

Article

Construction of a Participatory Model of School Accompaniment to Improve School Inclusion

Odet Moliner ^{*}, María Lozano and Aida Sanahuja 

Department of Pedagogy and Didactics of Social Sciences, Language and Literature, University Jaume I, 120171 Castellón, Spain

* Correspondence: molgar@uji.es

Abstract: This article presents research that examines how the processes of school change and improvement are promoted in those Spanish schools that are developing educational projects based on an inclusive, participatory and democratic model. The aim is to investigate the key elements involved in the processes of accompaniment of those schools that initiate processes of improvement and change from an inclusive approach, as well as the relationships established among them. Methodologically, this is a phenomenological study developed in two consecutive phases: in the first phase, the key elements are identified from the perspective of 24 inclusive education researchers participating in four focus groups and in the second phase, the study delves into their characteristic features and the relationship between them from the perspective of 19 professionals and researchers through 9 heterogeneous thematic focus groups. The analysis provides an integrated view of the actors involved: teachers, school management team, education authorities and researchers. The results show and define 8 key factors and present a model, collaboratively constructed, that links these key elements to develop more inclusive schools and helps to problematise them in order to build knowledge about what inclusive education means in a situated way.

Keywords: accompaniment; improvement; inclusive education; participation; model



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1. Introduction

The transformation of schools with an inclusive horizon is a current issue because, at the moment, it finally seems that there is a firm political commitment to promote an inclusive education model. The international agreements are in line with the establishment of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the 2030 Horizon. Specifically, goal 4 aims at ensuring inclusive, equitable and quality education.

However, many schools starting the transformation process require guidance, orientation and accompaniment. However, what does this accompaniment look like, who provides it, and what are the key factors for it to be consistent with an inclusive, democratic and participatory school model?

This study addresses an issue of vital importance for the improvement of school inclusion processes: the factors that the people involved in them define as key. In fact, one of the main difficulties for the success of such initiatives is the imbalances in the participation of the actors involved, an issue addressed in this study. Therefore, the interest of the present research lies in defining these factors and linking them through the construction of a participatory model of school accompaniment to improve school inclusion.

In the Spanish context, policy development has been promoted. Since education competences are decentralized and transferred to the Autonomous Communities, some regions, such as the Valencian Community and Catalonia, have made a step forward by publishing specific legislation that establishes the conditions for implementing equity and inclusion principles in the educational system. For this purpose, they count on the support

of the Specialized Counselling Services and the Teachers' Continuous Training Centres, which are subordinated to the public administration and provide the necessary support to develop, follow and assess the educational responses and the inclusive projects.

On the other hand, in the academic and scientific context of the Universities, extensive knowledge of inclusive education has been generated. The issue of how to enhance progress towards inclusion in schools is at the centre of the debate in the scientific literature in educational research. Recent literature reviews [1–3] agree that mainly theoretical and descriptive research has been conducted regarding inclusion, and there is a lack of empirical research on interventions. This is evidenced by the proliferation of articles on inclusive education, both in the international and national context [4–9] but the current concern in the field of inclusive education is how to mobilize knowledge, that is, how to enhance and increase the impact of the research in the communities and schools, and how to benefit from the joint work of researchers and practitioners to generate new knowledge [1,7].

As some relevant authors in this field [2,10,11] we consider that inclusive education is a process that maximizes the learning and participation of all the students. Such a process involves planning, implementing and assessing Educational Improvement Plans, Projects and Programs with an inclusive approach. This interest is evidenced in the literature by the increase of studies on these improvement processes [6,12–14].

At the same time, some authors [4,10] point to the existence of some elements that promote the schools' progress, such as some clear principles that guide political priorities within an education system, the opinions and actions of the people who really know the context, such as the community members and the education authorities, and the criteria used for assessing the schools' performance. Research on School Efficiency [15] also defines as associated factors: (a) the sense of community, (b) the school and class environment, (c) the school management team, (d) quality curriculum, (e) time management, (f) participation of the school community, (g) teachers' professional development, (h) having high expectations, and (i) the facilities and resources. Many authors [16–18] consider the School Improvement and Effectiveness movement as a valid theory to support and implement processes of change and improvement for inclusive education. Schools implementing inclusive practices share these key elements [9]: (a) a shared cultural project of common values and objectives that gives meaning and cohesion to the educational community [10], (b) spaces and times that facilitate citizen participation [19]; (c) commitment to social change [20]; (d) involved in a network of support and cooperation to increase schools' capacity and culture to deal with diversity in an inclusive and sustainable way; (e) planned and guided by the school, inside or outside the school, but related to the teaching–learning of content, processes and dynamics for community life; (f) embedded in its territory to strengthen the links between people and institutions in the local context [21]. However, the above-mentioned factors, in isolation, have a limited impact and it is its comprehensive combination which shapes a culture oriented towards efficiency and improvement.

Moreover, inclusive change processes that affect the school's culture represent a continuous challenge to transform the school into a space which is more sensible and open to the diversity of people and communities [22]. According to Echeita [23] we must implement the change needed at different plans or levels (multi-level/systemic) and involve many educational actors (multi-agency) working towards the same goal. In addition, from the literature review [24–28], it emerges that those schools immersed in improvement and transformation processes to achieve more inclusive schools follow more or less participatory action-research processes. Knowledge about inclusive education, flow from the theory to the practice and vice versa and shall be determined by the conditions of each school and each research process. According to Kemmis and McTaggart [29] (p. 560), on the critical side of active research, Participatory Action-Research Processes (PAR) “express the commitment to carry out a wide social analysis—the self-reflective self-study of one's practice, [...] and the action to improve things”. Thus, PAR is considered a coherent research approach consistent with the inclusive education model [26,30,31].

When schools start such complex transformation processes, they often turn to people from outside the school (counsellors, advisors or researchers) who guide, orient and accompany the process from the expert, scientific or academic knowledge generated by educational research. The positions, responsibilities and roles adopted by the counsellors and researchers in the face of this demand largely determine the processes developed there and the interactions among the actors involved. In fact, the work of Wang & Mu [32] highlights that the researchers play different roles in the different phases of an action-research project (AR). On the other hand, in the process of improvement towards inclusion, the researcher must know how to leave space to the professionals and other actors, which many times causes dilemmas between the role of expert that the actors give him/her and the one he/she intends to play as an accompanying person who facilitates the processes.

Accompaniment aims at helping the actors to explore their beliefs and practices through critical and collaborative reflection [10,33,34]. For this reason, we are interested in learning how to accompany the process so that the actors themselves find the solutions to their problems. Hence, this research arises from the question: how do we implement this accompaniment from an inclusive perspective?

Accompanying means, literally, “placing yourself next to another person” [35] (p. 17), going together on a journey, keeping him/her company. From this acceptance, accompanying means, firstly, helping the actors to explore their assumptions and beliefs, and thus trying to make sense of what they do and why they do it, so that they can make informed decisions and propose solutions to their problems [36]; it also means listening and observing without judging; it is essential to listen, and to be a good listener, because this is the beginning of a good dialogue. Accompanying also means sharing, as well as being in an attitude of learning, being available for learning and understanding [34]. Through this attitude, both researchers and actors are seen from a more egalitarian perspective. This promotes comprehension and appreciation of practical knowledge. For example, teachers have a deep knowledge of teaching-learning situations; it is a contextualized knowledge, located, and the interaction with the researcher is an opportunity to make it explicit [36,37]. The same occurs with the students’ and families’ knowledge; experiential, tacit and deep knowledge about what inclusion means and about the barriers towards inclusion that they experience on a daily basis. Therefore, the roles of the people accompanying the transformation processes are configured, by their positioning when choosing AR or PAR a method for investigating the critical transformation of reality, their different conceptions of what knowledge mobilisation is, and their commitment to the precepts of inclusion [37].

According to Ainscow [38] the development of inclusive practices “involves social learning processes within a given workplace that influence people’s action and, indeed, the thinking that informs their actions” (p. 5). Following this author, accompaniment involves developing strategies, with and among the actors, that facilitate sharing the experiences of what happens in the school regarding the inclusion or exclusion situations lived, the daily activity, and the difficulties found; analysing the school educational history; finding a common language, and looking for ways to transform the practices to make them more inclusive. This requires disrupting the daily work and looking for spaces for self-inquiry, creativity, joint reflection and implementation of the desired changes.

Consequently, the objective of this research is to inquire about the key elements involved in the accompanying processes of those schools that start implementing improvement and transformation processes with an inclusive approach; as well as establishing the relationships among them, in order to create an accompanying model from the contributions of the actors involved.

These objectives are specified in the following research questions:

- Which are the key elements when accompanying school improvement processes with an inclusive approach, from the perspective of the researchers?
- How are these elements defined from the perspective of the actors involved?
- How are these elements related to each other from the experiences and knowledge of the actors involved?

2. Materials and Methods

This work is part of an R&D project funded by the Valencian Community administration whose scope is national (Spain). Methodologically, this is a study of a qualitative nature, specifically a phenomenological study carried out through focus groups. This design is mainly used to examine the personal experience of the participants and their views and understandings of a phenomenon [39].

The study was developed in two phases. The first one was an exploratory study of the key elements involved in the accompaniment processes from the perspective of the researchers who had implemented PAR in the schools. The technique used to obtain information was the focus group. Specifically, four focus groups were organised in different locations in Spain: Granada, Castellón, Murcia, and Seville over two months.

In the second phase, four months later, after analysis of the data from the first focus groups, a collaborative research study was conducted in order to deepen in the characteristics of the key elements that had arisen both from the researchers' focus groups and when establishing links among them; it is considered that the actors, as the direct interest group of the educational research, can contribute to the change by giving the keys to influence in the policies and practices. A workshop was developed in which 9 focus groups were conducted (8 about each of the key elements and a last one, which resulted into the theoretical elaboration of the accompaniment model and its graphical representation).

2.1. Participants

In the first phase of this study, the participants are the teaching and research staff from ten different Spanish Universities, whose teaching and research is conducted in the field of inclusive education. The selection of the participants is carried out using a non-probabilistic and incidental sample-selecting method [39]. The informants were personally invited to participate in the research and most of them accepted with interest. Firstly, we turned to the Universities and Inclusive Education Network (RUEI), during the National Meeting held in Granada. Secondly, we invited researchers with experience in the field and, thirdly, we asked new teachers. The number of focus groups was decided gradually depending on the availability of participants, geographical distribution and in order to reach information saturation. The total number of participants in the four-focus group was 24. In the sampling, there was a prevalence of the female sex: 15 women (62%) and 9 men (38%) and they were aged between 29 and 62 with an average age of 45.5 years old. The first focus group (FG1) involved 8 informants (4 men and 4 women), the second one (FG2) involved 4 informants (3 men and 1 woman), the third one (FG3) involved 5 informants (1 man and 4 women) and the fourth involved 7 informants (1 man and 6 women). 58% of the participants belong to the RUEI Network and all of them implement or have implemented action-research processes on inclusive education in schools.

In the second phase of the study, 19 informants were selected through a convenience purposive sampling technique, aiming at getting a heterogeneous group and ensuring the presence of representatives of all the professionals involved: 11 researchers (57.9%), 5 local education authorities (26.3%), and 3 practitioners (a director, a counsellor and a teacher, 15.8%). In the sampling, there was a prevalence of the female sex: 13 women (68.4%) and 6 men (31.6%) aged between 29 and 56, with an average age of 44.07 years old. (See Table 1). What they all had in common was that they had been involved in the development of inclusive education school projects, from a democratic, participatory and transformative approach, either as accompaniers or facilitators (researchers and counsellors), as policy makers and resource providers (local education authorities and administrators) or as practitioners (principals and teachers).

Table 1. Informants by focus group, sex and profile.

Focus Group	Sex		Researchers		Local Education Authorities	Practitioners	Total
	Female	Male	Spanish	Canadian			
1	10 (71.4%)	4 (28.5%)	5 (35.7%)	3 (21.4%)	4 (28.6%)	2 (14.28%)	14 (100%)
2	10 (83.3%)	2 (16.6%)	4 (33.3%)	3 (25%)	4 (33.3%)	1 (8.3%)	12 (100%)
3	10 (83.3%)	2 (16.6%)	4 (33.3%)	3 (25%)	3 (25%)	2 (16.6%)	12 (100%)
4	7 (70%)	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
5	10 (71.4%)	4 (28.5%)	5 (35.7%)	3 (21.4%)	5 (35.7%)	1 (7.1%)	14 (100%)
6	7 (63.6%)	4 (36.3%)	5 (45.5%)	3 (27.3%)	1 (9.1%)	2 (18.2%)	11 (100%)
7	10 (76.9%)	3 (23.07%)	5 (38.5%)	3 (23.1%)	4 (30.8%)	1 (7.7%)	13 (100%)
8	7 (70%)	3 (30%)	4 (40%)	3 (30%)	2 (20%)	1 (10%)	10 (100%)
9	8 (72.7%)	3 (27.3%)	7 (63.6%)	3 (27.3%)	1 (9.1%)	0 (0%)	11 (100%)

2.2. Data Collection Instrument and Process

In order to gather information about the first research question, four focus groups were organized in four different locations within the Spanish territory. The data collection instrument was a focus group guide that included three sections: (a) protocol-instructions, (b) sociodemographic data, and (c) open-ended questions. Four questions were asked: one introductory question on the meaning of mobilising knowledge of inclusive education, two on the roles they played in the transformation processes and the fourth about the key elements involved in school improvement processes towards inclusive education. In this study the data obtained on the key factors are analysed. The focus groups were used according to the criteria of accessibility to more participants and to get more information in a shorter time. The number of focus groups was gradually decided on the grounds of participants' availability, geographic distribution, and in order to reach information saturation. Before starting the focus groups, and due to ethical issues of the research, each participant signed an informed consent. Each group, led by two researchers (moderator and rapporteur) lasted between seventy and ninety minutes. The interventions were audio-recorded and later transcribed.

The workshop conducted to answer the second and third research question lasted two days. The focus groups worked as collaborative research groups between local education authorities, scholars and practitioners with experience in the topic. A focus group was organized for each key element listed by the researchers in the first phase, aiming at deepening in its characteristics, contrasting the different points of view and experiences of the participants. The questions asked in the first 8 focus groups to define each element were: What do we know? Who participates and how? What is the purpose? Each focus group lasted between an hour and 90 min, and two people were in charge of making them more dynamic. In some focus groups, participative dynamics were developed in order to stimulate reflection and knowledge production. In the ninth focus group the question posed that led to the construction of the model was: What is the relationship between the elements discussed and how can we represent it graphically? All the sessions were recorded in audio-visual format and later transcribed.

2.3. Data Analysis Process

A literal transcription of the data was made, from which content analysis was conducted using ATLAS.ti (v.8) software (The Qualitative Data Analysis and Research Software) [40]. In the first phase, we applied an inductive analysis technique to identify the key elements (themes or categories) including latent or implicit and semantic or explicit content [40]. A theme is understood as something that condensates the meaning or a pattern of part of the information found [41]. Analysis took place in the following stages: (a) Reading of data: researchers read and reread each set of data to get a holistic understanding of the different sets of data. Essential codes were then highlighted in each set of data; (b) Development of categories: The highlighted codes were then sorted into themes or categories; (c) Derivation of patterns and meanings: related categories were grouped into coherent themes from different datasets. In the second phase, a deductive analysis was performed, based on the 8 categories previously established. Furthermore, a code system was established to easily identify the origin of the data. The code "FG" was the one used for the focus group (reference number), and to identify the participants, the following codes were used: "R" researcher, "Au" authorities, "SC" school counsellor, "SD" school director, and "T" teacher; and the informant's number.

With respect to the ethical aspects, the research process follows the ethical recommendations of the with respect to privacy and confidentiality of data and informed consent according the procedures in research involving human subjects, in accordance with article 6 of the Regulations of the Ethics Committee of the University Jaume I. All the research participants gave consent for participation (signed informed consent), participated on a voluntary basis, and were kept anonymous. Data (verbatim transcripts) were shared with participants of each focus group.

3. Results

In order to address the aims of the study, the results for each research question are shown below.

3.1. The Key Elements When Accompanying School Improvement Processes with an Inclusive Approach, from the Perspective of the Researchers

The researchers who participated the first phase of this study point out that, during the research process, it is crucial not to lose sight of the *inclusion objectives* because "research is not only a rational and methodological issue. Inclusion is also related to issues of justice, equality, equity, etc." [FG2.R9].

They agree that improvement and transformation processes are *action-research processes* that should be more participatory and start from real situations in the school: "Looking for some way of making this project real, and accompanying, and making this research a little bit more participatory" [FG2.R10], or "involving the participants in all the process, since knowledge is considered not to belong only to the research team, knowledge is shared" [FG3.R16].

In addition, the researchers raise the importance of *leadership* in this kind of projects, discussing by whom and how is it exercised in schools: "we will be accompanying, but we will keep in the background" [FG4.R18].

The questioning on the *researchers' role* has been the most critical and referenced element. From their research experience, they point out that they assume a wide range of roles. On the one hand, they are mediators since they "strengthen bridges with the intermediate actors, such as the training centres" [FG2.R9]. A researcher adds: "we provide tools and do research that later has some kind of influence on the internal dynamics of the school" [FG3.R13]. The ambition is to "transform the practice from the practice, that is, that research contributes to a transformation, accompanying the schools, involving them in the research project and generating this shift" [Ph1.FG2.R11]. In this sense, they also pose the dilemmas they face between the role of expert and the one of transformer: "I feel I have a split personality, which causes me strong tensions" [FG1.R4].

Teachers' training has been another key element, suggesting that lifelong learning must respond to the needs perceived by the education community:

Changes occur when teachers need to change. Thus far, changes have always been imposed by the administration with different organic laws, by the research with the different trends, obviously, but there is no real feeling of change and need [FG2.R11].

Moreover, they consider *community participation* essential to get in touch with social and educational actors, and from the needs raised by them: "seeing how we can link these needs present in the local and social context to academic knowledge" [FG3.R15].

They also highlight the importance of starting from the *analysis of the existing practices* in the schools: "they analysed their own practice by themselves, and we detected their weaknesses and strengths [FG1.R12]; it is considered an opportunity for joint reflection "from the co-analysis" [FG4.R20].

This joint work leads them to highlight another key element: *collaborative work*. The researchers point out that "a school project needs a much more collective collaboration, which does not remain in the personal sphere of the teacher with his/her students" [FG2.R9]; moreover, they also highlight the importance of collaboration networks and "the building of alliances among the different actors involved" [FG2.R9], as well as the need of "creating more linkages, more conventions, more collaborations" [FG3.R15] among the schools themselves and with the university.

Next, Table 2 shows a summary of the key elements when accompanying school improvement processes with an inclusive approach, from the perspective of the researchers.

Table 2. Summary of the key elements when accompanying school improvement processes with an inclusive approach.

Key Elements
Inclusion objectives
Participatory action-research processes
Leadership
Researchers' roles
Teachers' training
Community participation
Analysis of the practices
Collaborative work

3.2. Key Elements Defined from the Perspective of the Actors Involved

3.2.1. Objectives of Inclusive School: Inclusion and Equity for Social Justice

Problematizing the definition of the term "inclusion" is one of the keys to determining the purpose and scope of inclusive education. The participants agree with the importance of clarifying this concept because they observe tensions and contradictions when valuing its implementation in schools; they understand that inclusion has an ethical dimension of equity and social justice that forces to education dynamics of social cohesion and transformation. However, sometimes practice places itself in the more restrictive meaning of special education:

Specialized care is confused with inclusion, and we have been saying that they are different things for a long time. Inclusion wants to meet special needs, we already know this, but it also wants to transform the system so that we don't have more inequalities to address [FG1.R4].

A researcher points out that there is an ideological appropriation of this term by the political right, which ends up distancing it from the parameters of equity and social justice:

The problem is that for some power structures this is the measure, and what interests them is that this measure is named inclusion. Then, there is a counter-discourse that leaves us naked [FG1.R1].

In order to advance towards this model of transforming inclusion, they consider that it is important that the schools themselves are aware of the need to value and redefine the measures available at the moment and their use, without losing sight of the ultimate goal of inclusion.

3.2.2. Participatory Action-Research Processes for School Improvement

From their different areas of action, the participants agree that the action-research processes implemented facilitate knowledge and inclusive practices.

The counsellor considers that his role in the process involves facilitating reflection on the inclusion laws so that this issue is understood as a process of continuous improvement: “educating or teaching the law. Let’s digest it, let’s filter it. Focusing on and operationalizing . . . be quiet, calmly” [FG2.SC].

For their part, external researchers, school director and teachers point out that there is not enough support from the management of the research function of the teachers. This causes a division between researchers and practitioners, which hinders transformative actions in the schools:

There is a dilemma in the PAR which is being implemented in the schools. The school is developing a project, and is walking towards inclusion, and next year, half of the employees leave [FG2.SD].

3.2.3. Inclusive Leadership of the School Management Team

There is a consensus on defining leadership in school improvement processes within collaboration parameters. Transformation actions cannot depend on a single person or management team. Distributed leadership and the creation of action networks are a guarantee of continuity of the improvement projects undertaken in the schools:

When someone goes alone, it is not sustainable. Some participation structures are necessary. If we achieve that most of the faculty shares this view and participates, it is much more sustainable [FG3.Au1].

The way towards an inclusive and transformative education model is facilitated, according to the participants’ experience, when the school management team boosts and regulates collaborative intervention processes from the needs of the school actors. The leadership role is understood by the school management team as “living to serve, letting the others shine, staying in the background, accompanying, and respecting the different paces with assistance” [FG3.SD].

3.2.4. Emancipatory Role/Position of the Researcher-Practitioner

In the discussion about the roles played by the researcher when accompanying, in front of the collaborative position of traditional action-research projects, the participants claim that the researcher must adopt an emancipatory position. This position is included in the definition of inclusion from an ethical perspective, and is understood as a principle of action, an awareness-raising that commits the researcher to an inclusive practice.

If someone takes this further step and tries to assume an emancipatory position, then, he realizes that this education is not any kind of education, it is not any kind of participation, it is inclusive action-research, and this requires specific things from the researcher [FG4.R3].

A researcher warns that adopting the emancipatory role causes tensions between the institutional power of the expert-researcher and the community authority that inclusive research require.

There (must) be a fusion. Recognizing the other’s knowledge, the knowledge of the teachers, families, etc. is difficult; it means to lose power. I think that the research that tends to be emancipatory, from the hierarchical point of view,

loses power, but from the point of view of inclusive research, it gains authority [FG4.R1].

3.2.5. Teachers' Training Closer to the Schools' Needs

From the emancipatory perspective of inclusive education, the participants identify a series of barriers and difficulties due to the fact that there is no culture of training for accompanying transformation. A counsellor explains that the education authorities are aware that teachers' lifelong training requires both a structural change and a change of approach to training activity:

We have seen that inclusion is not so much about contents, but it requires an attitudinal change; moreover, it is very difficult to work towards changing attitude in training; it is necessary to look for other ways; moreover, measuring attitude is difficult [FG5.Au2].

There is a unanimous bet on this change in the training processes. Regarding the difficulties when addressing it, a researcher points out that "the barrier is also in the university" because "it promotes a kind of training that continues reproducing the separation between generalist and specialist teachers" [FG5.R2]. There is a consensus that it is necessary to problematize this model and introduce the perspective of emancipatory inclusion in the teachers' initial training.

Moreover, participants highlight the importance of creating reflection spaces and moments both within the school and among the different schools; it is about "living experiences and being able to think them through, not only about giving information" [FG5.T]. Therefore, training now has a community and non-transmissive nature: sharing and living experiences, actively and not only theoretically.

But who is inclusive education training addressed to? The participants understand that this training must include all education agents:

(. . .) even the bus driver. Every possible person within the education community, the neighbourhood, and municipal school boards. Inviting other actors and that they understand what we are doing in the school [FG5.Au1].

3.2.6. Community Participation

Teachers allude to the lack of participatory culture in the school itself, and the resistance of teachers and families. A counsellor points out that participation improves when it is possible to redefine what participation means for the different actors, fostering the sense of belonging: "explaining again or understanding what participation is, increasing participation spaces and times; moreover, that each family or person can have a feel of belonging" [FG6.SC].

The review of the democratic participation model from the negotiation with the participants allows schools to become a space where links are generated, and conflicts are redirected from inclusion criteria. A teacher highlights the importance of students as facilitators of families' participation, and a researcher claims that this participation improves when it is not limited to direct participation in the school building:

It is necessary to open other spaces for participation which are not direct, which are indirect. Understanding what community participation means and facilitating ways of linking what happens in the school with what happens outside it, without the need of physical presence [FG6.R4].

3.2.7. Critical Analysis of the Practices

According to the participants, reflection on pedagogical practices answers a series of attitudes, principles and values typical of the emancipatory model of inclusive education, which leads teachers to transform their classroom practice "in order to train committed, critical citizens, in the end, to materialize democratic and inclusive education" [FG7.T].

Practice review is part of the training and research accompaniment process within the processes of school change and improvement. Therefore, the entire community can give their opinion and at the same time they become a source of support for this transformation, because, on the contrary, “if they don’t feel part of the context, that is, if they feel that they cannot continue with this process, the process ends up dying” [FG7.T].

3.2.8. Collaborative Work of the Inclusion Support Team

The participants agree that, in the schools, counsellors’ support can facilitate this transformation, when it is conducted from a pedagogical accompaniment perspective. A counsellor explains that this means:

Valuing and recognizing all the counsellors’ functions but emphasizing the ones that remain on the sidelines: the collaborative ones. Making the community aware that if we work from a clinical model, we will reach one goal, but if we work from an accompaniment model, the school will get to another point [FG8.SC].

This “another point” is the one that, according to the participants, can place the school in the emancipatory inclusion model, since it requires from collaborative action processes, from a commitment shared by all the community.

3.3. *How Are These Elements Related to Each Other from the Experiences of the Actors Involved? Construction of the Model*

The actors discuss the relationships among the elements defined and the need to specify an accompaniment model. Regarding the aim of the model, the participants consider that it is about offering “a simplified representation of a process of school accompaniment based on our own experience, it isn’t possible to generalize because it is linked to specific actors” [FG9.R4]; they ask themselves, “a model for what?”; moreover, they agree that the aim of the model is an explanatory one, when defining its essential elements; a critical one, when analysing the relationship established among them; and an emancipatory one, since it commits itself to elaborate interpretations that enable to improve and generate new knowledge. Therefore, the aim is not to define a static model but “create a dynamic instrument, consistent with our conceptual framework, which facilitates the understanding of accompaniment processes” [FG9.R3].

They agree that the model must represent the process through a series of phases, which are the typical ones of PAR; they determine which relationships exist among the aims, the process, the actors and the conditions for inclusion; they also reach agreements on its graphical representation:

We start from the PAR as an inclusive tool; moreover, we start from an inclusive project with two main objectives, the first one is equity, and the second one, social justice; these two objectives imbue the actors, the PAR process and the conditions [FG9.R5].

The debate was focused on knowledge mobilization processes and on the difficulty of representing graphically the concept:

I wanted to highlight that it is not a model for mobilizing previous consensual knowledge, it is a model for creating knowledge towards inclusion, which boosts community creation [FG9.R6].

They agree that “what mobilizes knowledge is PAR. Before, during and after” (FG9.Au) and from here, the debate is focused on how giving visibility to the key elements or conditions which have been problematized in the focus groups.

They establish relationships among the conditions and processes, in view not only of one’s own experience, but also of the critical theorizing of each of them. For example, a researcher highlights that “the critical analysis of the action is part of PAR” [FG9.R3]; moreover, another researcher adds “in Freire’s words, this is «awareness-raising»” [FG9.R1].

Another participant focuses on collaborative work, both of the counsellors and the advisors and researchers, and claims that there must be a change of approach and role:

We rescue the collaborative work that also requires a change of role: how to move from the role adopted in a clinical model to an inclusive and curricular model that requires working always in collaboration with others; it is a condition for the counsellors, but it is also a characteristic element of the model [FG9.Au].

They link collaborative work with the view and position adopted by the researchers; it is claimed that “the emancipation position does not require a normative position of the researcher, but it also involves realizing that sometimes you adopt a transmitting position because you are giving a conference in a school” [FG9.R3]; moreover, this position resituates the debate on the relationship between researchers and practitioners, and between counsellors and teachers. A counsellor, a representative of the education authorities, values the accompaniment strategies that involve a more affective relationship, “closer to the teacher” [FG9.Au], and claims a training based on the real needs which proves to be more transformative.

Another element comes into play: community participation, “which includes the voice of the students” [FG9.R1] and which is associated with the inclusive leadership of the school management team; these elements are related again to participatory action-research and to the conditions that favour it “from the researchers’ desire of reaching “co-research” [FG9.R4].

From the critical discussion on the elements and their relationships, the graphical representation of the model arises (See Figure 1).

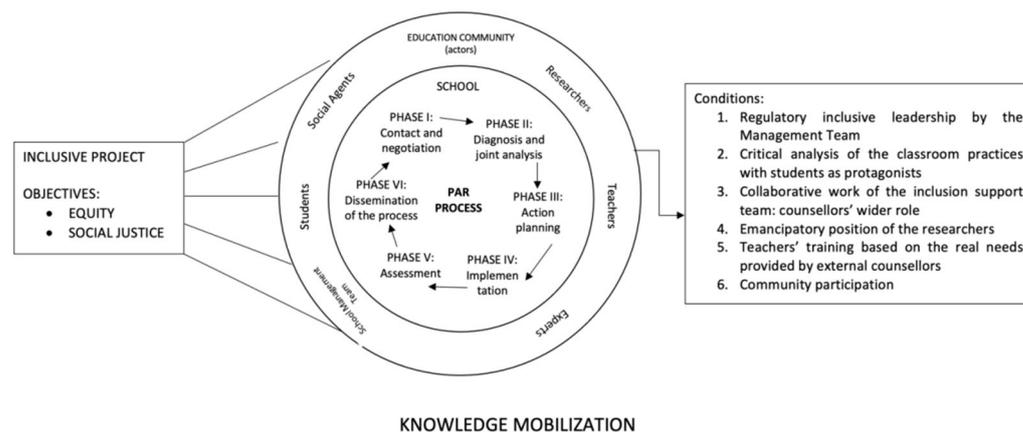


Figure 1. Participatory Model of Accompaniment for school inclusion.

It is a model from which it is possible to think about how to accompany schools in order to mobilize the knowledge generated through PAR, and with the aim of contributing to an inclusive approach based on equity and social justice, considering the conditions (or ingredients) necessary for this purpose.

4. Discussion

The aim of the study is to investigate the fundamental elements that are involved in the accompaniment processes of schools moving towards inclusion, to establish the relationships between them and to construct a model of accompaniment based on the contributions of the actors involved.

The results of the first research question reveal the key elements that shape the model from the perspective of the researchers: inclusion objectives, participatory action-research processes, leadership, researchers’ roles, teachers’ training, community participation, analysis of the practices and collaborative work. In this sense, we find many coincidences with the model of Porter & Towell [6] in highlighting that in order to set the process in motion, it is necessary to pay attention to a series of conditions upon which the success of the process may depend: (a) counting on a distributed leadership for inclusion, (b) involving all the educational community, from the teachers to the students, ensuring the participation of

all the collectives; (c) assuming that it is a cyclical process of continuous review, with the previously stated phases and nourished by the information obtained through the three questions, which allow identifying facilitators, barriers and improvements (what works?, what is not working?, which other things can be done?); (d) investing in the development of practices that have an impact on the school, the classroom and the teaching, as well as on every student; it will be essential to respond to teachers' professional training, knowing also how to exploit the expert knowledge of the faculty; (e) promoting support among students through different strategies, both in the classroom and in other spaces of the school, which will allow creating opportunities so that everybody can participate and learn; (f) involving the local community, knowing how to exploit its existing resources, and knowing that the school itself can have an impact and be a resource for the community and, finally, (g) making the process sustainable, doing the necessary follow-up, listening to the voices of all the people involved and, as a School Project, being able to have an impact on its culture, policies and practices; these are elements that, in one way or another, we can also find in other proposals [8,42] tools and guides to reflect on the situation of inclusion in each school. All agree that inclusion is a process of continuous review and improvement, a cyclical action-research process with the clear goal of articulating, with equity, the presence, learning, and participation of each and every student.

Regarding the results of the second research question about the key elements defined from the perspective of the actors involved, such results make sense when establishing a dialogue and problematizing them from the contributions of the actors involved. One of the most relevant results is that it becomes evident that the processes of change involve profound changes in the school culture (beliefs, principles and values); moreover, this is not possible unless they are carried out in joint agreement with the community. Thus, community participation and collaborative work allow schools to assume the project from an inner motivation, considering that change is possible and is focused; it involves that the school decides to take charge of what is happening, answering the challenges of heterogenization of its community, according to the work of [21] and this directly affects the emancipatory role or position that researchers want to adopt [21,36]. This role is materialized by helping the actors to explore their beliefs and professional perspectives from critical reflection, collaborative learning and the critical analysis of their own practices; its importance in the improvement processes is also included in the works of Ainscow et al. [10] and in the one of Sanahuja et al. [7]; it is interesting, from an inclusive and participatory approach, that they can make decisions by themselves and propose solutions to their problems [12,33]. Accordingly, as shown in the study results, the role of the researchers has been one of the most critical elements, and one of the most referenced by researchers and actors. Definitely, the participants agree that the role of the researcher in the processes of accompaniment through PAR requires examining dynamics and fixed structures to foster spaces of recognition and community action [9,43].

Another key element emerging from the results is improvement in teachers' training. From the emancipatory perspective of inclusive education, the participants recognize a series of barriers and difficulties, since there is no culture of training for accompanying transformation, and they agree that training and accompaniment strategies improve when they meet the paces and contexts of schools. The work of Ainscow [4] agrees that re-considering the perceived problems is an opportunity for professional and community development. Self-questioning, creativity and action go together [44].

Regarding the third question about the construction of the mode, before commenting the model as a result, there are a few preliminary issues to discuss. From the very moment that we considered building a model, the concept itself referred to three meanings: the representation, the copy and the ideal one. When we considered the relevance of generating a model of school accompaniment, to mobilize knowledge about inclusive education, we found these three meanings were uncomfortable and vague, as set out in the results of the third research question. We found them uncomfortable because they put a strain on some of the premises with which we address PAR in the schools: there are no universal

recipes or cookbooks, neither are there ways to be imitated; and vague because we found it was clearly complex to thoroughly represent the complexity of the processes involved in this task.

To justify this need, we can follow Habermas' classification of knowledge interests [45]. We could say that technical knowledge tends to consider models as schemes that describe reality, a kind of mirror that reflects the reality and constitute a direct means of access to knowledge and establish universal guidelines for action. Practical knowledge, for its part, more focused on understanding the individuals in a specific context, is related to the notion of model as an interpretative scheme of a specific reality, whereas emancipatory knowledge does not promote an instrumental conception but a critical conception of reality modelling, aiming at not only explaining it, but also problematizing it in order to advance towards its transformation and improvement. Therefore, the first requirement to justify our task is to focus on the mission and values that inspire the construction of the knowledge to be mobilized.

On the other hand, we have started from a multifaceted and interdisciplinary approach of inclusive education, whose theoretical-practical knowledge is grounded in research inspired by the emancipatory critical paradigm [46]. From this perspective, the model proposed is a simplified representation of a process of school accompaniment, based on the experience of the actors involved: researchers, politicians and practitioners. Thus, on the one hand, it has an explanatory purpose, since it identifies its essential elements and the relationship established among them; and on the other hand, it has also an emancipatory purpose, since it is committed to the elaboration of interpretations that enable to improve this field and generate new knowledge. Therefore, the aim is not to outline a static model but to generate a dynamic instrument which is consistent with our conceptual framework, and which facilitates the understanding of the accompaniment processes. In this regard, other authors have developed models in this field, such as the *Modèle dynamique de changement accompagné en context scolaire* of Rousseau [43] or *A model for School Transformation* of Porter and Towell [6]; their approaches coincide with our proposal. In the first case, because it is an open and dynamic model, which is in constant construction from the relationship, on the one hand, between the AR process and the actors involved, and on the other hand, the strategies to implement it. In the second case, because it is a school improvement model which tries to identify the conditions that schools must ensure to start school improvement processes and make them sustainable. However, the Participatory Model of Accompaniment for School Inclusion that we present introduces some singularities to be borne in mind. The first is that it is focused on the processes of school accompaniment, and the second is that it is used in PAR as a strategy, not only as a research strategy, but as a knowledge mobilization strategy.

5. Conclusions

An inclusive approach that pursues equity and social justice requires changes in the policies and schools, as well as advances in educational research at the service of school change and improvement processes.

This research problematizes how the proposed accompaniment model questions the roles attributed to the actors involved, especially the role of the researchers, which depends, in turn, on their view or position about the kind of research they are conducting. A conclusion of the study is that interactions among the elements of the model presented fall, to a great extent, on the researchers' adoption of an emancipatory position; it seems clear that emancipation requires transformation, but is all transformation emancipatory?

The article reflects how, from the school improvement processes, collaborative work invites to shared construction of knowledge, which allows to advance towards the intersection of policies, theories and practices. We can conclude that the model of school accompaniment must be consistent with inclusion conditions and principles, from a dual perspective: ethical and participative. The PAR process, as an inclusive and emancipatory process, favours shared construction of knowledge. This construction is indisputably part

of the knowledge mobilization process, and has a direct impact on the schools' cultures, policies and practices, since it is constructed from a problem, a perceived need or from the interests of the community agents involved.

The presented model, built collaboratively, may help to think about how to develop, from school accompaniment, school improvement processes grounded on the confluence of three contexts: the political, the academic and the practical one; it aims to contribute to theorising about inclusive education in a practical way. Taking Kurt Lewin's well-known words "there is nothing more practical than a good theory", the Participatory Model of School Accompaniment to Improve School Inclusion contributes to the development of a practical approach to inclusive education in the sense of helping to develop more inclusive practices.

There are still some questions that need to further deepen in future studies such as the inclusive leadership of the school management team. One of the conclusions of this study is that the school management team implements an inclusive regulatory leadership. Although there are considerable research on inclusive leadership, the competences of the school management team related to the role of action regulation as part of this leadership have yet to be explored in depth.

Finally, we highlight, as a limitation of the study, that neither the students nor their families have participated directly in the process of collaborative research. However, their voices have been indirectly present through the experience and the knowledge provided and discussed by the participants in the focus groups. In fact, they are key actors in the improvement processes from an inclusive and community perspective, as set out in the model, but the situation shows us that it is still a challenge to guarantee direct participation in all the phases of the research process. Therefore, we need to conduct future studies in which the vision of the family environment is considered, given that it constitutes a fundamental element in school inclusion processes.

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