TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION[1]

Hacia una educación más inclusiva: la transformación de un centro educativo

M.ª Luz M. FERNÁNDEZ BLÁZQUEZ & Gerardo ECHEITA SARRIONANDIA
Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. Spain.
mluz.fernandez@uam.es; gerardo.echeita@uam.es
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1551-1586; https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8682-5342

ABSTRACT

   Research in inclusive education highlights the need to broaden our understanding of school transformation processes with an inclusive approach on the basis of particular contexts and with an emic approach. The research we present here seeks to contribute to this. It is an instrumental single case study using a qualitative approach. Its main objective is to examine the implementation of the process of transformation with an inclusive outlook in an educational centre, analysing the reasons inspiring

it and the strategies followed to start this process of change. We used interviews for collecting information, carrying out a total of 37 with 27 members of the educational community, and discussion groups, carrying out three with a total of 16 informants. Based on an inductive thematic analysis we extract the principal results relating to two significant dimensions: the break with the existing situation and the strategies in the transformation process. The first of these dimensions has two thematic blocks, in which the reasons that led the professionals from the educational community to undertake the process of change are outlined along with the horizon that they followed. The second shows the strategies put in place in relation to changes in the structure and organization of the centre, the connection with their own professional practice, and accompanying teachers in the change. Developing inclusive education can involve a personal transformation relating one's self perception as an agent of change and a collective transformation through the group strategies that are developed and the institutional change that is needed.

Keywords: inclusive education; educational transformation; case studies; inclusion; educational change.

RESUMEN

La investigación en educación inclusiva apunta la necesidad de ampliar nuestra comprensión sobre los procesos de transformación escolar con horizonte inclusivo desde los contextos particulares, con enfoque *emic*. La investigación que presentamos busca contribuir en esa dirección. Se trata de un estudio de caso único de tipo instrumental con aproximación cualitativa. Tiene como objetivo principal conocer el desarrollo del proceso de transformación con horizonte inclusivo de un centro educativo, analizando los motivos que lo impulsaron y las estrategias seguidas para comenzar su proceso de cambio. Se emplearon como estrategias de recogida de información la entrevista, realizando un total de 37 a 27 miembros de la comunidad educativa, y el grupo de discusión, realizando tres a un total de 16 informantes. Desde un análisis temático de tipo inductivo extraemos los principales resultados relacionados con dos grandes dimensiones: la ruptura con lo preestablecido y las estrategias en el proceso de transformación. La primera de las dimensiones cuenta con dos bloques temáticos, donde se perfilan los motivos que llevaron a los profesionales de la comunidad educativa a emprender el proceso de cambio y el horizonte que siguieron. La segunda muestra las estrategias que pusieron en marcha relacionadas con los cambios en la estructura y la organización del centro, la conexión con la propia práctica profesional y el acompañamiento al profesorado en el cambio. Desarrollar una educación inclusiva puede significar una transformación personal relacionada con la percepción de uno mismo como agente de cambio y una transformación colectiva desde las estrategias grupales que se desarrollan y del propio cambio institucional que se necesita.

Palabras clave: educación inclusiva; transformación educativa; estudio de casos; inclusión; cambio educativo.

M.ª LUZ M. FERNÁNDEZ BLÁZQUEZ & GERARDO ECHEITA SARRIONANDIA
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

187

1. INTRODUCTION

The spread of the theoretical assumptions of inclusive education has international impact and presence (UNESCO, 2020). However, even today there is a real risk that inclusive education will be seen as little more than a masterpiece of rhetoric, as it seems to represent a solid ideal ethics that is easy to accept and hard to reject (Artiles & Kozleski, 2016; Norwich, 2014), but has little representation in action. Despite being recognised as a human right (UN, 2006) and even being part of UNESCO's Agenda 2030 (2015), international pressures appear to be insufficient for its development in different contexts (UNESCO, 2020).

Research has identified different types of aspect that could underlie the difficult and complex task of translating inclusive values into action (Booth & Ainscow, 2015). At the *conceptual level*, we find it is understood differently in different social spheres and contexts (Messiou, 2016; Nilholm & Göransson, 2017). At the *cultural level*, we know that the reforms with a national reach that building a more inclusive education requires can be *redefined* or *recalibrated* in local contexts, so that they fit in with the existing situation (Powell, Edelstein & Blanck, 2015), resulting in widely varied scenarios even within one country and with the inclusive outlook itself (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Hakala & Leivo, 2017). At a *practical level*, in the schools, we identify the complexities involved in the processes of mobilising knowledge from the field of research to the practical field (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2018) as well as the dilemmatic and also complex task of creating and maintaining coherence between theoretical and practical discourse by education professionals (Naraian & Schlessinger, 2017; Messiou & Ainscow, 2020). So, we need to understand how theoretical assumptions are implemented in particular contexts (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2018), with places like Spain that have decentralised educational structures being especially important (Powell *et al.*, 2015), as well as exploring the mechanisms through which education professionals themselves come to accept and commit to the development of inclusive pedagogies (Göransson & Nilholm, 2014; Messiou, 2016; Naraian & Schlessinger, 2017). In this framework, emic research focuses, that is to say, ones that comprehend the processes investigated from the perspective of participants, can contribute in at least two ways: (1) by expanding our comprehension of some of the gaps that the literature has identified and which we have previously noted; (2) by positioning us in an epistemology that allows us to relocate ourselves and distance ourselves from the direction, worrying for some, in which research in education is heading (Morín, 2006) and the way of understanding educational practice through statistical instruments and meta-analyses, which stops *listening* to educational practice (Korsgaard *et al.*, 2018) and ignores the reality that teachers and educators face, thus losing contact with *pedagogical tact* (Herbart, 1896 cited in Korsgaard *et al.*, 2018).

The research we set out here seeks to cast light on this sense, and its ultimate aim can be condensed in the words of UNESCO: "*How* can we advance legislation, policies, programs and *practices* that ensure inclusion and equity in education?"

(2020, p. 8 emphasis added). To do so we have examined an educational community that undertook a process of change and we have studied the process it followed in depth.

2. OBJECTIVES: RESEARCH QUESTIONS

We start with a main research question that is divided into two specific questions[2]:

- How has the process of educational transformation been carried out with the intention of developing a more inclusive education?
    * What were the reasons that inspired the start of the process?
    * What strategies were followed and implemented to drive the transformation with this horizon of change in the educational community?

3. METHOD

We carried out a single instrumental case study (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2009). This design enables a more in-depth consideration of the process of transformation with an inclusive outlook in an educational centre in the Community of Madrid (Spain).

Research in the field of inclusive education has shown the importance of setting out the philosophical assumptions that underpin the research (Messiou, 2016; Slee, 2019). Accordingly, at an ontological level, we understand that the experiences of the process of transformation of the educational centre we studied have a *high and systemic level of complexity* (Martínez, 2006;). The *direction of the change* must be constructed and understood from the context of the institution itself and its members, who can give *different meanings* to this experience, thus adopting the idea of *multiple realities* (Creswell, 2013). We understand that the image of the object of study that we show is not a reflection like a mirror would show and so we adopt positivist epistemological assumptions (Vasilachis de Gialdino, 2009). Instead, the analysis we present is one of the many approaches we could take to our object of study (Denzin y Lincoln, 2012; Gibbs, 2012)**.** Consequently, we can locate this research in a *constructivist–interpretativist paradigm* (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012).

3.1. *Description of the case*

This is a state-assisted private school run by a foundation. It is located in the north of the city of Madrid (Spain). It was founded in 1953. It has three classes at each level and at the time of the study had 1269 students across the school from nursery for two-year-olds through to year two of the Spanish Baccalaureate (aged 17–18). The teaching team comprises 90 staff members including teachers, the

---

2. This research was done under the framework of a doctoral thesis, which also has the objectives of understanding the results of this process of transformation in the educational community.

M.ª LUZ M. FERNÁNDEZ BLÁZQUEZ & GERARDO ECHEITA SARRIONANDIA
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

189

guidance department, and management. According to the headteacher, 5% of the centre's students are classed as *students with special educational needs*, and another 5% could be classed as such but this has not happened in this school in line with the centre's policy and in agreement with the families. In 2008, coinciding with a change in the centre's management team, a process of transformation was launched that sought to transform the centre giving it an inclusive outlook.

3.2. *Participants: selection criteria*

The *critical cases and maximum variation* criteria proposed by Miles *et al*. (2014) helped shape the total sample of 33 informants: 30 teaching staff with different roles in the educational community (management team, guidance department, teachers) and three parents of students from the centre.

3.3. *Information collection strategies*

To explore the motives that led to the start of the process of change and the strategies followed in the it, we used the following information collection strategies:

- Semi-structured interviews. We carried out 31 semi-structured interviews (Kvale, 2011) of differing formats (individual and in pairs) lasting between 30 and 120 minutes with 27 informants from the educational community.
- Discussion groups (Barbour, 2013). We held three discussion groups with teachers from primary education (five teachers), secondary education (five teachers), and the guidance department (six team members) of 50 minutes' duration each.

3.4. *Quality of the research*

This research was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Spain). We have also explicitly taken into account principles relating to quality in qualitative research: reflexivity, transparency, authenticity, holistic perspective, methodological systematicity, coherence, and awareness of complexity (Gehrig & Palacios, 2014;). We also followed a process of triangulation of data sources (Denzin, 1970, cited in Flick, 2015), comparing data and analyses that are comparable (Barbour, 2013), such as interviews in different formats and the discussion group. We carried out a triangulation process (Cresswell, 2013) between three researchers, two of whom are the authors of this work, by periodically comparing the analyses and interpretations done by the first of the researchers. We also followed a process of stakeholder review (Stake, 2013), comparing the analyses and results with various professionals from the centre throughout the study and in a final feedback session with the head of the centre.

3.5. *Procedure for analysing information*

The information collected was transformed into textual information using computers. We carried out an inductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Flick, 2013) including latent, or implicit, content and semantic, or explicit, content (Friese, 2019) in accordance with the research paradigm adopted. We define a topic as something that condenses the meaning or a pattern of part of the information found (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In the analyses we used the *ATLAS ti* version 1.6.0 computer program.

The thematic blocks and topics identified in the analyses are combined into two large dimensions: the break with the existing situation and strategies in the process of transformation. The first of these dimensions brings together the topics relating to the questions of *why start* and *where to head*, in other words, the reasons for starting the change and the direction that the educational community wanted to give to its process (Table 1).

Dimension 2 condenses the topic identified as the question of *how*, in other words, the strategies followed to be able to implement the process of change (Table 2).

4. RESULTS

The thematic blocks and topics are set out below. Each topic has a quote from a participant as its title, which distils how the topic is implemented. All of the names that appear in the quotes are pseudonyms.

Dimension 1. The break with the existing situation

How does one come to *perceive the need* to transform reality? In what direction should the effort for change be *directed*? In this dimension we found a major presence of the voices of two people who played a fundamental role as agents of change in the beginnings of the process of transformation (Powell *et al.*, 2015) and most evidently make the process visible. They are linked to the guidance department of the educational centre (for a more extensive analysis, see Fernández-Blázquez y Echeita, 2018).

TABLE 1
DIMENSION 1. THE BREAK WITH THE EXISTING SITUATION

Thematic block	Topic
Reasons for transformation	Students: replicating
	Practices-ideas: inconsistency
	Teaching work: lack of satisfaction
	Transformative experiences: the unfinished reality
Direction of the transformation	Open to all
	Theory as an essential concern

M.ª LUZ M. FERNÁNDEZ BLÁZQUEZ & GERARDO ECHEITA SARRIONANDIA
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

191

TABLE 2
DIMENSION 2. STRATEGIES IN THE PROCESS OF TRANSFORMATION

Thematic block	Topic
Strategies: Changes in structure and organisation	Changes in leadership
	Towards the configuration of the school as a community: staff bodies
	Transforming pedagogical practice
Strategies: towards the link with experience	Unfinished reality
	Acting
	Necessity
	Living what you teach
Strategies: from the link with people	Emotional availability and attunement
	Resistance

4.1. *Motives*

4.1.1. Students: replicating. "I want to be like the others in level 1A, in everything with everyone"

The professionals from the guidance department had experiences with students that made it easier for them to identify problems in the existing situation, develop reflexive processes regarding the implications of their own practices in the configuration of the educational experience of the students, and become aware of their role or responsibility in the creation of this experience. These experiences principally relate to how educational support was offered to students who were classed as having special educational needs. The particular words that open this topic come from the story of a student from the educational centre. This student, Vaiana, in the words of Mariana:

> I also know because of the conversations I had with the pedagogical therapist, she made all of the model change a little bit. Because we couldn't reach her. You know? (Mariana, Guidance Department).

"We couldn't reach her" implies a transformative perspective regarding the comprehension of diversity that previously existed in the educational community. This made it possible for them to break their inertia and connect themselves to their own professional experience: questioning their way of working and their own practices as a department.

4.1.2. Practices-ideas: inconsistency. "Inconsistent with the college's own
       principles"

There was some inconsistency in the connection between the educational centre's
ethos and the practices of the members of the guidance department. What the ethos
identified as the educational proposal was not related to what they members did as
a guidance department or the thing to which they were contributing.

> there were some big gaps between the purpose of the school and what we were doing
> as a department. So this raised lots of questions for us (…) we weren't satisfied.
> (Crista, Guidance Department).

This enabled them to articulate their reflections about the ethos and practice,
about what we might call the search for coherence between discourse and action.

4.1.3. Transformative experiences: the unfinished reality. "Experiences of real
       transformation"

The experience of being familiar with options for intervention that have contrib-
uted to profound transformations of people's lives seems to be a strong incentive
for professionals to think that transformation was possible, that what existed could
be transformed.

> I was at a critical moment where I felt… I felt like either this would end up absorbing
> me, or the system as it was would absorb me, take me to a different place [to the current
> one] or I would find something else. […] Because I was also having experiences of
> transformation in informal education contexts outside the school, experiences of real
> transformation, which are the ones that have excited me all through my life… That's
> why I'm here.
> (Crista, Guidance Department).

A journey to find alternatives for this new construction started then, based on
theory and undertaking training processes and knowing practices.

4.2. *Direction of the transformation*

4.2.1. Open to all. "It's open to everyone without exception"

The quote that heads this topic is from the school's Educational Proposal and
refers to the horizon chosen for its process of transformation. It is the filter through
all of the which all of the theoretical or practical content that permitted them to
advance towards the new configuration of the educational centre started to be
selected. Some members of the educational community have explicitly mentioned
inclusive education in the outlook for change:

M.ª LUZ M. FERNÁNDEZ BLÁZQUEZ & GERARDO ECHEITA SARRIONANDIA
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

193

An inclusive model where all of the students who have a support need are in class, the resources are in the classroom, the students participate in the same activity, they participate in the same dynamic, sometimes with different objectives, to achieve their own progress in… in the class and in the activity being covered, but the one being proposed.
(Enara, Guidance Department).

4.2.2. Theory as an essential concern. "Looking for what is well founded"

All of the people interviewed refer to some theoretical-educational concept or current that started to become valuable in the early stages of the change and enable us to observe that *theory* formed an essential concern during the process of transformation and that it also limited the possibilities for action. This teacher shares her experience of searching for alternatives to the way in which students were responded to in her subject, students who "didn't fit in anywhere":

So then when I was researching, I started to see that it had virtually no effect, very little effect. In other words, we did it with very good… with lots of care, but it had virtually no effect
(Saray, Management Team).

Dimension 2. Strategies in the process of transformation
The strategies put into action in the community are set out below in three thematic blocks: changes in structure, emotional availability, and resistance to change.

4.3. *Strategies: changes in structure and organisation*

4.3.1. Changes in leadership. "The management needed to transmit this support through the heads of the different sections"

At the start of the process of change, the leadership was not connected to pedagogical aspects. Therefore, the process of identifying problems in the existing situation, the feeling that there is a need for change, and the vision of themselves as key agents in this process was not shared by part of the management team in the way it was by members of the guidance department. For circumstantial reasons, one of the members of the guidance department became head of studies for primary education and there in a *formal leadership* position could implement some changes. In fact, the drive for change in this educational centre comes from the management team:

If it hadn't been the school leadership team who had the courage needed to do all of this, it wouldn't have happened.
(Galo, Primary Education teacher).

4.3.2. The school as a community: use of the staff bodies. "We have to create staff bodies where everyone is together"

The words that open this topic allude to the intention at the start of the transformation of linking work between colleagues. The information obtained suggests that staff bodies explicitly became a meeting place for all of the team of professionals, with the intention of transforming the absence of collaborative work between members of the community:

> Then there was reflection on: "we have to create staff bodies where everyone is together" (…). But the first proposal was: "We have to have an excuse every Thursday to convince the… to make us get together. And then even though we do shared tasks and divide ourselves up, we have to get together to reflect on something, even if it is only to make announcements and the like".
> (Cristian, Management Team).

4.3.3. Transforming pedagogical practice. "Good practices"

One of the topics that has been reflected has been the transformation in the teaching methodology. Tiana recounts some of the specific transformations:

> Because we started with the idea of getting rid of textbooks; after getting rid of books, we started working on projects; (…) then, a couple of years ago, the communication and language project began, which is the communicative topic…
> (Tiana, Early-Years Education).

As we saw in the topic relating to the direction of the change, theory is identified as an essential concern in this group of professionals. This meant that the transformations in methodology were supported in training processes for teachers:

> it's unusual to have a year where you don't have some kind of course, one-day training programme, something, a year when you don't have something is odd, inclusion, inclusive sport, management, conflict resolution…
> (Merlín, Primary Education).

4.4. *Strategies: towards the link with experience*

4.4.1. Unfinished reality. "We started imagining"

Different strategies were used with teachers to contribute to their understanding of the situation as something unfinished that can be transformed. Among them we found: imagining alternative forms of educating, training processes, and sharing and seeing the practices of other colleagues from the centre. In relation to the idea of imagining, Cristian comments:

M.ª LUZ M. FERNÁNDEZ BLÁZQUEZ & GERARDO ECHEITA SARRIONANDIA
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

195

We sat down to imagine with the staff bodies, we started imagining, what we imagine for our students, in fact it is still documented and is up in the staffroom and we carry on working very often with that energy, what we imagine, when we imagine it turns out that we don't imagine failing everyone and everyone studying a lot in the evening, when we imagine a classroom, a school, whatever, we imagine really cool things (Cristian, Management Team).

4.4.2. Acting. "Taking the leap"

Faced with major processes of advance planning, we found more action and subsequent reflection on it. As one teacher puts it: "diving in at the deep end":

Researcher. And what was that like? [starting some of the transformations she had described, specifically, the question of early attention].

Elisa. [Laughter]. Well, look, it was like… like… diving into the swimming pool… but I loved it.
(Elisa, Primary Education).

4.4.3. Need. "How can I do it?"

At the centre level, the decision was taken that no student would leave class without receiving educational support. So, the teaching staff started to find that their pedagogical practice did not meet the needs of the students they now had and that the training in methodology that was being driven by the management team now had a sense, a use:

Of course, when you change the model and then some students are accepted who wouldn't have been in a mainstream centre before or who weren't counted or at least this isn't what the situation in this centre was like, it creates difficulties for the teacher. (Ivo, Management Team).

The idea of increased diversity of students, linked to the transformation of the guidance model through which support was provided, facilitated processes of reflecting on pedagogical practice.

4.4.4. Living what you teach. "They do the same with us that they want us to do"

The words that head this topic set out to make visible another way in which the school tried to contribute to creating a link with experience: teachers experiencing in person what they have to do in class. Various teaching staff share this in relation to the use of methodologies, for example, cooperative learning. Merlín, a teacher, explains this fact:

In the teaching bodies they do the same with us that they want us to do with the cooperative groups in class.
(Merlín, Primary Education).

4.5. *Strategies: from the link with people*

4.5.1. Emotional availability and attunement. "Because, of course, you put yourself in the other person's place"

Emotional availability by the people who exercised leadership in the process of transformation was very clearly on display throughout our information gathering, and training in it was also provided. This availability meant that leaders seemed to accept that managing teachers' emotions was part of their job. This openness to emotions involved putting themselves in their colleagues' shoes, thus displaying a certain emotional attunement:

At first it was a bit like having a lot of… a lot of sense and logic and really being with all of your senses very open to see how your colleagues were doing and propose things that were close to what they liked, their strong points. Making sure it was them in particular who made proposals.
(Enara, Guidance Department).

This openness to others' emotions seems to have facilitated the provision of accompaniment in the process of change. This accompaniment for families is above all related to the idea of creating trust. In the words of one of the families interviewed:

we were about to take her [our daughter] to a… [special education] school, when we had a diagnosis. And it was there that we met with Cristian [the head] to take a decision. (…) And then he asked us to trust him, because of course we had serious doubts about what to do, how to do it, and then well we trusted him. "Let's start working on it, let's start asking for support staff, let's start working with Vaiana in this way" and, well, it was a very important decision for us, but also very important for the school.
(Fausto, father of a girl at the school).

4.5.2. Resistance. "Because we were going in one direction"

Negative, reluctant, or opposing reactions to the process of transformation appeared in the educational community. This is reflected in the opinion of one of the teaching staff, which has been shared by several of the informants:

(There are) people put up with it, but, well, without much enthusiasm, right through to the person who boycotts you. And there are people who just don't accept it, who are against the project, who are going to criticise, who are going to try something… It's like everywhere, there are all sorts. I think in general it's good, a big majority, even

M.ª LUZ M. FERNÁNDEZ BLÁZQUEZ & GERARDO ECHEITA SARRIONANDIA
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

197

older people where you think, "How are you going to learn new methodologies, do research and so on at the age of 60?", but, no, there are lots of people who are really motivated with the project.
(Coque, Early-Years Education).

It was accepted that they were natural and that the important thing was to welcome them as such.

5.   DISCUSSION

The main aim of this research has been to understand, from an emic focus, the process of transforming an educational centre to develop a more inclusive education, trying to understand the motives that led to the start of the process as well as the strategies implemented. The findings of this research fall within a logic of generalisation pertaining to qualitative methodologies, in other words, naturalistic ones.

Regarding the aspects that led to the break with the previous situation, we find that people stopped seeing the existing practice in the school (Tyack & Cuban, 2001) as immovable and started to see it from a new perspective close to the idea that *it can and should be transformed by us*. For that very reason, it became something unfinished, incomplete, with a similar meaning to that of Freire (2009), who spoke of people as unfinished beings with the power to create, recreate, and decide on the pre-existing world, which would become not a pre-existing world but one consciously created from the acts of people themselves. In this process of creation, ethical questions are of a primary value because the answer to the following question largely depends on them: where should effort in transformation be directed? According to the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (2014, p. 6) "The next generation of teachers and education professionals must be prepared to be teachers/trainers for all learners; they need to be trained not just in terms of competences but also of ethical values".

Accordingly, we specifically identified the role that two particular people might have played at the start of the transformation, who consequently became very important agents of change in its early stages and for the sustainability of the process. As Ehrich and Carrington (2018) note, agents of change have strong ethical convictions for confronting the different dilemmas inherent to that these processes of transformation with an inclusive outlook. The presence of people who perform this type of role in processes of change has been highlighted in the literature (Bolivar *et al.*, 2013; Murillo & Krichesky, 2012; Puig, 2012; Marchesi & Martín, 2014; Parrilla, *et al.*, 2017; Schlessinger, 2018; Ehrich & Carrington, 2018). As Powell, Edelstein and Blanck (2015) suggest, processes of transformation require the presence of *agents of change*, who (1) are open to new solutions for old problems, (2) have an in-depth understanding of the obstacles facing transformation, and (3) have viable solutions,

the *power* and the resources necessary to ensure compliance. We emphasise the word *power* because, specifically in the case of this educational centre, the people who led the process of transformation also had to adopt a position of greater formal authority. But what drove these leaders to question the status quo?

They made themselves agents of transformation through what we could define as a *problematisation of the present*. This capacity is identified by Koorsgard (2018) who returns to Hannah Arendt's idea of "thinking without a banister", and it offers an opportunity to look at the present through new eyes. A questioning attitude towards the status quo has been identified in places where processes of transformation have been implemented (Bunch, 2008). Ehrich and Carrington (2018) return to the *moral imagination* of Blumberg and Greenfield (1986) to refer to people's capacity to see the distance between how things are and how they could be. They state that this capacity invites the person to act on reality, taking these imagined possibilities as a horizon and transforming the present through their action.

This questioning attitude, which can help identify problems in the present and encourage people to position themselves as agents of transformation, is also related to the *ethical presence* of people in the world, an initial question to which we referred when faced with the vision of reality as unfinished. Teaching practice has been identified as an ethical practice by many authors from various theoretical currents (Echeita, 2013; Booth y Ainscow, 2015; Arteaga-Martínez & García, 2008; Ehrich & Carrington, 2018; Freire, 2009; Fernández-Batanero, 2013; Vázquez & Escámez, 2010). From our perspective, ethical aspects must be central on the path towards a more inclusive education and the results of this study strengthen this conviction. The possibility of questioning the existing situation was created thanks to various mechanisms in the form of concrete lived experiences. We describe them below.

Recognising the potential value of these specific experiences could contribute to an understanding of questions that might provide an impetus in transformations or mechanisms for eroding reproductive processes in institutions (Powell *et al.*, 2015). We have identified the connection with students as a central aspect. Connecting with the specific experience of students who are classed as having special educational needs led teaching staff to question their practice. The perspective and empathy towards them as *individual people* made this possible. Hart and Drummond (2004) use the term "transformability" to refer to the linkage of conceptions that lead teachers to feel able to improve students' learning and their future development.

The need to stress the value of each student in his or her uniqueness has been identified as necessary for the development of inclusive education (Echeita *et al.*, 2014; Norwich, 2009; Florian, 2014; Muñoz & Porter, 2018). Specifically, the students who are classed as having special educational needs enable some of these opportunities. The increased heterogeneity of the students in class and the policy decision of the centre that educational support should be provided in class might have helped create some new experiences in professional practice to which teaching staff had to

M.ª LUZ M. FERNÁNDEZ BLÁZQUEZ & GERARDO ECHEITA SARRIONANDIA
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

199

respond. Immersion in the "complexity of experience", as Naraian and Schlessinger (2017) identified in their study, enabled transformation. This situation can also be analysed in the words of Echeita (2014, p. 51, own translation): "And why is it that well-accepted diversity *can* produce such positive effects? Because diversity creates *uncertainty* and *challenge*, and both are prerequisites for innovation and creativity (…); they are the precondition for excellence" (author's emphasis). And he notes, returning to Skrtic (1991), that an adequate focus on attention to diversity can be a great opportunity to bring together excellence and equity.

In the case of these professionals, the link with students as individuals helped them become aware of the *mismatch between their practices* and what developing transformative education might require. We have identified different concepts or formulations in the literature that, with their nuances, ultimately refer us to similar questions to those that refer to experiences that allow questioning of the status quo. These are theoretical constructs that name events that have acted as mechanisms that can contribute to reflection and to transformation. These experiences are of value because of the possibility that they will mobilise the questioning of reality, creativity, and action and that they can lead to transformation of the existing (Messiou & Ainscow, 2020).

In this sense, Schön (1992) uses the term "undetermined zones of practice" to refer to events and experience that cannot be answered using the knowledge the person possesses and so create a need to find new ways to approach them. Cole and Engeström (2001) from their expansion of the theory of activity, give a central importance to the element of "contradictions" in the system of activity of people or groups that require the new reconfiguration of the system to be able to find balance again, in other words, the response considered to be appropriate from the activity. In the specific field of inclusive education, Ainscow (2004) speaks of "interruptions" and, returning to Senge (1989), observes that these interruptions can act as *levers* for changing the behaviour of an organisation. Sapon-Shevin (2013) specifically mentions students with special educational needs as a "revealing tablet" that fulfils this function.

Becoming conscious of one's own experience through the connection with the experience of the students seems to be something that might have established itself as one of the mechanisms for identifying problems in the status quo and launching the transformation: they felt responsible for the school life of particular students who were not responding educationally as they felt they should, and so placed professional practice in a relational logic from which care for students is established as something valuable. This outlook might start by positioning educational practice as both reflexive (Brady, 2020) and *relational*, with values of care, genuine interest in students, and love being central (Gergen, 2015; Pennac, 2008; Vázquez & Escámez, 2010; Vázquez, 2009). As well as the connection with students, other experiences that might provide an opportunity to problematise the present were familiarity with

options for action and feeling that transformation is possible thanks to knowledge of transformative experiences in other contexts.

Regarding the connection between the centre's practices and its ethos or educational project, it does seem that making incoherence visible was what initially led them to question the status quo and position themselves as agents of transformation; rather, it enabled them to establish the outlook to follow. We believe that this is of great value, as from the experience of this educational centre we have learnt that it was through the specific lived experiences, described above in the results section (connecting with students, knowledge of transformative experiences), that certain configurations or mechanisms developed that have awoken the need for transformation (Powell *et al.*, 2015; Göransson & Nilholm, 2014). Despite this, it was the horizon towards which actions were directed at different levels and it established itself as a tool to appeal to the need for change by creating reflexive processes that confronting it in the educational community. This is similar to the role that the view of inclusive education as a human right can play (UN, 2006): it has legal and moral force (Asís *et al.*, 2007) but on its own it is insufficient for it to take shape in the actions appropriate to this right.

The value of a change in leadership has been identified in the school studied. This change in leadership played a vital role in transforming the structure and organisation. We have identified a variety of practices in the leadership of the educational centre, and these relate to previous proposals, such as the development of more pedagogical leadership (Murillo, 2006; Murillo *et al.*, 2010). The leaders' plan to *link transformation to the experience of the team* of professionals in the centre was also fundamental. In this respect, and as we have previously noted, the inclusion of students who were previously kept out of the system enabled them to put themselves in a new educational scenario that required them to transform their pedagogical practice. As a result, the training processes that were promoted by the educational centre, which made it possible to find answers to the needs perceived by the teaching team, become meaningful (Naraian & Schlessinger, 2017). And, finally, positioning oneself next to people, in other words, *accompanying* them. The value of considering the emotional dimension in processes of educational transformation is recognised, as they demand great effort from people (Fullan, 2002; Martín & Cervi, 2006; Murillo & Krichesky, 2012). This makes it vital to try to return a certain degree of security and trust to the teaching staff, given the complexity and uncertainty of the challenges that the development of a more inclusive education poses them (Florian 2014; Fernández-Batanero, 2013). These challenges will also be the moral reward that will sustain them in the undertaking. In this sense, we end with the words of Booth (2006) who condenses part of this feeling:

> When our efforts to bring about change in accordance with our values are frustrated, principled action is our own reward and so the laborious task of combining values of inclusion with actions keeps a resource for acting differently alive. (p. 217, own translation).

M.ª LUZ M. FERNÁNDEZ BLÁZQUEZ & GERARDO ECHEITA SARRIONANDIA
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

201

6.   CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, we have identified five principal ideas that condense some of the lessons learned on the basis of the experience of the educational community, which we have analysed in this research:

- How can inclusive transformation be started? It is important to begin with the idea that *it is possible* to transform reality, and that this can be internalised, and accepted by educational communities. This idea is an important step towards initiating the change.

- Under what outlook on reality? It is important to identify problems in the existing situation, recognise its complexity and question it, and identify the aspects that must be transformed in view of the inclusive horizon, where ethical questions have special force.

- How can this be started? To promote this questioning and transformative outlook on reality, it is valuable to connect with students as individuals, as is awareness of transformative experiences that have been implemented elsewhere and enable us to see that another reality is possible and can act as support for us.

- Who starts the transformation? It is especially valuable for professionals to see themselves as agents of change, with capacity for agency and transformation.

- How can we make this possible? Leadership plays a fundamental role in creating the conditions that make it possible to launch and sustain the process.

REFERENCES

Agencia Europea para las Necesidades Educativas Especiales y la Educación Inclusiva (2014). *Cinco mensajes clave para la educación inclusiva*. https://bit.ly/344VXO9

Ainscow, M. (2004). El desarrollo de sistemas educativos inclusivos: ¿Cuáles son las palancas de cambio? *Journal of Educational Change, 5*(4), 1-20.

Arteaga-Martínez, B., y García, M. (2008). La formación de competencias docentes para incorporar estrategias adaptativas en el aula. *Revista Complutense de Educación, 19*(2), 253-274. https://bit.ly/3sbGAv9

Artiles, A. J., & Kozleski, E. B. (2016). Inclusive education's promises and trajectories: Critical notes about future research on a venerable idea. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 24*(43), 1-29. https://doi.org/10.14507/epaa.24.1919

Asís, R., Campoy, I., y Bengoechea, M. A. (2007). Derecho a la igualdad y a la diferencia análisis de los principios de no discriminación, diversidad y acción positiva. En R. Lorenzo y L. C. Pérez (Eds.), *Tratado sobre Discapacidad* (pp. 115-141). Aranzadi/Thompson.

Barbour, R. (2013). *Los grupos de discusión en Investigación Cualitativa*. Morata.

Blumberg, A., & Greenfield, W. (1986). *The effective principal perspectives on school leadership* (2nd Edition). Allyn and Bacon.

Bolívar, A., López, J., y Murillo, F. J. (2013). Liderazgo en las instituciones educativas. Una revisión de líneas de investigación. *Revista Fuentes, 14*, 15-60. https://bit.ly/3ARCdtb

Booth, T. (2006). Manteniendo el futuro con vida; convirtiendo los valores de la inclusión en acciones. En M. A. Verdugo, y F. B. Jordán de Urríes (Coords.), *Rompiendo inercias. Claves para avanzar. VI Jornadas Científicas de Investigación sobre Personas con Discapacidad* (pp. 211-217). Amarú.

Booth, T. y Ainscow, M. (2015). *Guía para la educación inclusiva. Desarrollando el aprendizaje y la participación en los centros escolares.* (3.ª ed.). Grafilia.

Brady, A. M. (2020). Del docente reflexivo al docente post-personal. *Teoría de la Educación. Revista Interuniversitaria, 32*(1), 55-71. https://doi.org/10.14201/teri.21438

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2) 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bunch, G. (2008). Claves para una educación inclusiva exitosa. Una mirada desde la experiencia práctica. *Revista de Educación Inclusiva, 1*(1), 77-89. https://bit.ly/3L4T2FK

Cole, M. y Engeström, Y. (2001). Enfoque histórico-cultural de la cognición distribuida. En G. Salomon (Ed.), *Cogniciones distribuidas. Consideraciones psicológicas y educativas* (pp. 23- 73). Amorrortu.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry and research design. choosing among five approaches* (3.ª ed.). Sage.

Denzin, N. K., y Lincoln, Y. S. (2012). Introducción general. La investigación cualitativa como disciplina y como práctica. En N. K. Denzin e Y. S. Lincoln (Coords.), *Manual de investigación cualitativa. El campo de la investigación cualitativa (vol. 1)* (pp. 43-102). Gedisa.

M.ª LUZ M. FERNÁNDEZ BLÁZQUEZ & GERARDO ECHEITA SARRIONANDIA
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

203

Echeita, G. (2013). Inclusión y exclusión educativa. De nuevo "Voz y quebranto". *Revista Electrónica Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación, 11*(2), 99-118.

Echeita, G. (2014). *Educación para la inclusión o educación sin exclusiones*. Narcea.

Echeita, G., Muñoz, Y., Sandoval Mena, M., y Simón Rueda, C. (2014). Reflexionando en voz alta sobre el sentido y algunos saberes proporcionados por la investigación en el ámbito de la educación inclusiva. *Revista Latinoamericana de Educación Inclusiva, 8*(2), 25-48.

Ehrich, L. C., & Carrington, S. (2018). Making sense of ethical leadership. En J. Harris, S. Carrington y M. Ainscow (Eds.), *Promoting equity in schools. Collaboration, Inquire and Ethical Leadership* (pp. 30-44). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315105659-8

Fernández-Batanero, J. M. (2013). Competencias docentes y educación inclusiva. *Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa, 15*(2), 82-99. https://bit.ly/3upvrto

Fernández Blázquez, M. L. y Echeita Sarrionandia, G. (2018). Un departamento de Orientación singular en un Centro Educativo que tiene la colaboración como seña de identidad. *Profesorado: Revista de Curriculum y Formación del Profesorado, 22*(2), 161-183.

Flick, U. (2015). *El diseño de investigación cualitativa*. Morata.

Flick, U. (2013). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282243

Florian, L. (2014). Reimagining Special Education: Why New Approaches are Needed. En L. Florian (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Special Education (vol. 1)*. (2.ª ed.) (pp. 9-23). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282236.n3

Freire, P. (2009). *Pedagogía de la autonomía* (11.ª ed.). Siglo XXI.

Friese, S. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis with ATLAS. ti*. Sage.

Fullan, M. (2002). *Los nuevos significados del cambio en educación*. Octaedro.

Gehrig, R., y Palacios, J. (Coords.). (2014). *Guía de criterios básicos de calidad en la investigación cualitativa*. Servicio de publicaciones UCAM.

Gergen, K. (2015). *El ser relacional. Más allá del Yo y de la Comunidad*. Desclée de Brouwer.

Gibbs, G. (2012). *El análisis de datos en investigación cualitativa*. Morata.

Göransson, K., & Nilholm C. (2014). Conceptual diversities and empirical shortcomings- a critical analysis of research on inclusive education. *European Journal of Special Needs Education, 29*(3), 265-280. https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2014.933545

Hakala, J. T., & Leivo, M. (2017). Tensions in the New Millennium: Inclusion Ideology and Education Policy in the Finnish Comprehensive School. *Journal of Education and Learning, 6*(3), 287-298. https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v6n3p287

Hart, S., & Drummond, M. J. (2014). Learning Without Limits: Constructing a Pedagogy Free from Determinist Beliefs about Ability. En L. Florian (Ed.), *The SAGE Handbook of Special Education*. (2.ª ed.) (pp. 439-458). Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781446282236.n28

Korsgaard, M., Larsen, V., & Wiberg, M. (2018). Thinking and researching inclusive education without a banister-visiting, listening and tact as a foundation for collective research on inclusive education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 24*(5), 496-512, https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2018.1469680

Kvale, S. (2011). *Las entrevistas en Investigación Cualitativa*. Morata.

Martín, E., y Cervi. J. (2006). Modelos de formación docente para el cambio de concepciones en los profesores. En N. Scheuer, J. I. Pozo, M. del Pérez Echeverría, M. M. Mateos, E. Martín y M. de la Cruz (Coords.), *Nuevas formas de pensar el aprendizaje y la enseñanza. Concepciones de profesores y alumnos* (pp. 420-434). Graó.

Martín, E. y Marchesi, A. (2014). *Calidad de la enseñanza en tiempos de crisis*. Alianza.

Martínez, M. (2006). La investigación cualitativa (síntesis conceptual). *Revista de Investigación en Psicología*, *9*(1), 123-146.

Messiou, K. (2016). Research in the field of inclusive education: time for a rethink? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *21*(2), 146-159. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360311 6.2016.1223184/

Messiou, K., & Ainscow, M. (2020). Inclusive Inquiry: student-teacher dialogue as a means of promoting inclusion in schools. *British Educational Research Journal*, *46*(3), 670-687. https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3602

Miles, M., Huberman, M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis. A methods Sourcebook*. (3.ª ed.). SAGE.

Morin, E. (2006). *La mente bien ordenada: repensar la reforma, reformar el pensamiento*. (6.ª ed.). Seix Barral.

Muñoz, Y., & Porter, G. (2020). Planning for all students: promoting inclusive instruction, *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, *24*(14), 1552-1567. https://doi.org/10.10 80/13603116.2018.1544301

Murillo, J. (2006). Dirección escolar para el cambio: Del liderazgo transformacional al liderazgo distribuido. *REICE: Revista Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación*, *4*(4), 11-24. https://bit.ly/3sSyMPo

Murillo, J., y Krichesky, G. (2012). El Proceso del Cambio Escolar. Una Guía para Impulsar y Sostener la Mejora de las Escuelas. *REICE. Revista Iberoamericana sobre Calidad, Eficacia y Cambio en Educación, 10*(1), 26-43. https://revistas.uam.es/index.php/reice/ article/view/3072

Murillo, F. J., Krichesky, G., Castro, A., y Hernández, R. (2010). Liderazgo para la inclusión escolar y la justicia social. Aportaciones de la investigación. *Revista Latinoamericana de Educación Inclusiva, 4*(1), 169-186. https://bit.ly/3ISPX9G

Nairaian, S., & Schlessinger, S. (2017). When theory meets the "reality of reality": Reviewing the sufficiency of the social model of disability as a foundation for teacher preparation for inclusive education. *Teacher Education Quarterly, 44*(1), 81-100. https://www.jstor. org/stable/90003619?seq=1#page_scan_tab_contents/

Nilholm, C., & Göransson, K. (2017). What is meant by inclusion? An analysis of European and North American journal articles with high impact. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *32*(3), 437-451 https://doi.org/10.1080/08856257.2017.1295638

Norwich, B. (2009). Dilemmas of difference, inclusion, and disability: international perspective placement. *European Journal of Special Needs Education*, *23*(4), 287-304.

M.ª LUZ M. FERNÁNDEZ BLÁZQUEZ & GERARDO ECHEITA SARRIONANDIA
TOWARDS A MORE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: A SCHOOL TRANSFORMATION

205

Norwich, B. (2014). Changing policy and legislation and its effects on inclusive and special education: a perspective from England. *British Journal of Special Education, 41*(4), 403-425 https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8578.12079

Parrilla, A., Susinos, T., Gallego-Vega, C., y Martínez, B. (2017). Revisando críticamente cómo investigamos en educación inclusiva: cuatro proyectos con un enfoque educativo y social. *Revista Interuniversitaria de Formación del Profesorado, 89*, 145-156. https://bit.ly/3IY1hkZ

Pennac, D. (2008). *Mal de escuela*. Random House.

Powell, J., Edelstein, B., & Blanck, J. (2015). Awareness-raising, legitimation, or backlash? Effects of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities on education systems in Germany. *Globalisation, Societies and Education, 14*(2), 227-250 https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2014.982076

Puig, J. M.ª (2012). La cultura moral como sistema de prácticas y mundo de valores. En J. M.ª Puig (Coord.), *Cultura moral y educación* (pp. 87-105). Graó.

Sapon-Shevin, M. (2013). La inclusión real: Una perspectiva de justicia social [Versión en castellano]. *Revista de investigación en Educación, 11*(3), 71-85.

Schlessinger, S. (2018). Reclaiming teacher intellectualism through and for inclusive education, *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 22*(3), 268-284 https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2017.1362598

Schön, D. (1992). *La formación de profesionales reflexivos. Hacia un nuevo diseño de la enseñanza y el aprendizaje en las profesiones*. Paidós/MEC.

Senge, P.M. (1989). *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*. Century.

Skrtic, T. M. (1991). The special education paradox: Equity as the way to excellence. *Harvard Educational Review, 61*(2), 148-206. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.61.2.0q702751580h0617

Slee, R. (2019) Belonging in an age of exclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education, 23*(9) 909-922 https://doi.org/10.1080/13603116.2019.1602366

Stake, R. (2013). Estudio de casos cualitativos. En N. K. Denzin e Y. S. Lincoln (Coords.), *Manual de investigación cualitativa. Las estrategias de investigación cualitativa (vol. 3)*, (43-102). Gedisa.

Tyack, D., y Cuban, L. (2001). *En Busca de la Utopía: un siglo de reformas en las escuelas públicas*. FCE.

UNESCO. (2020). *Towards inclusion in education: status, trends and challenges: the UNESCO Salamanca Statement 25 years on*. UNESCO. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000374246/

UNESCO. (2015). *Educación 2030. Declaración de Incheon y Marco de Acción. Hacia una educación inclusiva y equitativa de calidad y aprendizaje a lo largo de la vida para todos*. http://www.unesco.org/new/fileadmin/MULTIMEDIA/FIELD/Santiago/pdf/ESP-Marco-de-Accion-E2030-aprobado.pdf/

United Nations (UN). (2006). *Convención de las Naciones Unidas sobre los derechos de las personas con discapacidad*. https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/documents/tccconvs.pdf.

Vasilachis de Gialdino, I. (2009). Los fundamentos ontológicos y epistemológicos de la investigación cualitativa. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research*, *10*(2), Art. 30. https://bit.ly/3ojPTrS

Vázquez, V. (2009). *La educación y la ética del cuidado en el pensamiento de Nel Noddings*. (Tesis doctoral), Universitat de València, Facultad de Filosofía y Ciencias de la Educación, España. https://bit.ly/3gm1D8V

Vázquez, V., y Escámez, J. (2010). La profesión docente y la ética del cuidado. *Revista Electrónica de Investigación Educativa, 12*(especial), 1-17. https://bit.ly/34djLzl

Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. (4.ª Ed.). Sage.