theoharis, 2009; Tintoré, 2018). Just redistribution, just recognition, and just representation are also considered characteristic elements of LSJ (Fraser, 2008).

According to Yuanyuan Zhang et al. (2018), LSJ is "a complex concept that is shaped by a multitude of personal, social, and political factors, as well as specific school and community contexts" (p. 67). LSJ is related to management by values, and in this sense, principles such as justice, respect, democracy, equity, equal opportunity, inclusion, and acceptance of diversity should be at the basis of the school culture (Blackmore, 2009; Rodríguez-Molina & Gairín, 2020). In developing this culture, some leadership practices are crucial, as noted by Leithwood et al. (2020, p.7) and Ishimaru and Galloway (2014): build a shared vision, model the school's values and practices, develop trusting relationships with and among staff, students and parents, build collaborative cultures and distribute leadership, structure the organisation to facilitate collaboration, develop productive relationships with families and communities, connect the school to its wider environment, allocate resources in support of the school's vision and goals, staff the instructional program, and, finally, provide instructional support. With all these practices, it is not intended that all students reach the same objectives but that each one gets the best of themselves.

LSJ also has to do with changes in management and organisation, as it is usually related to the introduction of more democratic and participatory organisational processes, in which all educational agents and bodies are given a voice (Jean-Marie, 2009; Lindsey et al., 2011). Furman (2012) observed that studies on LSJ highlight that LSJ is action-oriented and transformative, committed and persistent, inclusive and democratic, relational and caring, reflective, and oriented toward a socially just pedagogy (p. 195). LSJ, from an organisational point of view, should eradicate unfair and discriminatory situations from educational centres while achieving high academic quality (Gairín & Rodríguez-Gómez, 2014; Oplatka & Arar, 2016).

Although almost exclusively studied from a qualitative point of view, various authors point out the benefits of LSJ. Among them, we can identify, following Flood (2019): valuing and acknowledging diversity, creating support networks, facilitating dialogue, developing inclusive learning environments and reflecting on the practice.

After describing the type of leadership needed to improve SJ, we can describe leaders who exercise this type of leadership. What do some leaders do differently to identify themselves as promoters of social justice? Leaders concerned with SJ stand out for their capacity for dialogue and the ability for critical reflection on themselves and the circumstances accompanying them (Ayers et al., 2009; Furman, 2012). They are also characterised by humility, passion for their work, and relentless commitment to SJ (Theoharis, 2008). Faced with great difficulties, these principals try to increase expectations regarding the students' possibilities; they also improve structures to serve students better, build relationships with staff, families, and students, and, fundamentally, create cultures of support and collaboration (Tintoré, 2018). Flood (2019) compiled the behaviours that educational leaders undertook to achieve SJ within schools and classified those behaviours into three domains: school-specific, self-focused, or community-minded.

The obstacles these leaders face in their work, as identified by some authors (Macpherson, 2016; Theoharis, 2007; Tintoré, 2018), included, among others: lack of preparation or lack of capacity on the part of leaders or teachers, fear and stress of the situation, prejudices (deficit thinking about marginalised groups still prevalent in many schools), lack of support from families, lack of support from the administration and local or national policies, the valuing of technical leadership over moral leadership both in the field and in preparation programs, or the perceived lack of value placed on equity work.

Theoharis (2007) found that principals used different strategies to support themselves and suggested developing resistance to sustain their SJ agenda to cope with these difficulties. Macpherson (2016) described techniques used by the leaders to build SJ at schools: for example, abilities to gather information and formulate goals, to build relationships with staff, parents, and

students, or to challenge existing inequities, advocate for marginalised groups and empower others to act.

Principals as promoters of social justice. Guidelines and strategies to fight inequity, and some examples from Spain

The role of educational leaders must be reconsidered, taking as a reference the complex school reality and the communitarianism that they must develop if they plan to contribute to social development. From the perspective of critical pedagogy, they should strengthen their commitment to SJ, exploring its contributions to social development and promoting more democratic and inclusive social relations (Allen, 2006; Jean-Marie et al., 2009; Murillo & Hernández-Castilla, 2011; González-González 2014; Murillo et al., 2019). Undoubtedly, the new obligations cannot be separated from some of the characteristics that school leadership must have if it intends to contribute effectively to SJ: transformative, technically and morally balanced (Dantley & Tillman, 2006), distributed (Pont et al., 2008), and collaborative (Kochan & Reed, 2005).

It makes sense, in this perspective, to consider principals as agents of change, as community leaders and as promoters of social development through educational development. Faced with a traditional management model focused on the maintenance of structures and processes, LSJ proposes a direction for transformation, where the values of equity, justice, commitment, and cooperation take priority over the traditional ones of equality, efficiency, control or competitiveness; all this from the perspective that combines personal ethics with the social and ethical responsibility of the organisation.

Following the contributions of Nava (2003), principals must move from a management model based on the ethics of exclusion to a model based on the ethics of sharing characterised by three dimensions (Gairín, 2004a):

- The nature of decision-making recognises a space for justice, where the actions of the members are not arbitrary but must follow the rules of cooperation and a climate of mutual respect. Management is seen as a constant dialogue with persons, favouring the sharing of purposes and leaving deeply rooted perspectives that are not always consistent with the community's commitments.
- The principal's experience as the moral foundation of management. The expertise of principals as teachers will be essential to share teaching and management approaches, thus linking the needs of teachers with those of the institution effectively.
- Principal's actions as virtues, when decisions are made following what one is morally obliged to do. It will only be possible if the behaviours respond to specific values.

Within the framework of institutional autonomy and the reconsideration of schools as nodes of educational networks from which to promote social, political and cultural change, a rethinking of the role of principals makes sense. They expand their competencies and responsibilities and assume essential functions for an adequate exercise of responsible institutional autonomy, such as intervening in selecting the staff, participating in choosing a part of the teachers, or determining the internal organisational structure. In all cases, SJ must guide its activity, and principals must pay special attention to the care of vulnerable groups and develop more inclusive institutions. There are few studies on the performance of principals in vulnerable contexts, and it will be necessary to consider their competence profile (Esteban et al., 2019; Villarroel & Gairín, 2014; Rodríguez, 2020) or what intermediate leaders can do (Amber & Martos, 2017; Domingo-Segovia & Ritacco Real, 2015; Rodríguez-Molina & Gairín, 2020; Villarroel et al., 2019).

We are not talking about proposals but challenges regarding the orientations and strategies to act against inequality. The different educational centres can move forward, pointing out in advance that change is possible as shown by various institutional actions at the system, school and principals level.

The movement for the quality of education in Madrid, born in the mid-90s and focused on the marginal neighbourhoods of the southwest, is a clear example of how the efforts of different educational agents, authorities and the territory can reduce social injustices. This movement, made up essentially of teachers, families and socio-cultural associations, and with a strong link with the educational and social community, "achieved significant influence with public opinion, authorities and the school and social community of the area" (Casas, 2008, p. 211) and served the objectives of a) Demanding legal, budgetary and organisational measures that would compensate for the socio-cultural deficiencies of the affected population; b) Promote the involvement and coordination of all administrations in the educational task; c) Promote coordination between schools, mainly primary and secondary schools; and d) Elaborate and disseminate new theoretical and practical perspectives.

Other examples of synergies between educational and socio-community development programs can be found in marginalised neighbourhoods such as 'El Raval' in Barcelona, the environmental plans promoted in Catalonia or the support programs for educational centres that work in vulnerable or highly complex contexts. They all try to encourage social insertion through education, understanding education as part of social transformation.

From an organisational perspective, it is worth considering organisations as social spaces where values are present, and actions can be taken to configure new values and ways of making sense of what has been done. We speak of organisations as ethical spaces where values such as justice, reciprocity, cooperation or creativity are developed. The commitment to the SJ implies, among other

things, a political commitment, effective codes of conduct, transparency in the activities and coherence with the declared values. And in this context, we cannot forget that ethics in organisations is a dimension of the broader set that would be civic ethics.

However, we forget that educational intervention is morally and ethically based and that a good education already contains many principles of action of an ethical nature and is linked to SJ. When we say that the school must be autonomous and indigenous, open and committed, updated and critical, participatory and democratic, a school for opportunities, we say just that. And when we state that the school should focus on strengthening leadership, the professional development of teachers, the implementation of information and communication technologies, and the constant improvement, we are also saying just that (Gairín, 2003).

The entire proposal promotes an ethical and excellent school for all citizens. This proposal includes a commitment to a school that is democratic in its objectives, processes and ends, reflective and self-critical, comprehensive and not elitist, inclusive and equitable, attentive to diversity, plural and not indoctrinating, competent and not competitive, based on dialogue and participation and committed to the environment and social improvement, as corresponds to a progressive vision of education and the training that accompanies it.

Achieving this kind of school requires strengthening ethical behaviours while promoting technical improvement and implementing appropriate strategies. If we consider that training is not a neutral action, we should consider its development (its institutionalisation or organisation through structures) as not neutral. We must remember that the future depends not only on the evolution of production systems or the vitality of the values and citizen attitudes that direct and nurture them but also on the development that organisations achieve as a context where people interact. In this context, education makes sense as a conscious and intentional collective project, an expression of the utopia we want to achieve and a methodology to achieve it.

As we have maintained for a long time (Gairín, 2004a), we must reject those organisations that do not measure or consider the effects of their decisions on people and society, only think of themselves and ignore their status as social realities. We must criticise organisations that destroy themselves and cause harm to their members and the community that needs their services, due many times to the effects of pragmatism, amoral management and the transgression of ethical principles.

Institutional social responsibility is not an individual issue, but a collective one, and it manifests itself in a transversal way in all the work that is made in the schools: working on attitudes towards learning; taking responsibility for the time and spaces for learning; including individual values and institutional culture in the training content and assuming the mistakes made as a source of knowledge. As Lozano (2007, p. 13) points out, "educational institutions should strive to regain

prominence, to openly affirm their goal as an organisation, to strengthen the role of professionals and to exercise pedagogical leadership before administrations and society".

It is necessary to identify those issues that generate practices that can endanger coexistence, personal relationships, the educational possibilities of some students, the role of the academic centres or their democracy. Defending SJ at school means its transformation as a living community with the students and the educational community at the centre.

The following Table 2 collects some suggestions concerning SJ at schools, based on the proposals that Colorado (2020) raises to develop organisational ethics.

Table 2. Proposals for the promotion of SJ.

The social reality of educational centres	Some proposals to consider
Factors that influence the development of SJ in schools	Support from educational administrations and the management team to develop educational and social values. Increase the commitment to the values of the educational community. Promote positive and quality relationships. Respect for differences. Use consensus as a way to improve challenges. Develop pedagogical and distributed leadership. Align the PEC (Educational Project) and PCC (Curricular Project) with the school's needs.
Possible actions	Collaborative strategic planning. Promotion of the inclusive educational centre Give priority attention to vulnerable groups and situations of inequity. Incorporate proposals, cases and dilemmas about SJ into the programs. Systematic evaluation with ethical criteria. Training in values of the educational community Promote the existence of spaces for reflection and ethical dialogue. Involve the educational centre in social demands that are linked to educational processes. Create school ethical commissions and codes of ethics and conduct. Incorporate social responsibility in annual reports.
Professional competencies related to school management	Leadership based on values. Transformational leadership. Commitment to pedagogical development, resource management and managerial skills linked to adherence to equity.

Source: Colorado (2020)

The reflective process and actions to improve SJ should not ignore the possibilities and limitations of the context. Thus, the lack of training or the lack of involvement of teachers plays a fundamental role in individual behaviour. It is necessary to create and implement training courses and initiatives that reinforce and clarify the value system and awaken new values and principles in educational centres and communities.

Let us recall, in this regard, how several studies (Marshall & Oliva, 2006; Jean-Marie et al., 2009) highlight that, frequently, issues related to equity, democracy and SJ are ignored or marginalised in training programs for educational leaders, hindering a deep understanding of the subject and effective social action by them. Jean-Marie et al. (2009) suggest that using the dialogical framework derived from critical pedagogy could help educational leaders develop a profile conducive to promoting SJ and coping with changing social conditions. The activity of training leaders in the perspective mentioned above must combine the previous contents with the development of sensitivities and positive attitudes towards community work and action against inequalities and marginalisation processes.

In short, contributing to SJ from education implies, as Tedesco (2010) suggests, "broadening the view on educational problems, incorporating the vision that comes from studies on the profound social, political, economic and cultural transformations that take place in society" (p. 8); also, assume the action of transformation as part of the educational and social process. And in this, principals, teachers, families, students, and social and political agents need to be involved.

Conclusions

Based on the latest literature reviews on LSJ at the international level and in Spain, this article has explored three conceptual themes that can help improve equity in schools. The studies mapped the literature and identified the conceptual structure of the field, and the research has sought to delve into three specific topics.

First, we have shown that LSJ is needed more than ever, given the increasing complexity of our world and the way this complexity and diversity affects education. In this context, school leaders must develop actions that promote equity, not treating all students equally but ensuring that each pupil receives what they need to develop their full potential. To do this, marginalised students require very thoughtful, appropriate, optimistic, and realistic actions to overcome obstacles that students alone will hardly overcome. Educational leaders need to help and think about this change and transform schools into fairer places (Tintoré, 2018).

Second, the literature analysis shows the importance of adding transformational and distributed leadership elements to LSJ to improve organisations and connect with internal and external social

projects. The leadership style is as important as the attitudes, commitments, and responsibilities acquired in the fight against inequality and social problems. Linking leadership behaviours for SJ with other types of leadership, fundamentally leadership for learning, and distributed leadership can contribute to more fair and equitable schools.

Finally, we have addressed how leaders who are agents of change can fight for equity, providing some examples of change and suggesting proposals for the promotion of SJ. Endorsing and impelling those proposals requires democratic leaders, with strong convictions about the role of the school in the fight against inequality, with an excellent capacity for dialogue, sensitivity towards students' problems, and skills to promote collaboration between students and teachers, and with the social community. Their strengths will be linked to their ability to detect problems, generate alternatives, and improve social cohesion.

The study of principals committed to SJ is a general concern, although it is incipient in some contexts and lacks concrete and contextualised analysis. For this reason, it is crucial to approach publications from non-Anglo-Saxon countries and share ideas and examples from those areas, which can be transferred to other geographical locations. This characteristic is perhaps the essential element of this research focused on Spanish literature. The examples of leaders in Spanish educational institutions who position themselves as agents of change have shown that improvement is possible. Although much of the bibliography and samples correspond to Spanish cases, we believe that this analysis can be extrapolated to very diverse contexts, as long as they are adapted to the particular circumstances of each place.

However, as in all research, there are certain limitations to this study: First, we have delved into three topics related to LSJ without exhausting these topics. In addition, there are many other issues related to SJ to be analysed, which we have not addressed. For these reasons, we suggest continuing to delve into everything that can promote equity in educational organisations and the tasks of the leaders working in them.

We can reasonably say that the principals' commitment to SJ is one expression of the proactive direction focused on the internal and external community of the educational centres. Internally, there is a constant concern to promote collective projects based on values of equity and inclusion, paying particular attention to the different individual or collective vulnerabilities that may arise. Externally, there is empathy with the social reality that involves a commitment to the fight to overcome inequity and alignment with unjust situations that affect education or educational community members.

Advancing in LSJ requires a shared vision on the social commitment of education, developing and improving relationships of trust between the community and with the environment, enhancing

coherence between school statements and practices, developing distributed leadership and maintaining supports that allow all students to develop their abilities; also fighting to eradicate unjust situations and inequity in educational centres (Leithwood et al., 2020; Ishimaru & Galloway, 2014).

Many of the contributions reviewed go beyond the mere traditional concept of legal justice to introduce us to other aspects linked to equal opportunities and human rights, bringing us closer to the idea of social justice. As Montané (2015) points out, when we promote citizens' rights to achieve a fairer world, terms such as legitimacy, dignity, justice, recognition, participation, and commitment acquire whole meaning.

Social justice is an ethical, political and legal imperative that materializes primarily in social and educational policies and the ethics of relationships (Montané, 2015:106). Educational institutions are, in this regard, committed to promoting human capabilities to help reduce the structural, institutional and personal elements that prevent the full development of people. Thus, a proactive conception is adopted (Murillo and Hernández, 2011) when ensuring people's active and equitable participation in society.

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PAROCHIAL SCHOOL VITALITY

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Abstract Catholic schools in the United States face severe challenges to financial stability. Decreasing enrollment and increasing expenses are negatively affecting school budgets and threatening school vitality. Parishes consider closing or consolidating schools facing economic challenges. Catholic schools utilize vitality metrics to create school profiles that focus on financial viability factors such as enrollment, tuition collection, alternative revenue sources, and parish subsidy. However, evaluation of school vitality places significant emphasis on the financial threshold for a parish to support its school. This study sought to understand the relationships between Catholic parochial schools and their sponsoring parishes to contribute to the larger concept of school vitality currently in use. The study recommends two further parish vitality factors representing the interconnectivity of a parish and school, integration of organizational structures and development, and maintenance of parish identity to broadening the understanding of parochial school viability beyond financial resources.

Keywords Viability, vitality, parish identity, Catholic education, parochial school, relational trust

Introduction

Catholic school enrollment is in a steady decline. Over the past decade, 20% of the Catholic schools in the United States have closed (National Catholic Education Association (NCEA), 2016). Studies of the Catholic Archdiocesan schools in Saint Louis and Chicago offer alarming statistics for the viability of many Catholic schools across the country. James et al. (2008) discovered school viability correlated with the total average enrollment of 200 students within the Archdiocese of Saint Louis while Lundy (1999) reported viable enrollment to be greater than 175 in Chicago. Substantial revenue is required to maintain excellent academic programming and provide students with support necessary for their educational experience families investing in Catholic education expect. Typically, tuition collection contributes to 62% of income, making it the largest revenue source for

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Catholic schools (McDonald & Shultz, 2010). Heavy reliance on tuition collection ties student enrollment to financial viability.

This study sought to understand the relationship factors between a parochial school and its sponsoring parish, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of Catholic school vitality. Traditional parochial schools struggling with viability must reflect upon the school's financial sustainability and consider varying strategies to generate revenue. It is imperative to examine schools with exemplary parish relationships and demonstrate positive enrollment trends and financial viability to ensure the future health and strength of Catholic schools.

Schools operate at the behest of their sponsoring parish to fulfill the educational mission of the church. With the financial stability of Catholic schools under significant financial stress, Catholic schools and affiliated parishes must have a realistic understanding of the school's vitality. School financial viability is a substantial factor in determining a school's sustainability, and a parish's capacity to support its school is foundational to school viability. Diocesan support helps ease Catholic schools' organizational and financial strain; however, the ongoing decline of enrollment remains a significant threat to school viability.

Catholic schools need to evolve the current concepts of school viability to include an understanding of school vitality to ensure the endurance of parochial schools. Innovative solutions are possible when a school understands its challenges and crafts a shared vision with its parish. Decreasing enrollment and increasing operational costs require Catholic schools to seek alternative models to stay economically viable. Many models have proven to improve the financial viability of schools; however, transitioning into a financially viable model often leads to the loss of the parochial identity. Financial viability is essential to parochial school sustainability, but additional factors worth evaluating may be neglected by parochial school leadership.

Guiding Questions

Do strong parish and school relationships correspond with more robust school vitality?

What do parochial schools with strong vitality do to maintain parish relationships?

How does the relationship between the pastors and principals affect school vitality?

Where are the opportunities for schools and parishes to couple, and what degree of coupling is optimal for school vitality?

Review of the Literature

The numbers of students in Catholic education, and Catholics attending mass, are in sharp decline across the United States. Religious disaffiliation is the term associated with people leaving a

particular faith. Manning (2018) indicated the difficulties determining the causes of this decline within the Catholic Church stating, "it is hard to identify with precision what the cause or causes may be...large scale Catholic disaffiliation cannot be attributed primarily to discontent with Church teachings, clergy sex abuse scandals, or society-wide liberalization of traditional values" (p. 27). Practicing Catholics' beliefs on social issues correlate with American culture in general. It is difficult to pinpoint specific issues to attribute to disaffiliation. Still, Catholics' increasing acceptance of same-sex marriage leads Manning to claim, "Catholics' moral views are increasingly diverging from official Church teaching and approximating popular opinion" (Manning, 2018, p. 30). Yet, many of these practicing Catholics are not leaving the Church.

Manning (2018) pointed out the shift away from the Catholic church is not disaffiliation but rather a shift in Catholic imagination. The Catholic imagination is how Catholics currently view themselves and their place with the Church. Attributing the decline of Catholic participation with Catholic institutions to either disaffiliation or a re-imagination of Catholic identity has significant implications on Catholic school relevance in modern American culture. Re-engaging disaffiliated Catholics to the church and employing practices to encourage Catholics to rediscover the importance of church participation is a daunting task. A clear vision of the Church is required before comprehensive strategies can be employed to counter disaffiliation or encourage re-imagination. Catholic schools, as evangelical arms of the church, require this vision to fulfill their mission.

In addition to disaffiliation, disintegration has been a cause of decreasing enrollment in Catholic schools. Disintegration occurs with a demographic shift in a community. Urban Catholic schools increasingly have to deal with disintegration as Catholics move out of urban areas and into suburbs. Whether through disaffiliation or disintegration, the parochial model for Catholic schools has been slowly deteriorating. Insufficient enrollment, financial stresses, and a loss of parish connectivity contribute to increasing parochial schools closing or consolidating.

Welsh and Campbell (2011) examined the disintegration of the parochial school system in Ohio, which closed 17 of its 18 schools between 1960 and 2006. Although they attributed these closings to the changing demographics, a steady financial downturn, and a significant reduction of Catholic families within the urban city, they reported the closures of these schools to the lack of Diocesan support and not the Catholic culture or community. The authors concluded that even though the school populations were increasingly composed of non-Catholic students, their culture, and community kept them afloat for as long as they did. Additionally, the schools had lost their parish identity and the parochial support, both financial and spiritual, which accompany a strong school/parish relationship.

Transformation of Catholic Imagination

Manning (2018) reported that Catholics today are no less spiritual than they were in the past, but their current imagination is more secular. He indicated there is an opportunity to work with contemporary Catholic imaginations to rebuild an inclusive and supportive imagination of Catholic education. Frey et al.'s (2004) research on Catholic high school students' spirituality indicated Catholic high school students demonstrate a high level of spirituality and discovered a correlation between student spirituality and hope. These students maintained their spirituality and hope even though they were less engaged in the institutions of the Catholic Church.

Brennan (2011) supported the importance of community to the Catholic imagination, "Roman Catholic communities need to unify in faith toward knowing who they were, who they currently are, and where they are going as a community-of-persons" (p. 29). Frabutt et al. (2010); Murphy (2002) and Crea et al. (2015) reported Catholic education is faced with more than a crisis of Catholic culture, but also one of a grounded local Catholic community association. Murphy (2002) connected Catholic imagination to the community stating, "What is often forgotten is that community is necessary to remembering and telling the stories by which people define themselves" (p. 6). Examining how Catholics engage in community is beneficial to understanding the Catholic imagination. Catholic schools and their built-in communities are primed to assist in transforming the Catholic imagination.

Manning (2018) pointed out the challenge of transforming Catholic imagination within the minds of potential Catholic families with school-age students. Catholic imaginations shifted as "parents who experience a vestigial desire for their children to receive the sacraments but who cannot see what the added benefit a Catholic school offers when compared to an excellent public school" (p. 40). Catholic schools must distinguish themselves in the minds of potential families. Cook and Simonds (2011) presented a solution: "Catholic schools should set a new course for the future by making relationship building the distinctive purpose of all school programs" (p. 322). Reinforcing the Catholic imagination is possible through cultivating personal relationships within the school and parish community. To transform the Catholic imagination of families, Crea et al. (2015) recommended that Catholic educators foster a connection between families, the school, and the Church to immerse students in a consistent Catholic environment.

Perl and Gray (2007) examined the effects of attending Catholic school on the probability of remaining Catholic. They found 71% of responders who attended Catholic elementary school, and at least three years of Catholic high school, correlated positively with maintaining their Catholic imagination and did not disaffiliate with the church. They stated, "attending Catholic high school occupies a large portion of day-to-day life and seems likely to enmesh one in an array of close, dense, social ties-creating an experience of living in a Catholic community" (p. 278).

If rebuilding the Catholic imagination requires strengthening parish and school relationships, then the relationship between the parish and parents of Catholic school students need to be cultivated. Frabutt et al. (2010) presented the parental role in Catholic education and its importance to parish life from the pastor's perspective. Because Catholic school students often attend their parochial school from a young age to young adulthood, the Catholic parish and school become a "second home" for students and their parents. Frabutt et al. (2010) conducted a study of U.S. pastors to understand their perspective on the roles of parents in Catholic education. Their review of Church documents concluded that collaboration among parents and the Church is essential to supporting Catholic education. Additionally, parents recognize the importance of the community to student education through engagement with the parish community. Pastors expressed the need to improve engagement with the parents of Catholic school students as a dominant theme to improve parish and school community and ensure the parish and school are viewed not as two distinct entities but rather as a "unified whole" (p. 42).

Catholic School Leadership

Code of Canon Law 519 (1987) designates the hierarchical structure of the Catholic Church, in which Bishops have legislative, judicial, and executive authority of a diocese, and pastors work at the behest of the bishop. Weiss (2007) described the Catholic school hierarchy with the pastor the extension of the bishop and the principal an extension of the pastor. The Catholic schools operate at the will of the Bishop and Pastors.

Convey (1999) presented the feelings Clergy had about the Catholic school system within thriving Catholic schools with a growing enrollment, especially suburban areas, and reported the highest assessment of the worth and quality of Catholic schools. Although bishops and priests hold Catholic schools in high regard, it is noteworthy to see discrepancies between Clergy on their views of Catholic schools. They presented the characteristics of Clergy that influenced perception. "It is critical to note that priests directly involved in Catholic schools are among the most supportive of them, as are many younger priests who are likely, in due time, to become pastors of parishes with schools" (p. 260). Subsequently, Convey (1999) pointed out the lowest assessment reported by Clergy in stagnating or declining enrollment areas. Additionally, they stated that priests with unfavorable views of schools are assigned to parishes without schools and indicated this might skew the data. They reported a concerning trend that "weaker support for Catholic schools, particularly in the assessment of Worth, by some pastors of parishes without schools and some priests who have not had a Catholic school background themselves" (p. 261).

Parochial schools fulfill the parish's mission; however, a frustration pastor of parishes with schools report is the decreasing enrollment (Frabutt et al., 2010). They stated the frustrations of pastors who determine parents view the parish schools as "private rather than parochial" (p. 37). Belmonte and Cranston (2009) reported this reality as well, "faced with the contemporary society,

characterized by a plurality of beliefs and experiences, it cannot presume all students, family, and teachers are fully committed to Catholic traditions" (p. 301). Although many parents are not active parish members (Lundy, 1999; Welsh & Campbell, 2011), it is vital to increase the number of parish families who attend the parish school.

Interviewing experienced pastors of parishes with schools, Frabutt et al. (2010) indicated many pastors recognized the opportunity to reframe the parochial school by "making the parish community aware of the need for and importance of [the Catholic] school to the future of our children in the parish" (p. 37). As such, they authors showed parent involvement as integral to the reframing process: "new governance models emerging in dioceses throughout the United States require deep and meaningful partnerships with parents to ensure accountability and transparency in school operations" (p. 37). Reframing the mission, vision, and philosophy is necessary to re-establish the importance of parish families having their children attend the parochial school (Frabutt et al., 2010).

The organizational design of Catholic parochial schools is essential to school vitality. Weiss (2007) reported a strong collaborative relationship between pastors and principals might help stabilize Catholic school vitality. They stated, "The shared relationship between these two key players, the parish pastor, and school principal is essential for the life and future of the Catholic education" (p. 9). However, the Churches hierarchical organizational structure is an obstacle to pastor and principal collaboration. As the bishop's representative, the pastor has the direct and legislative authority to administer the school (Weiss, 2007). Essentially, principals recognize the legislative authority of the pastor and pastors to recognize and grant the school principal the appropriate level of autonomy to administer the school. They concluded that the hierarchical organization of the church should not be applied to Catholic schools. Finally, they said pastors and principals must "examine their relationships in the context of how they view each other within the organization" (p. 15), and roles must clearly be defined.

When these roles are not clearly defined, problems arise between pastor and principal as each views the other as not staying in their appropriate lane (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). Belmonte and Cranston (2009) stated, "there was general confusion as to the precise nature of the relationship between the lay principal and the local church, suggesting that there was little evidence of a functioning relationship among principals and priests" (pp. 304-305). They elaborate by stating, "Principals reported many priests were authoritarian" (p. 305). Although Canon Law 519 (1987) grants this authority to pastors, the lack of collaboration is detrimental to a principal's ability to fulfill the school mission (Belmonte & Cranston, 2009). Belmonte and Cranston (2009) reported the key finding to be "priests need to step away from the hierarchical views and work in collaboration [with principals]" (p. 311). Weiss (2007) concluded principals to be empowered by pastors to "exercise knowledge of leadership and administration for the effective operations of the school" (p. 20).

School Models and Governance

Goldschmidt and Walsh (2011) identified nine distinct Catholic educational models: parish schools, private schools, inter-parish schools, Diocesan schools, consortium schools, private school networks, K-12 school systems, university partnership schools, and faith-inspired charter schools. They determine successful governance models embrace "the articulation of mission, policy development and enforcement, the establishment of core priorities, and employment and evaluation of key leadership" (p. 14).

Parochial schools owned and operated by a single parish are the most prominent governance model (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2011). The parochial school is legally incorporated with its parish and bound by civil and canonical law. The pastor has the ultimate authority to hire the principal and teachers. Principals and teachers work "at the behest of the pastor as the administrator over the educational functions of the school" (p. 15). Although the pastor grants the principal the authority to run the school, the level of control the pastor allows the principal varies between parishes (Goldschmidt & Walsh, 2011). They presented the relationship between the school and the parish as pivotal to both the school's vitality and viability.

Britt (2013) cited enrollment and finances as the most distinctive and significant challenges for many parochial schools. James et al. (2008) developed a predictive tool that evaluates total enrollment, enrollment trends, and median household income to determine Catholic school viability. They presented sustained enrollment counts of under 200 students as the threshold for parish school viability. Lundy (1999) reported a similar enrollment threshold of 190 student enrollment counts sustained over time. The enrollment challenge facing the parochial school system is real, with a negative enrollment trend in the United States (NCEA, 2020).

Tuition rates have steadily risen over time to offset the rising operational costs of Catholic schools (James et al., 2008). Goldschmidt and Welch (2013) indicated that tuition costs make up 64% of Catholic school budgets. James et al. (2018) stated that medium household income contributes significantly to school viability, with higher-income families contributing a more significant portion of tuition costs. Unfortunately, tuition is not enough to maintain parish Catholic school viability. Britt (2013) stated, "Over the last several decades, however, not much has been done outside of closing and consolidating schools" (p. 338). They indicated new governance models are not being applied sufficiently, as "the single administrator model (principal only) and consultative board approach still dominate the way Catholic schools are structured and governed today" (p. 338). This model is inadequate as it frequently relies only on tuition and parish subsidies to overcome financial deficits.

Britt (2013) refers to parish schools that reorganize with other like-minded parish schools into a single school entity rather than discontinue Catholic education altogether as a consolidated school model. Wolsonovich et al. (2018) concluded the predominant reason for adopting the regional Catholic school is "diocese have decided to reorganize their parish schools into various types of regional school systems in which the schools collaborate to increase their financial longevity and academic competitiveness" (p. 175). Furthermore, they presented academic competitiveness and financial viability as the most common reasons governing boards reorganize schools into the regional or inter-parish school model. They showed governing boards had a positive perception of school reorganization because it made them "more attractive to families" (p. 175). Seventy-eight percent of respondents claimed reorganization from a parish to a regional system was necessary for survival, and 83% of respondents believed the reorganization strengthened the school's financial viability (Wolsonovich et al., 2018).

Britt (2013) presented the top five reasons governing bodies associate the necessity for consolidation as "financial challenges, enrollment decline, centralized administrative responsibilities, building maintenance, and facility upkeep, and inconsistent finances between schools" (p. 348). They found the discrepancy between school successes against the reasons for consolidation and indicated the longer-term viability of consolidated schools to be inconsistent. They presented the financial implication consolidation had on the budgetary line items of tuition, parish subsidy, and development then reported a troubling contradiction, "Participants agree that the system model has improved finances, yet over half of the systems reported that they were not able to balance their operating budget at least once over the past three years" (p. 356).

Although enrollment trends were expected to increase after three years, only 11% of the schools realized enrollment improvement, and 37% continued to experience enrollment decline with a 51% majority experiencing stable enrollment. Enrollment data presented by Britt (2010) contradicts the perception of governing bodies that consolidation will increase enrollment (Wolsonovich et al., 2018). They indicated nearly "three-fourths of the systems reported that schools closed at the time of consolidation or since consolidation occurred," with a third of the remaining school' enrollment declining greater than 5%. In addition to enrollment concerns, Britt (2013) recognized expected financial viability gains are not always realized.

Britt (2013) reported parish subsidies fell "from 22% to 20%" of the budget after reorganization (p. 348). Although Goldschmidt and Walsh (2011) stated parish subsidies should be no more than 25% of a school's budget to maintain financially stable, consolidation results in a decreased subsidy for the school. This decrease is concerning because multiple parishes support a consolidated school (Britt, 2013). Wolsonovich et al. (2018) pointed out "it is difficult to convince wealthier parishes of the need for parity among participating schools, where wealthier parishes shared their resources

with the school system, thereby assisting in the financial support of the less wealthy parishes" (p. 181).

Consolidated schools must increase alternative revenue sources to maintain a balanced budget (Britt, 2013). The average development line item reflects 20% of the regional system budget, which is more than double the parish school's national average (Britt, 2010). Britt (2013) and Wolsonovich et al. (2018) reported school leadership, including governance boards, is highly confident in their abilities to make their development budgets. Wolsonovich et al. (2018) indicated consolidated schools demonstrate significant improvement in school development planning and implementation of strategic plans. Both Britt (2013) and Wolsonovich et al. (2018) concluded reorganizing to a regional system could be an effective and viable strategy to provide Catholic education when traditional parochial schools are no longer financially viable. Schools that choose consolidation instead of closing face an uphill battle to remain viable. Britt (2013) pointed out unsuccessful consolidated schools may still close when parochial schools fighting for survival wait too long to begin the consolidation process.

Methodology

Study Participation

Three parochial schools and their principals located in the western region of the United States participated in this study. All were accredited by the Western Catholic Education Association (WCEA) within the past five years and recommended by their Diocesan Office of Education (DOE). Importantly, an exemplary relationship between parochial school and sponsoring parish was the primary criteria for recommendation.

Data Collection Sources

The three participating schools provided their WCEA accreditation self-study report and the visiting team's report, the school principal participated in an interview, and further school data collected from the diocese in which the schools were located. The schools belong to the WCEA therefore, are required to produce a self-study report every six years, implement an action plan from the previous self-study, and present data on performance indicators. Schools identify strengths and develop an action plan addressing the critical goals identified through the evaluative process.

1. Accreditation Documents

The WCEA self-study is a comprehensive study of a school's status, the progress made towards critical goals identified during the previous accreditation cycle, and an action plan for goal attainment for newly identified goals for the next accreditation cycle. Subsections of the

accreditation self-study pertain to *School Profile, Catholic Identity, School Mission, Philosophy, and Purpose* providing information regarding the parish and school relationship with the subsection for *Resource Management and Development* presenting school financial viability.

An independent team of Catholic teachers and administrators from the local diocese or Archdiocese and WCEA Accreditation Chair provided by the WCEA from outside the diocese writes the report. This team spends three days observing the school operations, conducting interviews with stakeholders, and reviewing the school's self-study report. Data from the accreditation team report verifies the school's self-study data and a rubric provides designations to justify the observations on each factor. The four designations are *Highly Effective, Effective, Somewhat Effective, or Not Effective* with the *Highly Effective* and *Effective* designations enabling schools to receive full accreditation status and maintain the six-year cycle.

2. Principal Interviews

Semi-structured interviews conducted with the three school principals consisted of eleven questions designed to flesh out parish and school relationships, administrative planning and promotion, student service, relationships between the parish and school stakeholders, parish perspective on school mission fulfillment, willingness of the parish to maintain support, and parish contribution to school financial viability.

Data Analysis

The principal interviews were audio recorded and later transcribed. Data analysis followed thematic analysis, which identified and reported patterns. Coding was done after reading the interview transcripts and accreditation documents multiple times and grouped patterns into categories according to the principles presented in *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers* (Saldana, 2013). Finally, the patterns and categories were organized into vitality themes, vitality factors, and the types of parish/school relationships expressed by the data.

Ethics

Ethics approval was granted by the dioceses of the schools involved and an Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved the Quality Improvement/ Quality Assurance (QI/QA) application and instruments. Informed consent was obtained from participants; interviews conducted privately, obtained documents strictly secured, and the letter A, B, or C assigned to the schools and principal to ensure anonymity.

Findings

Accreditation documents from the three schools provided data on twelve accreditation factors (WCEA, 2012). Of these factors, five provided information relevant to this study. The five accreditation factors (AF) used were:

AF #3: The school is Catholic, approved by the Local Ordinary (Cannon 803), providing opportunities for community worship and participation in the Sacraments, and promoting evangelization and service to the community. A school's ability to reflect upon and incorporate its Catholic identity into its daily life.

AF #4: The school's purpose is defined through the school's mission statement, philosophy, measurable Schoolwide Learning Expectations, Arch/diocesan curriculum standards (local curriculum standards where Arch/Diocesan standards don't exist), and other governing authority expectations. A school's mission and philosophy and the degree to which the school communicates to all stakeholders.

AF #5: The organizational structures of the school focus on high achievement of all students and communicate student progress to all stakeholders. The effectiveness of a school's organizational structure.

AF #9: Within the school's community of faith, students have opportunities to participate in support services and activities to assist them in accessing the curricular and co-curricular programs to achieve the Schoolwide Learning Expectations, Arch/diocesan curriculum standards (local curricular standards where Arch/Diocesan standards don't exist), and other governing authority expectations. How a school's support programs and service-learning opportunities are utilized for student achievement.

AF #10: The Pastor, Principal, and school board develop, implement, and monitor resources and plans to ensure and support high achievement of all students of the Schoolwide Learning Expectations, Arch/diocesan curriculum standards (local curricular standards where Arch/Diocesan standards don't exist), and other governing authority expectations. A school's ability to manage current resources, plan for long-term financial viability, and the degree to which financial resources are reported to all stakeholders.

Accreditation

The accreditation documentation showed School A and School C have a rich and robust history with their sponsoring parishes. Importantly, data reflects perspectives from well-established and recently founded schools with enrollment data proving relevant as a significant factor in determining school viability as between 175-200 students. School A and B have enrollments that exceed this minimum, while School C falls well below this viability indicator.

School A is considered a highly effective Catholic school with long-standing parish relationships and financial viability. An enthusiastic parish recently founded School B and it boasted the largest enrollment of all three schools and is well funded; however, establishing the traditions and relationships with the parish takes time to develop. School C has struggled with enrollment leaving its financial viability vulnerable. Although it is financially vulnerable, it demonstrates an excellent relationship with the parish. School C has vastly improved its financial viability since its last accreditation cycle under new school leadership.

Relationships

Multiple shareholder relationships were identified with the most frequently referenced categories as organizational alignment (71), committee (42), parish life (39), and service (28). Further subcategories were identified and those relationships reflect the intentional integration of the parish and parochial school organizations through either institutional structure or shareholder interactions. Predominate sub-categories were parish council (29), informal interactions (22), mission and philosophy (21), fundraising (23), mass (17), financial council (16), and school board (11). Importantly, documents and organizational alignment are present within governance models, strategic planning, and policies. These categories represent integration at the organizational level. Ministry, parish life, and service include personal connections between the parish and school stakeholders. These categories demonstrate opportunities for parish and parochial school stakeholders to collaborate or communicate.

Guiding Question #1: Do strong parish and school relationships correspond with more robust school vitality?

Mission and Philosophy. Two of the three schools have mission statements that mention the school as a parish ministry. Only School A's mission statement does not cite its connection to the parish. School C's mission statement was revised in 2009 and the self-study presents School C as, "a ministry of Parish C and a Catholic community committed to creating a learning environment that encourages students to be faithful and active Catholics who strive to know and serve God by knowing and serving others." The visiting team observed, "The mission and philosophy statements effectively reflect the Catholic identity of the school and the purpose of the school." The school operates as a mission of the parish. The mission and philosophy of School B affirm a connection to the parish. The mission statement defines "Our community" as "School, Families, and Parish." The parish formulated the mission statement in 2015, two years before the school's opening, and folded the school into the parish from its first official documents.

Governance Model. Parochial school governance models traditionally maintain the hierarchical structure with the pastor as the head of the school and the principal charged with maintaining the school's daily operations. All three schools follow this model. School bi-laws, policies, and ordinances reflect this relationship between school and parish. Parish A integrates School A into its organizational structure. The principal is a parish staff member and provides monthly reports to the parish council. The school's Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) chair, a school parent, is on the parish council. Additionally, a schoolteacher attends parish council meetings with the principal to report on school operations. Integrating multiple shareholder representatives on the parish council encourages collaboration and increases vitality. The school bookkeeper works closely with the parish finance council and the school's principal and finance officer reports quarterly to the parish finance council. Pastor A is an active school board member, and the school board includes a parish member. As noted, School A's mission statement excludes reference to the parish; however,

the level of the parish and school integration within executive councils and boards is exceptional and highly creative.

Like School A, School B maintains many organizational connections among its governance structures. Principal B is a parish staff member and attends all parish staff meetings. Principal B also attends parish council meetings. Parish finance councils and parish councils maintain oversight of school finances and budget. The school board is configured with multiple parishioners with specific finance, business, law, and development working with the school principal, pastor, and parent representation.

School C demonstrates similar integration with parish councils. The principal is a member of the parish council, and the pastor is an active member of the school board. Each school and parish employed a separate bookkeeper who the newly created parish office manager supervises. Although School C had to overcome inept business practice, it serves as an exceptional example of the parish and school relationship enabling the school to work through significant challenges to financial viability. School C is still in operation because of this vitality and the parish's belief that the school is worth supporting.

Financial Support. Financial support of Parochial schools by their parishes is often necessary for school financial viability. Financial support also affects the vitality of a parish and school community. Ownership and community buy-in are facilitated when a parish organization supports its school financially. School vitality reflects a parish's willingness to support its school. This section reviews parish financial support regarding subsidy, capital campaigns, and parishioner donations. School A has significant revenue sources beyond tuition, and therefore financial viability is not a concern. A strong relationship between School A and its parish is expressed through the financial support offered by the parish organization and individual parishioners. The parish maintains a modest subsidy relative to the school budget. Although the subsidy is modest, it is appropriate to the school's needs.

Parishioners of Parish A support their school well. School A is financially viable because of planned giving, trusts, and endowments established through its parishioners. Parishioners have participated in planned giving for the development of trusts and endowments. The trusts and endowments are significant to the school's viability, but their establishment speaks to the school's positive relationship with its parishioners. Parishioners are enthusiastic participants in school capital campaigns and fundraisers. Principal A adjusted the multiple fundraisers School A conducted. He eliminated all the "cookie and gift wrap sales" to focus on one significant annual school event that generated \$150,000 of additional revenue for the school. Parishioners were also instrumental in a recent capital campaign for school remodeling. Finally, the Knights of Columbus, a men's group dedicated to service, provides scholarships for School A students.

School B's financial viability is not in question as it is a part of a wealthy and rapidly growing parish. Finances are not a concern for School B, but the parish maintains its subsidy. The parish committed to increasing the parish subsidy from 3.5% of the school's budget in 2017 to 5% in 2019. School B is financially sound and does not require the increase to maintain viability; however, like School A, School B increased its subsidy for two reasons. The first brings the percentage in line with NCEA subsidy recommendations, and the second aligns the subsidy to the amount of tuition assistance offered by the school to parish families. Additionally, School B receives substantial donations from parishioners every year through an Annual Appeal, generating approximately \$200,000 for the school.

In 2016, Parish B raised 4.6 million dollars over six months to build School B. The parish took out a construction loan to acquire the funding necessary to complete the school. Parish B assumed the entire loan and payments were never applied to the school budget. Principal B reflected upon the community's excitement for this project, "[the parish] funded the school with relatively small donations. Because it was not a couple of big donors, the number of parishioners, and the amounts they donated built the school. I think it speaks to the collective mentality of the mission, and we all feel pretty proud about that." The parish sparked the creation of the school, and the school is financially viable because of the parish's vitality.

School C is not considered wealthy, and its financial viability has been questioned for multiple years. Nonetheless, the vitality of the school and parish relationship is essential to the ongoing operations of the school. School C receives a parish subsidy and substantial financial help from parishioners. Principal C indicated that the parish subsidy they receive is "substantial" and that the parish takes up a second collection every month for the school. The second collection generates an additional \$2,000 a month. Parish C is not located in an affluent part of the diocese, and this monthly donation is appreciated. Parishioners are active with school fundraisers, have provided the school with an endowment, and contribute additional contributions at the end of the year for tax purposes.

When an additional financial need is recognized, Principal C stated the parish "generally answers the call" and the pastor is willing to help cover expenses. Principal C has an excellent relationship with the pastor and can have informal conversations about the financial trouble the school has faced. School C's financial viability has vastly improved since the hire of the current principal. The school's current deficit is 10% of what it was when he began. Principal C attributes the improvement to parish faith in leadership. The vitality of the parish and school relationship was much stronger than their financial viability. A sense of togetherness with the parish contributes to the impressive vitality of School C.

Strategic Planning. Collaborative strategic planning is evident in each of the schools. Regardless of financial viability, each school and its parish work closely together to ensure the future goals are in alignment. The intentionality of parish and school organizations aligning with each other is significant for school vitality. School A demonstrates exceptional integration with the parish regarding long-term and strategic planning. Survey data is collected from parishioners, PTO, school board, and parish council every four years to ensure organizational alignment. There is frequent overlap between the governing bodies of school and parish councils and boards as pastors and parishioners are included in the makeup of School A's school board.

Parish A manages the finances of School A and operates capital campaigns for school facilities. Parish A has established a significant endowment for the school that provides about \$160,000 a year for tuition assistance and to supplement the operational budget. Additionally, Principal A indicated that the parish maintains a subsidy of \$30,000 a year for school operations. Although the school is in exceptional financial shape, the subsidy is maintained to ensure parish engagement with the school.

School B is firmly established within the organizational structure of its parish. Accreditation documents reflect the dedication and commitment Parish B has to its school. A significant amount of planning went into the school opening. Because School B did not exist, parish administration and various parish councils and committees collaborated to create the school. All parish and future school stakeholders were surveyed to ensure the needs of parents, parishioners, and parish administrations were met. Plans for funding, building, and school educational philosophy and models were established between 2014 and the school's eventual opening. School B opened fully funded with significant financial resources and a parish community of young families eager to enroll. The strategic planning of Parish B ensured the viability of School B upon its establishment. Since 2017, the school and parish have engaged stakeholders through surveys and joint committees to ensure continuous improvement of the school.

School C has a rich history; however, it has had significant financial challenges recently. School C's accreditation documents tell how the parish and school reflected upon its past and committed to a shared vision for their collective future. The school was simultaneously undergoing the school accreditation process and a diocesan initiative for parish and school strategic planning. The alignment of these three processes proved a major undertaking; however, the effort proved successful in helping the parish and school understand its history and define its future vision of a parish with a school. The strategic planning process engaged all stakeholders, helped uncover the parish's strengths, and future goals. Community and education were two of the five strengths identified by the strategic planning process. Both indicated the school to be a strength of the parish.

Principal C expressed the importance of the organizational structure to the school's viability and the parish risked its financial viability to protect the school's financial viability. The strategic planning process allowed parish and school to create plans to overcome their financial challenges. Without this shared vision, School C may already have been closed. The strategic planning process illuminates the substantial vitality of this community.

Guiding Question #2: What do parochial schools with strong vitality do to maintain parish relationships?

Parish Identity. Parochial schools with a strong relationship with their sponsoring parishes have a well-established parish identity. Data expressed the importance of parish identity to school vitality. School A's Self-Study claimed, "A strong working partnership between parish, school, and parents." School A's sense of parish identity is shared by the parish as well, "Parish members feel a strong sense of active membership in the growth of the school." The terms partnership and membership reflect the strong identity these two organizations share and indicate the school and parish's value for each other. Consistent personal engagement establishes parish identity. The pastor of Parish A is committed to building and maintaining parish identity. Pastor A hired a contractor who specializes in invigorating the parish community. Principal A elaborated "and so there have been a lot of ideas on how to get the school and parish working closer or get our parents involved." The utilization of the specialist reignited parish identity and improved vitality.

A feasibility study identified the need for Parish B to build a school. The parish's interest in building a school was described by Principal B as "through the roof." School B has significant parish support and strives to establish its parish identity. A goal identified by School B's accreditation process is "to build parish relationships, gather feedback, and earn trust to create a true community." School B recognized a lack of history with the parish that most parochial schools take for granted. An authentic community is critical for the school's future success. Although School B has a brief history within the parish, Principal B repeatedly discussed the excellent parish engagement. They acknowledged the pride the parish has for their new school and how they are striving to "live up to the pride they have." Principal B works to "make sure all parishioners know that we are their school. We belong to them." School B has an enthusiastic parish and now looks to maintain vitality through authentic relationship building. This process has begun as Principal B, and many staff members of School B are active parishioners and frequently participate in parish functions.

Accreditation documents for School C reflect an extensive history. The school recognized parishioners' "hard work and dedication" over the years and credits this commitment to the school's vitality. The ties between the parish and school run deep through multiple generations. The principal cited many students are second and even third generation. School C is grounded firmly in the parish's identity. Principal C believes that "they are more loyal than some of our families;

families tend to come and go.” A parishioner’s survey reflection conveys this sentiment concisely, “the school feels like family.” The school is a part of the parish identity as reflections such as these permeate their data.

Communication. A school that experiences excellent vitality has open lines of communication. On the report of findings, all three schools were recognized as highly effective communicators to the parish. School B employs a communications director who ensures messaging is consistent, clear, and received by all stakeholders in the school and parish. School A and C demonstrate excellent communication with the parish as well. When a communication gap presented itself, Principal A acknowledged it is usually their fault. Little evidence was found to suggest this happens often. Multiple stakeholders are involved in communication and safeguard against significant communication lapses.

Schools A, B, and C each employ similar mediums for communicating and promoting the events each are hosting. Weekly parish bulletins promote school events, share school successes, and elicit help with service projects. Likewise, parish information is distributed with weekly school newsletters. All three schools submit articles to a monthly diocesan newsletter. The parishioners of Parish A are encouraged to subscribe to the school’s weekly newsletter and Parish A creates a quarterly newsletter explicitly designed to inform the parish of the state of the school. Schools B and C provide the parish with an annual report. Similarly, both schools’ published documents inform parishioners of the schools’ financial viability and vitality. Student academic success, student service, and school functions are reported upon and promote the school’s vitality.

Service. Each of the three schools conducts service for the parish and participates in joint service opportunities. Each of the three parishes has examples of parishioners working in the school setting serving students and teachers. The accreditation self-study of School A emphasized the importance of school service to the parish community. It stated, “The school is an active member of the faith community through service to the parish.” Students perform multiple age-appropriate services for the parish, such as student letters to sick and homebound parishioners, grounds clean up, and clothing and food drive to maintain the parish’s community outreach programs. School staff is expected to facilitate service to the parish, and they do so willingly. School B offers a Student Leadership Group. Participating students serve at parish functions, including luncheons and dinners for various parish groups. Teachers host a student service fair, and multiple parish service options are included.

School C’s purpose is defined as to be “a service to the parish” by its principal. To fulfill this purpose, classes write letters to shut in, collect food for the parish poverty fund, help the parish groundskeeper with yard clean up, and sponsor parish families during Christmas to provide dinner and presents for families in need of extra help. Junior high students serve at parish luncheons,

dinners, and staff parish bulletins. Required family service hours are typical within the Catholic school system. Schools A and B connect school parents to the parish through this requirement. School B allows for service hours worked in the parish to contribute towards the school service hours with School A requiring at least five of their twenty service hours to the parish school.

At all three schools, the relationship of service is reciprocal. Parishioners participate in multiple service opportunities within the school. School B has parishioners volunteering in classrooms and the lunchroom. School C has retired parishioners tutoring students during the school day. The Knights of Columbus is a national men's service organization with chapters in Schools A and C that conduct service to the school. The Knights at School C work on the school facility when items break or need replacing. School A's Knights also work on various school projects and host an annual free throw shoot contest for school students. The reciprocal service at parochial schools builds community. Service is integral to school vitality.

Ministry. The church is at the heart of the parish organization. Students actively participating in church ministry contributes to school vitality. Participation in parish youth groups, Mass, sacraments, and other prayer opportunities and faith formation connects students to the parish. School A, B, and C students participate in parish ministry. The ministry most commonly referenced is Mass participation. Referencing student ministry, Principal C affirmed, “[parishioners] want to see the school at mass.” Students act as lectures, greeters, altar servers, gift bearers, Eucharistic ministers, and sing in the choir for weekly school masses as well as periodic Sunday masses. Semi-structured interview data suggested that parishioners highly attend weekly school masses, and parishioners take great pleasure and pride in participating in student-led mass. Principal B mentioned that many school students participate in the monthly children's mass with parishioners invited to each school's unique prayer devotionals.

Faith formation opportunities for parish and school stakeholders are another indicator of vitality. Schools A and B have developed spiritual committees. These committees compose of parishioners and school staff planning and hosting spiritual development and faith formation opportunities for the parish, including book studies, bible study, retreats, and prayer opportunities for parishioners, school parents, and staff. They also prepare retreats for children of the parish and school students.

Guiding Question #3: How does the relationship between the pastors and principals affect school vitality?

Schools A, B, and C operate under the parochial school governance model, with the pastor maintaining absolute decision-making power. School C's report of findings stated, “The principal and pastor are committed to strong parish connections, and see the school as a ministry of the parish.” School C effectively demonstrates collaborative relationships between pastors and principals with clearly defined roles (Weiss, 2007). Principals offered additional insight into their

relationship with pastors. Principal A attributed the strong working relationship with the pastor as pivotal to school improvement and parish and school vitality, “I think it’s just the attitude starting with the pastor there that we are all one. We’re part of the church.” He frequently refers to him as a “really great guy” in semi-structured interview data. Principal C discusses an even more personal relationship with the pastor, “I was a first-time principal, and he was a first-time pastor of a parish with a school. And so that’s been helpful for us too because we lean on each other and are very forgiving of each other.” This relationship evolved into a friendship with shared interests, “he and I get along very well. We talk about books. We talk about movies. It is a really good relationship.” Principal B expressed little personal relationship with the pastor other than an effective working relationship.

Guiding Question #4: Where are the opportunities for schools and parishes to couple, and to what degree of coupling is optimal for school vitality?

Tightly Coupled Relationship (TCR). Accreditation documents presented relationships where pastors and principals engage with stakeholders to shape a shared vision for the school's current operations and future vitality. School A indicated the pastor and principal's role to “encourage and support a collaborative approach...to better benefit all programs of the parish” Principal A spoke to the evolution of this process and attributed the current school vitality to the pastor's relationship with the parish staff. Before the current pastor's arrival, the parish office administrator was “iron-fisted” which promoted an environment where parish ministries were overly territorial and unwilling to work with the school. He continued that the parish staff was “set in their ways” and were “not thinking of the big picture”. Principal A attributed the pastor to the collaborative vision of the parish.

Principal A commented on his impact on parish culture, “when I got here [there was not] an appreciation for the school. I had to start convincing [parishioners and parish staff] the school is important to the future of the parish.” He claimed, “Parishioners now have a vision in their head that the school is a huge part [of the parish].” Much of School B's vitality is credited to the parish creating the school's vision. The report of finding commended the parish's process of creating a school committee, hiring a principal, and working together to make many decisions and completed a multitude of tasks to establish a school. To do so, this committee conducted a series of exercises to “narrow down the values the community identified” for the school through initial surveys. Data from School C also illuminated how school vitality improved through the collaboration of parish governing bodies to create and adopt a shared vision of the school's importance to the parish. Parish C and School C conducted substantial strategic planning with considerable overlap between pastor and principal and parish council and school board.

School boards meet monthly and influence each school's operations, policy, and organizational goals. Because the three schools employ a traditional parochial school governance model, school

boards are advisory rather than decision-making boards. Pastors have final decision-making authority, but principals report a more collaborative relationship with the pastor. The principal and school board chair are responsible for planning and hosting school board meetings. Pastors are participating members with the remaining members of school boards, including school parents and parishioners. While School A and C include a single parishioner on their boards, School B's board comprises half school parents and half parishioners.

Principal C recognized the benefit of having influential and supportive parishioners on the school board as "people really listen to them." School A's self-study revealed the principal, pastor, and board chair "meet monthly to collaborate on the direction of the school." The collaboration of parishioners, parents, pastors, and principals builds awareness and trust necessary to maintain vitality. Each school's accreditation documents acknowledged the value of their school board and value the perspective of parents and parishioners. Parish councils operate similarly to school boards for the parish. They are composed of parishioners, pastors, principals, and school parents. Principals for the three schools are valuable members of parish councils who report on school operations and work in partnership with the council to develop and implement organizational goals. School B includes relevant staff members when reporting on school functions as well. School A's pastor intentionally includes school parents within the parish council. He appoints the PTO chair to this council. Principal A discussed the positive impact the PTO chairs have on parish operations, "[the chairs] have their traditions and events they have done for years...they know how to get things done, and so the church can learn from them too." The PTO's unique inclusion highlights the integration of the parish and school and the benefits of using shareholder talents.

Financial oversight of the school is another responsibility of the parish council and its sub-committee, the parish finance council. All three parishes require approval of school budgets and capital projects. Principals report monthly to the parish council on the financial situation. The Principal, school bookkeeper, and the school board's finance officer present a detailed financial report to the parish finance council monthly at Schools A and B. The Principal then presents an abridged financial report monthly to the parish council. Schools A and B demonstrate appropriate oversight of school financial viability.

Principal C illuminated the potential problem of consolidated financial oversight between parish and school. The parish employed a single bookkeeper who kept the finances for the parish and school. Although using a single person for this job was cost-effective, the limited oversight of a single person monitoring the financials proved a mistake. The accounting practices employed by the bookkeeper were not sound, with no separation of the parish and school funds. Principal C described the situation, "the school accounts, the parish accounts, it was all one huge lump of money. So, it was very hard to get financials. In addition, the bookkeeper was not as qualified as they should have been. It was a huge mess...the bookkeeper had too much power." The challenges

posed for the school were significant, “and so at the end of the month, payroll would come around, we would find out if whether [the school] would have enough to cover payroll or not.” If not, the principal would go to the pastor for help. The bookkeeper was frequently at odds with the Principal; however, the principal's relationship with the pastor enabled school staff to be paid.

Diocesan intervention forced changes to the bookkeeping structure. School C and Parish C's bank accounts are now separate, and each uses its own bookkeeper. The parish and school utilize a part-time accountant to review financial statements monthly. Principal C, bookkeeper, and the finance officer of the school council meet monthly to review finances. They then report to the parish council monthly. The TCRs monitoring financial viability is now appropriate and has resulted in significant deficit reduction for the school. TCRs such as the parish councils and school boards ensure effective school operations.

Loosely Coupled Relationships (LCR). Accreditation documents for School A drew attention to the pastor's role in providing an environment conducive to relationship building by “strongly supporting the ongoing education and participation...in the faith community.” The pastor for School A frequently interacts with the school community. The principal identified the pastor as instrumental in shifting a “territorial” mentality present within the parish to one that is collaborative, “the pastor realized they needed a softening of people over there.” The self-study affirmed the pastor's approach to team building, “the pastor makes great effort to know the staff as individuals, to assemble a unified parish team, and to set high standards for the way our Catholic faith is witnessed in the community.” Breaking down the wall between the parish and the school was necessary to realize vitality to its fullest.

Pastor A demonstrated to the community the importance of strengthening LCRs through his actions. Principal A elaborated on the pastor being present at school drop-off times before school to visit with families and his frequent visits to classrooms to visit with students. The pastor required the associate pastor and youth director to spend lunch with the students weekly. The youth director takes great strides “making it cool to be Catholic” (Simonds et al.). Besides visiting with students at lunch, the youth director for Parish A plans fun social activities for junior high students, prepares engaging school retreats with the spirituality committee, and assists students with parish service opportunities. Principal B also discussed a robust youth group participation and its importance to school vitality. The youth group director for Parish B “hosts grade-level retreats, and we collaborate very strongly with the parish so that [school] participates.”

The LCR between parish and school staff contributes to school vitality. All three schools report a positive relationship between the parish and the school staff. School C writes in their accreditation self-study that, “staff works in partnership with the parish.” Principal B explains positive relationships are maintained through “various social events with each other” and “so many of my

staff are parishioners...they attend many of the parish events.” Staff members at School B socialize with parish staff and attend parish staff meetings regularly.

Spirituality committees, utilized by Schools A and B, offer the community parish and faith formation opportunities. These committees comprise school and parish staff. This integration provides effective growth opportunities for all stakeholders and provides opportunities for parishioners, school staff, and school parents to build relationships. School A has a highly engaged staff within the parish community. They attend parish staff meetings and interact through faith formation opportunities. Parish and school staff are provided social opportunities to gather outside the work environment. Principal A discusses the importance of managing the parish expectations of the school staff. They ensure staff does not feel compelled to attend parish functions because they work long hours. Principal A balances the loosely coupled relationship of school staff and parishioners by providing engaging social opportunities for staff while protecting their personal time.

Student interactions with parish stakeholders are critical to school vitality. School C's stressed, “Parishioners express delight and appreciation in seeing the school community as a part of the Parish.” They shared, “We try to involve the students in the parish life as much as we can.” Seeing students participate in mass is extremely important to parishioners at all three schools. Principal B emphasized the importance of mass participation, “just last week, some parishioners came up to me [after mass], I mean this happens all the time, they say, “we are just so happy for the school...there is a lot of pride.” The schools ensure parishioners are invited and celebrate weekly school mass and periodical Sunday masses. Students act as lecturers, welcome parishioners as greeters, participate as gift bearers and Eucharistic ministers, and sing in the choir to strengthen the community.

Service opportunities for students and parishioners contribute to school vitality. Students engage directly with parishioners often while performing service. Principal A stated, “Students learn that they are a part of a larger community” when participating in joint projects with the parish. School A's report of findings commended, “students for serving the parish and their desire to expand opportunities to serve their local parish.” School C listed many service experiences for students by assisting in Parish clothing drives, food drives, working with the Knights of Columbus, helping the Parish office staff, and cleaning the parish grounds. Parishioners tutor students during the school day, support teachers in the classroom, volunteer in the lunchroom, and help maintain school grounds.

Principals utilize LCRs with parishioners to build goodwill, monitor parish sentiment, and bolster future support. Principal C elaborated on the importance of the principal and parishioner relationship. By fostering these relationships, parishioners “become his ears” and have successfully

enabled them to reshape the parish's attitude toward the school. Principal C discussed a few influential parishioners who proved to be instrumental to the increasingly positive attitude parishioners felt to the school. They called them the Coffee Crew because they have a social hour after daily morning mass where they socialize over morning coffee. The principal joined the Coffee Crew on occasion. Principal C began building a relationship with this group of parishioners and learned they were wary of the school's sustainability as one indicated, "You don't throw money at a dead horse." After many months of relationship building, the Coffee Crew is some of the most significant school supporters. When Principal C is beginning a new initiative, they will join them for coffee to "plant the seed" and let them go and spread the news to other parishioners.

Discussion

Decreasing enrollment and the subsequent loss of revenue threaten Catholic schools' financial viability (Britt, 2013; Manning, 2018; Welsh & Campbell, 2011). Parishes with parochial schools face difficult decisions when their school struggles with financial viability. When a school becomes no longer financially viable, parishes often must decide to increase financial support to keep the school, consolidate the school with another parochial school, or close the school entirely. Parochial schools operate as a mission of a parish. The financial sustainability of Catholic schools is a challenge upon which parishes must reflect. Because parishes determine the operational status of parochial schools, an overlooked aspect of parochial school viability is the parish's willingness to maintain the support for its school. School vitality is the life of a parochial school and its ability to overcome challenges.

Understanding the relationship factors between a parish and its school provides a more thorough understanding of vitality. Innovative solutions are possible when challenges are thoroughly understood. A parochial school and its parish must create and maintain an authentic shared vision. Communities with solid cultures for learning establish a shared vision (Salina et al., 2015). A culture of learning requires transparency and open communication of vulnerability. Strong relationships between the parish and school establish relational trust. Building relational trust is essential to parochial school vitality. Parishes and schools need to utilize tools and protocols designed for honest data analysis. Through authentic relationship building with the parish, parochial school communities along with open communication, trust, solid working relationships, and rich discussions promote a shared vision of the school's future, improving parochial school vitality.

Catholic Imagination and Parish Identity

Data indicates that parochial schools with strong vitality have well-established parish identities. Each of the schools reviewed for this study demonstrated actions that secure themselves within the

parish's imagination. They have a history, clearly defined and interwoven governance expectations, and communicate school operations and activities. When a parochial school's financial viability is threatened, parishes must make difficult decisions about a school's future. Catholic school vitality and a school's place within the Catholic imagination of its parish are closely related. Catholic schools struggling with vitality may receive additional support from a parish that values its school. Parishes that view their school as an essential attribute to the parish identity are motivated to help schools through difficult times.

Relationships. TCRs between parish and school provide the foundation and mandate to ensure the school remains a part of the parish identity. Decision-makers at the top of the organizational hierarchy ensure that all other stakeholders' working and social relationships are maintained. Schools with solid parish relationship vitality have leadership that cultivates community. Data indicated strong community relationships begin with the pastor and principal and how they network with parish and school stakeholders. Pastors and principals create environments where LCRs between school and parish stakeholders are expected. Relationship expectations are present in organizational structure and lived by leadership. Developing LCRs requires intentional planning because they have fewer opportunities with greater variables. Parishioners and students do not interact regularly, and schools with strong vitality organize opportunities for these stakeholders to engage with each other. Stakeholder interactions maintain a shared vision throughout the organization. Parishioners influence the future of the school and schools with excellent vitality strive to maintain parish pride through LCRs that improve school vitality.

Governance Models. Research indicates that adopting alternative governance models may improve Catholic school's financial viability. Parishes consolidate schools to stabilize enrollment and improve financial viability. Often consolidated schools do not maintain a balanced budget for multiple years following the organizational change. Many of these schools close within three years of consolidation. Britt (2013) points out the loss of identity as a significant challenge consolidated schools must overcome. Consolidation may fail when a school's previous issues are not addressed. Schools participating in this study take intentional steps to maintain parish identity. School C demonstrated exceptional school vitality while financially struggling. Instead of consolidation, it leaned on its parish relationships to maintain viability. Parochial schools with strong parish relationship vitality can overcome substantial financial challenges. The parochial school's vitality is grounded in community, and the school's powerful relationship with its parish supports the school during difficult times (Crea et al., 2015; Cook & Simonds, 2011). Parish identity strengthens through carefully cultivated relationships that endear the two communities together solidify school vitality.

Contribution to the Field

This study contributes to the field of Catholic education by broadening the understanding of parochial school viability beyond financial resources to include vitality factors representing the interconnectivity of a parish and school. Using literature, study data, and findings, two vitality factors were created to highlight how to integrate organizational structures and develop a parish identity.

Recommending Two Parish Vitality Factors

School boards and parish councils look to financial markers when determining if parochial schools with financial struggles should be consolidated or closed. We recommend using the following vitality factors and their themes in collaboration with viability factors to provide opportunities for deeper reflection by school stakeholders and offer exemplary practices of schools considered to have strong parish relationships to assist schools with strengthening vitality through building parish relationships.

Reflecting upon prominent relationship factors such as organizational structure and parish identity allows parish communities with schools to understand the values of a reciprocal relationship. Parochial schools that intentionally evaluate their relationship with their sponsoring parish will realize more vitality that is robust and strengthen future viability. Reviewing the relationship between the parish pastor and school principal as they set the tone for relationship building encourages interaction between stakeholders and set relationship expectations leading by example by being present, building rapport, and approachable which facilitates relationships and a sense of belonging.

Parish Vitality Factor 1: Integration of Organizational Structures

Themes: Mission and Philosophy, Governance, Financial Support, Strategic Planning

This factor evaluates how parish and school interact at the governance level. Organizational structure relationships are between organizational decision-makers and the policies and planning they establish. These TCRs have a significant and immediate impact on school operations. Parishes and schools that maintain a shared vision of the school as an integral aspect of the parish community demonstrate strong school vitality. Parochial school mission statements establish the purpose of the school's existence. Mission statements that include integration between the school and parish demonstrate an expectation that school and parish will foster a relationship. Inclusion of parish in the school and school in the parish mission statement affirms a commitment to each other and ingrain the school in the parish identity.

The parish and school governance expectations should be clearly defined and aligned, and governance boards and councils are intentionally interwoven. The governance theme recognizes the

hierarchical structure of the school. The pastor is the final decision-maker, with the principal maintaining the school's daily operations. Integrating decision-making entities establish relational trust. School boards and parish councils, finance councils, and advisory boards should include representation of both organizations to promote collaboration and foster positive relationships. Parish and school governance documents and planning could include language that expresses the reciprocal relationship between the school and the parish. Mission statements indicate the school to be an integral aspect of the parish identity. Strategic planning documents could outline how the school and parish will maintain and grow their relationship.

The financial support theme requires the parish to maintain a financial subsidy to the school and encourage parishioners to participate in school fundraising efforts. Parishes that provide financial support regardless of school financial need have a greater sense of school ownership. Additionally, it promotes financial oversight of the school to ensure its investment is utilized by the school appropriately. Financial oversight and budget approval of school finances by the parish provide the trust necessary to encourage parishioner support of school fundraisers and capital campaigns.

Strategic planning provides the road map for school development to ensure vitality. The parish and school governance include cross representation when undergoing future development planning. Integration of parish and school planning contributes to parish ownership of the school's future successes. Strategic planning and the other themes associated with organizational structure factors promote a shared vision through ensuring organizational alignment. Tightly coupled relationships committed to the school's vitality enable the school to handle future challenges better because of parish support.

Parish Vitality Factor 2: Development and Maintenance of Parish Identity

Themes: Communication, Ministry, Service, and Community Building

This factor highlights the importance of parishes expressing pride in their school and recognizes the school's value in parish identity. The factor reviews the LCRs that bind the school and parish together providing interwoven structures at the organizational level establishing the shared vision and mandate for schools and parishes to support each other. The LCRs exist between the stakeholders of each organization. The sense of pride parishioners and school students, parents, and staff feel for each other is the glue that binds school and parish together. The themes contributing to stakeholder relationship development are communication, ministry, service, and community building.

Exemplary schools maintain multiple forms of formal and informal communication. Formal communication like pulpit talks and newsletters allow access to the school that would not be present to most parish stakeholders. Parishioners cannot hold an opinion of a school's worth without information. Equally important is the use of informal communication. Principals and

pastors have significant influence. When principals and pastors interact with stakeholders regularly, they use their influence to improve or maintain stakeholder support. Keeping parishioners and parish staff informed of the school's operations and sharing the school's successes builds parish pride in the school. The pride a parish has for its school increases its willingness to support it. The communication theme represents how a school keeps its parish informed of its successes and events. Likewise, the parish's communication with school stakeholders regarding events and faith-building opportunities informs and welcomes school participation. Parishioners need frequent education on the benefit their parochial school provides. Informing the parish community of school success maintains parish pride in the school.

Student and school families' active participation in church contributes to school vitality. Participation in mass, sacramental, prayer devotionals, retreats, and other faith formation opportunities connect students to the parish. Parishioners see students engaging in ministry affirms the mission of the parish to provide religious formation to children therefore, solidify the school within the parish identity. Providing service for others builds pride, community, and relationships. Schools with strong vitality offer service opportunities for students to serve the parish. Additionally, they have significant parishioner volunteerism during the school day. Service opportunities connect parishioners and students to the value of parish life and increase positive sentiments.

The quantity and quality of interactions between school students, teachers, administration, parents, and parishioners directly affect the value parishioners have for the school. Relationships are the lifeblood of vitality and schools with excellent parish relationships put significant effort into providing meaningful engagement opportunities for stakeholders. Large parish and school social events engage the entire community while informal opportunities that present themselves daily build belief in each other. When parish and school communities identify, parish identity is strengthened. The stronger the parish identity, the more likely schools will be able to overcome challenging situations.

Conclusion

The study examined Catholic school viability and vitality seeking to understand impactful practices to maintain parish and school relationships to build a community ensuring school vitality. Re-imagining viability and vitality to include parish and school relationship factors provides tools schools can utilize for future success. Recognizing and taking steps to ensure the parochial school remains ingrained within the parish identity may give the extra stability necessary for struggling schools to overcome hardships. Reflecting upon prominent relationship factors such as organizational structure and parish identity allow parish communities to better understand and

value a reciprocal relationship. Parochial schools that intentionally evaluate their relationship with their sponsoring parish will realize robust vitality and strengthen future viability.

Parish and schools that create and maintain a shared vision are an integral aspect of the parish community. LCRs are the glue that binds the two organizations together allowing a school's parish identity to thrive. Schools with strong vitality work diligently to maintain a parish identity and parishes express pride in the school knowing the school is integral to the parish. Engagement helps parishioners feel connected to the school and share in the school's success. Parish pride increases a parish's willingness to support the school through its challenges with the school's vitality measured by the strength of their relationships. Parishes and schools must reflect upon their relationships and take actions that strengthen the school's parish identity to mitigate the potential risk of school closure or consolidation.

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TEACHING AND SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: AN INVESTIGATION OF THE ATTITUDES AND PRACTICES OF CATHOLIC HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS IN UNITED STATES

Noreen Powers* & C. Ben Freville**

Abstract Catholic schools in the United States have long had the reputation of requiring students to adapt to their methods of instruction and to meet their behavioral expectations or be removed from the schools. Today, a great number of U.S. Catholic schools are accepting students who struggle academically and social-emotionally including students with diagnosed disabilities. This raises significant questions about the structures in place to support these students. This article reports results from a survey of U.S. Catholic teachers about how prepared they feel to teach and the instructional strategies they use with students with disabilities. Furthermore, this study explores teachers' attitudes toward the support they receive from their principals. Results of this research indicate that Catholic Schools in the U.S. have made progress in meeting the needs of students with disabilities; however, it also shows a need for further development and continued research.

Keywords U.S. Catholic secondary schools, students with disabilities, principals, teachers

Introduction

Catholic schools in the United States (U.S.) have long had the reputation of requiring students to adapt to their methods of instruction and meet their behavioral expectations or be removed from the schools. While this approach impacted many students and their families, students who had special education needs and students who struggled academically and behaviorally experienced the greatest impact from this practice (Scanlan, 2008). Such students were frequently counseled out of U.S. Catholic schools because, as teachers and principals would explain to parents, the school could not meet their students' needs. In most cases, they were directed to the nearby public school that, by law, provided special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act

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(IDEA; Scanlon, 2008). This meant that one or more children within the same family attended the local parish school or Catholic high school, while another child in the same family attended the local public school. When parents in the U.S. desired a Catholic education for their child with a disability, there were few options available to them. In some U.S. Catholic schools, this practice continues today; however, in recent years, a growing number of U.S. Catholic elementary and high schools have embraced the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) challenge “to make the Body whole by ensuring that Catholics with disabilities receive the catechetical and academic instruction essential for their full and equal membership in the Church community” (NCPD, 2010). Consequently, many U.S. Catholic elementary and secondary schools now accept students with disabilities and provide services to support their learning and development (Burke & Griffin, 2016).

For some U.S. families of students with disabilities and students who struggle academically and behaviorally (hereinafter “students with disabilities”) who desire a Catholic education for their children, Catholic schools have become a viable alternative to public schools. According to the most recent data from the National Center for Education Statistics, 78.4% of U.S. Catholic schools serve students with mild to moderate disabilities (McDonald & Shultz, 2021). These disabilities include physical, emotional, and learning disabilities. Most students are served in regular education classrooms with or without special resource teachers. In the 2020-21 school year, 6.1% of students in Catholic schools across the United States had a diagnosed disability (McDonald & Shultz, 2021). Previous literature reported that approximately 78% of U.S. Catholic elementary schools and 74% of the U.S. Catholic secondary schools have a process in place for identifying students with special needs (Durow, 2007).

The fact that Catholic schools are viewed as an alternative to public schools in the U.S. for educating and providing services to students with disabilities raises myriad questions, some of which have been addressed in recent literature (Long & Schuttloffel, 2013). For example, what types of services and programming would students need to be successful in Catholic schools? What type of training would teachers and administrators need to meet students’ needs? In schools that are already struggling financially, how would such initiatives be supported? What would be the impact on other students of admitting such students in Catholic schools?

The majority of research about students with disabilities and Catholic schools has focused on elementary schools with a limited amount focusing on Catholic secondary schools in the U.S. Consequently, this study focuses on the attitudes and practices of Catholic high school teachers toward students with disabilities in the U.S. In particular, the study focuses on three areas: 1) attitudes toward professional preparation, professional development, and supports provided to Catholic high school teachers for teaching students with disabilities; 2) types of instructional approaches implemented by Catholic high school teachers to support students with disabilities; and

3) Catholic high school teachers' attitudes about the support and resources they receive from their administration for addressing the needs of students with disabilities.

Literature Review

In recent years, families of students with disabilities in the U.S. have increasingly sought inclusion in Catholic schools. Given that there are a large number of students with disabilities attending Catholic schools today, it is clear that many U.S. parents view Catholic schools as an alternative to public schools (Scanlon, 2008). The inclusion of students with a variety of disabilities in Catholic schools places a great responsibility on the schools and perhaps an even greater responsibility on teachers within these schools to teach and meet students' academic and social emotional needs (Long & Schuttloffel, 2013). Teachers must be able to design a classroom and teach a curriculum that is accessible to all students. Allday et al. (2013) identified four skill areas teachers need for the successful inclusion of students with disabilities within their classrooms: 1) basic knowledge of characteristics of students with disabilities, 2) an understanding of how to differentiate instruction, 3) knowledge of effective classroom management strategies, and 4) the ability to collaborate and communicate effectively with special education teachers. These four skill areas raise the question of when and where teachers, specifically teachers in Catholic schools, receive preparation and training in developing them.

In the United States, whether preparing teachers for Catholic or public schools, teacher candidates are commonly prepared in the same manner. They complete teacher preparation programs in which they take a sequence of courses, participate in field experiences, and complete a supervised student-teaching experience. After completing these programs, teacher candidates receive a teaching credential from the states in which they are prepared. How much of this preparation focuses on students with disabilities? In a study of teacher education programs across the United States, Harvey et al. (2010) found that the majority of institutions with teacher preparation programs offered coursework to preservice special and general education teachers regarding exceptional children and/or special education, specifically a course in characteristics of students with disabilities. Furthermore, they found that the majority of programs (89%) placed teacher candidates in inclusive settings for field experiences and/or student teaching. In another study, Allday et al. (2013) noted that while most teacher education programs require a characteristics course, the majority (67%) did not offer a course related to the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings nor a course specific to collaboration between general and special education teachers (93%). Secondary teachers, in particular, reported that the methods courses in their teacher preparation programs spent little time exploring special education issues (Gately & Hammer, 2005).

Teaching licenses in the United States are issued by individual state boards of education. Once teachers receive their initial license, they may receive additional training for teaching students

with disabilities through professional development offerings. These offerings take a variety of forms, and most are offered within school settings. Much of the professional development follows the traditional, one-day, “drive-by” format (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017). As a result, teachers frequently have unfavorable views of the professional development offerings in their schools. Furthermore, this type of professional development does not have a lasting impact on teaching and learning. Darling-Hammond et al., (2017) define effective professional development as “structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes” (p. v). In an extensive review of literature, they identified seven widely shared features of effective professional development. Such professional development is content focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support, offers feedback and reflection, and is of sustained duration. Unfortunately, most professional development does not contain many of these elements, and, as a result, it has little to no impact on teacher pedagogical practice or student learning (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

Providing support to students with disabilities takes a variety of formats in U.S. Catholic schools. For example, some Catholic schools are designed specifically for students with disabilities (for example, Holy Trinity Parish School, Louisville, Kentucky, USA). Additionally, many Catholic schools today have programs designed specifically for addressing the learning and behavioral needs of students with disabilities and students who struggle (for example, the Phoenix Program at St. Patrick High School, Chicago, Illinois, USA). According to the most recent report from the National Center for Education Statistics, 78% of Catholic schools in the United States serve students with mild to moderate disabilities which include physical, emotional, and learning disabilities, and they are accommodated in general education classrooms (McDonald & Shultz, 2021). With this said, there is little information in the literature about instructional approaches used in U.S. Catholic schools to aid students with disabilities in accessing the general education curriculum. It should be noted, however, that the student/teacher ratio in U.S. Catholic schools in 2021 was 11:1 (McDonald & Shultz, 2021). With a student/teacher ratio this low, teachers have ample opportunity to provide more individualized instruction and personalized learning opportunities which may be beneficial to students with disabilities.

While there is little information in the literature about instructional strategies and approaches used with students with disabilities in U.S. Catholic schools, research has identified certain strategies and approaches that, when implemented with fidelity, show a positive impact on learning for students with disabilities. These include, but are not limited to, direct instruction (Gersten, 1985; Flores & Ganz, 2007; Flores et al., 2013; White et al., 2014; Head et al., 2018), modeling (Regan & Berkeley, 2011), learning strategies instruction (Deshler & Schumaker, 2006; Reid et al., 2013), computer-based instruction (Weng et al., 2014), cooperative learning groups (Gillies & Ashram, 2000; Stevens & Slavin, 1995), one-on-one and small group instruction (Colón et al., 2018,

2022), and peer tutoring (Alzahrani & Leko, 2018). U.S.Catholic school principals reported that they have provided professional development for teachers on differentiated instruction, learning strategies, and alternative assessments (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016); however, it is unclear as to the extent to which Catholic school teachers have been trained in the other strategies and approaches listed above. Furthermore, the level of implementation of these strategies and approaches in Catholic schools is not known.

In U.S. Catholic schools, the principal sets the tone and direction with regard to integrating students with disabilities into the school community and “builds the capacity of their school communities by articulating both a vision and strong expectations to meet this vision” (Scanlon, 2008, p. 44). According to the Catholic School Principal Competencies developed by researchers at Loyola University in Chicago, Catholic school principals “develop programs to address the unique learning needs of students” (Morten & Lawler, 2016, p. 340). Since Catholic schools currently serve students with disabilities, this suggests that Catholic school principals should have an understanding of the learning needs of students with disabilities in their schools, and that they should provide their staff guidance on how to effectively address their students’ unique learning needs.

In a study of attitudes of U.S.Catholic school principals about the inclusion of students with disabilities in their schools, Boyle and Hernandez (2016) reported that most Catholic school principals have a more positive than negative attitude toward including students with disabilities. They found that, “Principals with more positive attitudes towards inclusion reported higher percentages of students with special education plans in their schools” (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). They also found that principals were more willing to enroll students with high-incidence disabilities such as learning disabilities, ADHD, and speech and language impairments and suggested that Catholic schools may be more equipped to meet the needs of students with these disabilities (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016).

Study Design

There has been an increasing number of research studies addressing inclusive education in U.S.Catholic schools in recent years; however, the overall amount of research about how Catholic schools in the U.S. support struggling students and students with disabilities and the role that school leadership plays in this endeavor has been sparse (Taylor, 2005). The purpose of this study is to investigate how prepared U.S. Catholic high school teachers feel to teach students with disabilities, examine the instructional approaches they use, and explore their attitudes toward the support they receive from their administration. Because this research is primarily descriptive and explanatory, a quantitative approach was used.

Participants

We used a recruited sample for this study. A recruited sample is when a sample is obtained by consulting and selecting from an existing sample frame, and a method is used to control respondents' entry into a survey (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). The participants for this study are Catholic high school teachers from four midwestern states identified through an internet search. This resulted in 101 Catholic high schools. Through additional internet searching, the principals of these schools and their email addresses were located and recorded. An email describing the purpose of the study and providing a survey link was sent to each principal inviting them to forward the email and survey link to the teachers in their schools. The researchers took this approach because they believed teachers were more likely to respond to a survey forwarded by their principal, and many Catholic high schools do not provide teachers' email addresses online. One challenge with this approach is the difficulty with determining the response rate since the researchers do not know the total number of teachers to whom the survey was forwarded. Van Selm & Jankowski (2006) suggest that in this situation, the response rate can be estimated by dividing the number of returned surveys by the number of times that a site was accessed. Ninety teachers viewed the survey. Seventeen teachers started but responded to fewer than half of the questions, and as a result, their responses were removed. A total of 71 teachers completed the entire survey (completion rate 81%). We recognize that this can be a limitation that will inhibit the generalizations that can be drawn from this study.

Of the teachers who responded to the survey, the average number of years of teaching experience in any school was 16 years, and the average number of years teaching in their current Catholic high school was 22 years. Table 1 provides a summary of the teachers' years of experience teaching and years teaching in their current high schools. It is interesting to note that for 24 teachers (34%), all of their teaching experience was in their current Catholic high school.

Table 1: Years of Total Teaching Experience and Teaching Experience in Their Current Catholic High School.

Years of Experience	Total Teaching Experience		Teaching Experience in Current Catholic High School	
	Number	%	Number	%
1-5	14	20	33	46
6-10	15	21	10	14
11-20	20	28	10	14
More than 20	22	31	18	25

Teachers were asked to identify the department in which they primarily taught. They represented a wide range of content areas. The majority of the teachers taught English (17 teachers or 24%)

and math (16 teachers or 23%). One teacher did not respond to this question. Table 2 provides a summary of the content areas taught by teachers.

Table 2: Content Areas Taught by Teachers

Content Area	Number	%
English	17	24
Math	16	23
Religious Studies/ Theology	13	18
Social Studies	11	15
Fine Arts	4	6
World Languages	4	6
Sciences	4	6
Business	1	2

Note: One teacher did not respond to this question.

One final question was asked to better understand teachers' experience and background. They were asked whether their school had a program to support struggling students and/or students with disabilities. We believe that teaching at a school with a program might influence teachers' attitudes and practice in terms of supporting students with disabilities. Of the 71 teachers who responded, 67 (94%) reported that their schools had programs. Table 3 provides a summary of the teachers' responses to this question.

Table 3: Programs Offered to Support Struggling Students and/or Students with Disabilities

Type of Program	Number	%
For both struggling students and students with disabilities	38	53
For struggling students	27	38
For students with disabilities	2	2
No program offered	4	5

Procedures

The survey administered in this study was developed using Qualtrics, an online tool for creating electronic surveys. Electronic surveys increase the reach of a survey, especially when the population being studied is distributed across a large geographic region (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). At the beginning of the survey, respondents were informed that their responses would be

kept confidential and that they and their schools could not be identified as a result of completing the survey. They were asked to agree to a confidentiality statement to proceed to the remaining survey questions.

The survey consisted of 20 questions divided into four areas. The first set of questions, which are described in the Participant section, asked about teachers' experience and background. The second set of questions related to the teachers' preparation for working with struggling students and students with disabilities. This section included questions about training completed in their teacher preparation programs as well as ongoing professional development received in their current positions. The third section of the survey contained questions about the teachers' current teaching practices and focused on teaching strategies and techniques that have been shown through research to support the learning of students with disabilities. For example, there were questions about differentiating instruction, providing students options for demonstrating their learning, learning strategies instruction, peer tutoring, presenting content in multiple formats, and using technology. The last section of the survey focused on administration and specifically on support provided to teachers by their school leadership, their perceptions about the extent and effectiveness of that support, and the allocation of resources for supporting those with disabilities.

Results

Preparation, Collaboration and Resources for Working with Struggling Students and Students with Disabilities

In the first part of the survey, teachers were asked to rate their preparation for working with students with disabilities using *extremely well prepared*, *very well prepared*, *moderately well prepared*, *slightly well prepared*, and *not well prepared*. The first question asked teachers how well they felt their university courses prepared them for teaching students with disabilities. In general, teachers did not feel that the university courses that they took as part of their licensure programs prepared them well for working with students with disabilities. The responses ranged from 21% who felt *not well*, 24% who felt the coursework prepared them *slightly well*, and 34% who felt it prepared them *moderately well*. Only 15% of the teachers felt that their university coursework prepared them *very well* or *extremely well*. There was a moderate negative correlation between teachers' years of experience and how well they felt their university courses prepared them [$r=-.35$, $N=71$, $p=.002$]. This might suggest that teachers who recently finished their preparation programs view their teacher preparation coursework more favorably, and as teachers gain experience, they view their teacher preparation coursework as less relevant. There was no relationship between how teachers felt about their preparation coursework and whether their school had a program for students with disabilities.

Teachers’ feelings about professional development (PD) offerings and how well they prepared them for working with struggling students and students with disabilities were even more striking. The majority of teachers (58%) felt that professional development offerings prepared them *slightly* or *not well*. There was no relationship between how teachers felt about PD and their years of teaching experience. Additionally, there was no correlation between their feelings about PD and whether their school had a program for struggling students and/or students with disabilities.

Table 4: Teachers’ Responses to Questions About Their Preparation for Working with Struggling Students and Students with Disabilities

Question	Responses to Level of Preparedness (%)				
	Extremely	Very	Moderately	Slightly	Not Well
How well do you feel the courses in your teacher preparation program prepared you for working with struggling or students with disabilities?	10	11	34	24	21
How well has professional development you attended prepared you to work with struggling students or students with disabilities?	1	16	25	37	21

Note: One teacher did not respond to this question.

Teachers were asked about the opportunities and resources that they received for working with students with disabilities and responded to these questions using the scale of *significant*, *many*, *some*, *few*, or *none*. Teachers reported having little opportunity to collaborate with colleagues about how to work with students with disabilities. The majority of teachers (69%) said that they had *some*. Furthermore, there were no relationships between schools that had programs for struggling students, students with disabilities, or both and teachers’ opportunities to collaborate.

Teachers were also asked about resources available to them to help them with their work with struggling students and those with disabilities. The majority of teachers (80%) responded that they had *some* (38%) resources available to them. Furthermore, there was no correlation between schools that had programs and resources available to teachers. Table 5 summarizes the responses to these questions about opportunities and resources.

Table 5: Responses to Questions about Opportunities and Resources for Working with Struggling Students and Students with Disabilities

Question	Responses to Amount of Opportunities or Resources (%)				
	Significant	Many	Some	Few	None
How would you describe the opportunity you have to collaborate with colleagues about how to work with struggling students or students with disabilities?	7	17	38	31	7%
How would you describe your access to resources to help you work with struggling students or students with disabilities?	4	16	48	31	1

Use of Instructional Approaches that Support Students with Disabilities

As previously stated, research has demonstrated the impact of various instructional practices and strategies on students with disabilities' learning. Examples of such instructional practices include differentiation (Lai et al., 2020), modeling (Lopez et al., 2017), one-to-one instruction (Elbaum et al., 2000), peer tutoring (Maheady et al., 2003), and learning strategy instruction (Deshler & Schumaker, 2006; Reid et al., 2013). The second part of the survey focused on instructional practices and, in particular, teachers' comfort level with a variety of practices and how often they implemented them in their classroom instruction.

Teachers were asked about their comfort level with differentiating instruction in their classes. Differentiation is defined as "an approach whereby teachers adjust their curriculum and instruction to maximize the learning of all students" (IRIS Center, 2010). It is not a single strategy, but rather a framework that teachers can use to implement a variety of strategies. Teachers were asked to indicate their level of comfort with differentiation using the scale *comfortable*, *slightly comfortable*, *neither comfortable nor uncomfortable*, *slightly uncomfortable*, and *uncomfortable*. The majority of the teachers' responses fell within the comfortable range with 11% indicating they were comfortable and 44% percent responding that they were slightly comfortable. It might be expected that teachers working in schools with programs for struggling students and/or students with disabilities would be more comfortable differentiating instruction; however, no relationship was indicated in the data.

Additionally, there was no relationship between teachers' comfort level with differentiating instruction and their years of teaching experience.

Table 6: Comfort Level with Differentiating Instruction

Question	Responses to Comfort Level with Differentiating Instruction (%)				
	Comfortable	Slightly Comfortable	Neither Comfortable/ Uncomfortable	Slightly Uncomfortable	Uncomfortable
How comfortable do you feel differentiating instruction in your classroom for struggling students or students with disabilities?	11	44	21	6	10

In the survey, teachers were also asked about their use of a variety of instructional techniques. They were provided a list and asked to indicate which they implemented most often in their classrooms. Results indicated that on average teachers use at least 4 of the instructional techniques often in their teaching. As indicated in Table 7, more than half implemented direct instruction (75%), modeling (69%), and large group instruction (62%) often. One-to-one instruction was used by almost half (49%) of the teachers and small group instruction was used by 44% of teachers. Table 7 summarizes the use of instructional strategies in instruction.

Table 7: Instructional Strategy and Use in Instruction

Instructional Strategy	Teachers who use the Strategy Often in Instruction (%)
Direct instruction	75
Modeling	69
Whole group instruction	62
One-on-one instruction	49
Small group instruction	44
Cooperative learning groups	37
Computer-based instruction	37
Learning strategy instruction	30
Peer tutoring	20

Using a frequency scale, teachers were asked about how often they allow students to learn through their preferred learning modality, as this is consistent with differentiating instruction. More than half of the teachers (64%) indicated that they allow students this opportunity at least *somewhat frequently*. In a related question, teachers were asked how often they offered students options for demonstrating their learning. Whitman and Kelleher (2016) explain the significance of assessing students in ways that play to their strengths while posing significant challenges. Providing students options for demonstrating their learning can achieve this goal. The majority of teachers (77%) responded that they provided students options for demonstrating their learning *often* (21%), *frequently* (25%), or *somewhat frequently* (35%). In a related question, the majority of teachers (66%) indicated that they use a variety of data or evidence to determine where students stand in terms of meeting learning standards at least *somewhat frequently*.

Presenting content in multiple formats (e.g., auditory, video, multimedia; Center for Applied Special Technology, 2018) and using technology (Mahoney & Hall, 2017) has been shown to benefit the learning of students with disabilities and is consistent with differentiating instruction. Half of teachers surveyed indicated that they use technology to address the needs of students with disabilities *often* (28%) or *frequently* (22%). The majority of teachers (21%) indicated that they *often* present content to students in multiple formats. Almost 60% reported that they *frequently* (25%) or *somewhat frequently* (34%) engage in this practice. No teacher responded that they never present content in multiple formats. Table 8 summarizes the responses to questions about student preferences, and options for determining learning.

Table 8: Responses to Questions about Students' Preferred Learning Modality, Assessing Learning, and Use of Technology and Multiple Formats

Question	Responses to Variety in Instruction and Assessment (%)				
	Often	Frequently	Somewhat Frequently	Sometimes	Never
How often do you give your students the opportunity to learn through their preferred learning modality?	27	17	20	32	4
How often do you give your students options for demonstrating their learning?	21	25	35	17	2
How often do you use a variety of data or evidence to determine where	18	14	34	24	10

each student is performing in relation to learning standards?					
How often do you use technology to address the needs of struggling students or students with disabilities?	28	22	20	27	3
How often do you present content to your students in multiple formats?	21	25	34	20	0

Attitudes About Support and Resources Provided by School Leadership

The final section of the survey focused on teachers' attitudes about support and resources provided by their school leadership for working with students with disabilities. Teachers were asked how supported they felt by their administration in meeting the needs of struggling students and students with disabilities. Approximately 33% responded that they were either *extremely well* (13%) or *very well* (20%) supported. The responses to a question about the administration's involvement in aiding teachers in meeting struggling students' needs were similar; 29% indicated that their administration was *very* (7%) or *significantly* (22%) involved in helping teachers to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Table 9 summarizes the question of perception of administrative support.

Table 9: Perceptions of Administration-Level Support and Involvement in Meeting Student Needs

Question	Responses to Level of Support and Involvement (%)				
	Extremely	Very	Moderately	Slightly	Not Well
How supported do you feel by your administration in meeting the needs of struggling students and students with disabilities?	13	20	31	25	11
How involved is your administration in aiding you to meet the needs of struggling students and students with disabilities?	7	22	31	30	10

In a survey of U.S. Catholic School principals about their attitudes toward including students with disabilities in their schools, Boyle and Hernandez (2016) reported three major obstacles to including students with disabilities in the general education classroom. They found that financial constraints were the most frequently reported barrier. In this study, teachers were asked their level of agreement with the following statement: *My school’s administration allocates enough resources (time, money, staff, etc.) to address the needs of struggling students and students with disabilities.* Given Boyle and Hernandez’s findings, the level of agreement with this statement was interesting in that the majority of teachers either *strongly* (10%) or *somewhat agreed* (35%) with the statement. For the last question of the survey, teachers were asked about their level of agreement with the statement: *My school’s administration makes it a priority to address the needs of students who struggle and students with disabilities?* The majority of teachers indicated they believe that their administration makes this a priority. Table 10 summarizes the responses to questions of resources and prioritization of students’ needs.

Table 10: Level of Agreement with Statements About Administration’s Allocation of Resources and Prioritizing Addressing Students’ Needs

Question	Responses to Variety in Instruction and Assessment (%)				
	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My school’s administration allocates enough resources (time, money, staff, etc.) to address the needs of struggling students and students with disabilities.	10	35	21	23	11
My school’s administration makes it a priority to address the needs of students who struggle and students with disabilities.	14	41	17	21	7

Discussion

This study investigates attitudes of U.S. Catholic high school teachers about their preparation for teaching students with disabilities, types of instructional practices they use to teach students with disabilities, and their attitudes about the support and resources they receive from their administration for addressing the needs of students with disabilities. We believe that exploring these areas will provide the leadership and faculty of Catholic high schools, both in the U.S. and worldwide, guidance on how they can improve the educational experience for students with disabilities and their families.

One purpose of this study was to explore teachers' attitudes toward their preparation for working with students with disabilities. Consistent with previous research (Gately & Hammer, 2005; Allday et al., 2013), teachers indicated that they did not feel their university course work prepared them well, and their attitudes toward the professional development they received in their current schools was even more negative. Teachers specifically noted that there were few opportunities to work collaboratively with colleagues in planning and working with students with disabilities, and they believed that there were not sufficient resources available to them in this work.

This study also set out to investigate the instructional approaches teachers use to teach students with disabilities. In general, teachers reported that they feel comfortable with differentiation. Previous research has shown that differentiation was a frequent topic of professional development in Catholic schools (Boyle & Hernandez, 2016). While teachers reported feeling comfortable with differentiation, they appear to frequently rely on the same instructional practices, namely direct instruction, modeling, and large group instruction. Other instructional methods that have been shown to benefit the learning of students with disabilities and are consistent with differentiation were used with less frequency. This discrepancy leads us to question teachers' understanding and implementation of differentiated instruction. A notable finding was how infrequently teachers used instructional methods such as computer-based instruction, learning strategies instruction, and peer tutoring. These were reported as being used the least by teachers.

There were interesting findings in regards to teachers' attitudes about the support and resources they receive from their administration when it comes to serving students with disabilities. The majority of teachers feel at best a moderate level of support from their administrations when working with students with disabilities. Furthermore, they are somewhat neutral when it comes to the administration's allocation of resources. Those who felt enough resources were allocated was similar to those who felt there were not enough resources; a large number fell in the middle. Given these responses and lack of research in this area, we were surprised that the majority of teachers (55%) reported that their administration makes meeting the needs of students with disabilities a priority.

Recommendations for Research and Practice

As stated in the introduction, it is clear that many parents of students with disabilities in the U.S. view Catholic schools as an alternative to public schools when it comes to educating students with disabilities (Scanlon, 2008). While many U.S. Catholic schools are meeting student needs, the results of this research suggest that there is more that can be done to do this more effectively. First, there is little research about the types of instruction and specialized programs provided in Catholic high schools. Further exploration into current practices, including in-depth interviews, with a focus on student learning outcomes would be beneficial.

A significant finding in this research was the lack of relevance teachers found in their preparation coursework and professional development. It would be beneficial to conduct further research with teachers from U.S. Catholic high schools in order to determine the types of courses and experiences that would better prepare future teachers for working with students with disabilities. For high school teachers, this coursework should focus on teaching students with disabilities in specific content areas. Additionally, it would be beneficial to provide teachers “structured professional learning that results in changes in teacher practices and improvements in student learning outcomes” (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. v). As stated in the literature review, such professional development is content focused, incorporates active learning, supports collaboration, uses models of effective practice, provides coaching and expert support, offers feedback and reflection, and is of sustained duration (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

This research found that U.S. Catholic high school teachers frequently rely on the same instructional strategies, namely direct instruction, modeling, and whole group instruction. Professional development focusing on other instructional strategies that impact the learning of students with disabilities and that are implemented less frequently by U.S. Catholic high school teachers, such as learning strategies instruction, class-wide peer tutoring, computer-based instruction, and cooperative learning groups would be beneficial. Perhaps with more intensive and ongoing professional development focused on specific instructional strategies, teachers would be more likely to implement these strategies in their teaching.

Finding time for teachers to collaborate with colleagues about how to support students with disabilities is another major concern that was raised in this study. Systematic approaches to collaboration need to be identified and implemented in Catholic high schools. One such approach that has shown promise is professional learning communities (PLCs). These provide teachers time to collaborate with and learn from each other and to reflect critically on their teaching practice (DeMathews, 2014). Previous research has shown that PLCs have a positive impact on student learning, and they may also improve outcomes for students with disabilities (Blanton & Perez, 2011).

Limitations

There are several limitations to this study that may impact the ability to generalize the results to broader contexts. We used a recruited sample for this study. A recruited sample is when a sample is obtained by consulting and selecting from an existing sample frame; a method is used to control respondents' entry into the survey (Van Selm & Jankowski, 2006). We took this approach because we believed teachers were more likely to respond to a survey forwarded by their principals, and not all Catholic high schools provide teachers' emails online. We received 71 completed responses to the survey which is lower than expected. Additionally, the fact that the survey was forwarded to teachers by their principals can create bias. The COVID-19 pandemic may have created a number of barriers, including principals forwarding the survey and the number of respondents. Studies have reported achieving a higher number of respondents when making follow-up telephone calls to identified nonrespondents (Bouck, 2004; Eignebrood, 2005). Perhaps follow-up phone calls to principals would have been beneficial. This is a limitation that will inhibit the generalization that can be drawn from this study.

Conclusion

The number of students with disabilities in U.S. Catholic schools today is strong evidence that Catholic families desire a Catholic education for their children. Catholic school principals and teachers must be prepared to effectively meet their needs. This study focused on U.S. Catholic high school teachers' attitudes toward their preparation for teaching students with disabilities, the types of instruction they implement in their classrooms to support students with disabilities, and their attitudes about the support they receive from their administration. We have identified a number of significant findings in this study that warrant further investigation so that U.S. Catholic high schools will meet the challenge of the National Catholic Partnership on Disability (NCPD) "to make the body whole by ensuring that Catholics with disabilities receive the catechetical and academic instruction essential for their full and equal membership in the Church community" (NCPD, 2010).

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