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Educational equity based on teachers' reflective autonomy

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Abstract

The expansion of accountability has fed the debate on the consequences of what is known as the evaluating state *on teachers' professional autonomy, in which a negative, mistrustful vision has prevailed. However, we should distinguish between two main models of accountability in education:* a) *the neoliberal model, which promotes the publication of school rankings and pressurises for results; and* b) *the teacher responsibility model, stemming from internal diagnostic assessments that activate teachers' reflective autonomy and initiate comprehensive school restructuring and innovation processes. The first model leads to the de-professionalisation of teaching and the steamrolling of its pedagogical authority, while the second model can enhance re-professionalisation and a renewed sense of the teaching team's public function. The "genuine school restructuring" movement based on bottom-up changes and innovations is an example of reflective autonomy that incorporates equity as a core objective. However, the educational community knows little about the* school *effect and* teaching *effect on equity due to the limited research carried out in Catalonia and erratic educational equity policies.*

Key words: teacher autonomy, educational equity, teaching teams, educational change, reflective professionalism, teacher accountability.

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1. Clarifying the concept of *educational equity*

The educational community has not yet undertaken a well-grounded, evidence-based self-analysis on accountability aimed at promoting educational equity and improving the outcomes and opportunities in the most socially disadvantaged schools. The concept of educational equity is not firmly enough entrenched or well enough understood in the educational community, since an explicit framework of equitable policies grounded on research has not been created here, unlike countries with a stronger institutional and political tradition in the culture of equal opportunity. In fact, what predominates is a defensive rhetoric on equity and equal opportunity as an ideal worth striving for, while failing to outline the specific objectives, the priority action targets or the dimensions comprising educational equity.

Educational equity is built upon two complementary and interrelated cornerstones: equal opportunity and inclusion (Field, Kuczera & Pont, 2007). First, equal opportunity implies that ascriptive factors (gender, family social background, migrant or ethnic background or disability) should not be barriers that affect or determine educational careers. Equal-opportunity actions and policies are interventions that seek to level the initial conditions and the process so that talent, effort and individual capacity are the only factors behind outcomes. John Rawls (1998) is the seminal author on this normative conception of equal opportunity, which justifies the inequality of outcomes as long as it does not worsen the performance or status of the most disadvantaged groups, who deserve compensatory affirmative actions.

Equity introduces a component of justice to the concept of *equality*. *Equity* means that each person receives their due, or what they deserve, bearing in mind their differences and needs, without harming others. Therefore, equity is fairer than mere equality. In the opinion of Rawls (1998), justice should be understood as equity, such that some people's success or improvement should not come at the expense of others. In his opinion, social justice consists in equitably distributing resources and social goods, except when an unequal distribution ends up benefiting the least advantaged. This is what Rawls calls the *difference principle*, and it is the philosophical-normative underpinning that inspires positive discrimination actions and programmes to offset and redistribute resources. According to this principle, priority should be given to the most vulnerable children and adolescents and the most sensitive targets of the system where the most inequality lies (failure to graduate from secondary school, early school drop-out or segregation among schools).

The concept of educational opportunity does not refer to a hypothetical possibility but to a real option that could materialise through a public policy scheme which is activated to guarantee it. This is why each opportunity that is made the object of public policy should be evaluated and contextualised, bearing in mind:

a) the characteristics and needs of the target population that should benefit from it, and where the policies and programmes should exert their influence;

b) the goal or objective sought (lowering drop-out rates, segregation or school failure; increasing social inclusion; improving equal access to scientific degrees, etc.); and

c) the obstacles which come between the target groups and the goals or objectives, regardless of whether these barriers and conditions are internal or external to the educational system.

In education, equal opportunity depends on an equitable financing framework, a powerful scholarship policy, balanced and equitable enrolment among non-segregated schools and a comprehensive system structure with a unified core that delays the age of selection until 16 while also offering opportunities to go back to school and earn new degrees.

Secondly, inclusion consists in the universalisation of at least a minimum level of knowledge and competences that enable and equip everyone to develop their capacities as both citizens and workers (Field et al., 2007). Unlike equal opportunity, inclusion reflects a continuum logic not focused on prior conditions but on successive new adjustments to ensure that equal opportunity is universal and to minimise polarisation between the extremes while also elevating overall outcomes, especially those of more disadvantaged groups. While equal opportunity focuses on earning degrees, inclusion focuses more on acquiring functional competences for an active, cultural civic life to overcome the existing gaps due to gender, age, nationality, disability or social class.

Inclusion is reinforced by two complementary approaches: capacitating equality and reactivating equality, both of which stem from and are inspired by the work of Roemer (1998). Via capacitating equality, individuals are not responsible for their social backgrounds or the talents they have been assigned by nature's lottery, given that capacities, inclinations and talents are determined by their social inheritance, which must be neutralised. The unequal outcomes considered tolerable by this approach are only limited to those caused by individual decisions and choices. Authors like Nussbaum (2012) and Sen (2010) advocate this approach, defending a logic of empowerment that overcomes theories of deficits or shortcomings which end up reproducing compassionate, care-oriented paternalism. In education, the examples of reparative/capacitating equality include effective measures to attend to diversity, compensatory actions and positive discrimination in extremely complex settings, fostering positive parenting and strengthening parents' associations. In fact, it entails the axiological conception of educational inclusion, given that the school of the masses should universalise the capacity of all students who are learning while always minimising the influence of their social inheritance and family culture in their outcomes, motivation or aspirations.

Despite the efforts to apply capacitating equality meant as inclusion, the school of the masses reproduces and generates new inequalities without sufficiently attacking the underlying causes that condition individuals in their academic careers (Table 1). In order to guarantee full inclusion, reactivating equality is needed and new opportunities should be offered in the wake of failed life choices or poor decisions in the past that need to be reversed, especially in a collective setting which induces erroneous decisions, such as dropping out of school to work during an economic growth cycle (2000-2008).

Learning potential and earning degrees would thus be backed by reactivating mechanisms to re-empower people who have taken failed decisions, such as dropping out. Examples of this modality of reactivating inclusion in our current system include adult education, occupational training, second-chance schools, flexible accreditation of competences for vocational training degrees

based on work experience, and programmes encouraging people to go back to the university.

In short, the concept of equal opportunity is related to what is called *negative freedom*, which enables individuals to exercise their will even if they are not capacitated or sufficiently prepared to do so. Therefore, both capacitating inclusion and reactivating inclusion are exponents of *positive freedom*, which guarantees that individuals can exercise their will much more freely once they are emancipated from their ignorance by being capacitated and empowered. Education is intimately tied to *positive freedom*, and in order to guarantee it, teaching teams and schools have to use their reflective professionalism and the school's autonomy with accountability as the pivots of their equalising intervention.

Table 1. Dimensions of and approaches to educational equity

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Educational equity</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Diminishing the influence of social background on the learning, aspirations, degrees and job placement of new generations with social and educational policies (financing, curriculum and faculty) that are appropriate for the need of the settings, neighbourhoods and social composition of the schools.</td></tr>
<tr><th>Equal opportunity</th><th colspan="2">Inclusion</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">To equalise the initial conditions and trajectory by neutralising the ascriptive factors (family background, economic level, gender, nationality or disability) that are not the result of individual responsibility.
The resulting unequal outcomes must be limited to differences in individual talent, effort and capacity.</td><td colspan="2">To universalise the basic sufficiency of knowledge and competences in order to equip everyone to develop their capacities and trajectories in social and economic life with no restrictions owing to their social background or condition.

Elevating the capacitating and reactivating outcomes in order to strengthen social and educational cohesion.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Capacitating inclusion</td><td>Reactivating inclusion</td></tr>
<tr><td>Talent or capacity for learning are socially determined.
Only inequalities stemming from individual decisions and choices are legitimate.</td><td>The potential to earn a degree is conditioned by failed life choices (like dropping out of school) which require second chances.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Example: equitable financing, balanced enrolment, comprehensive structure of the educational system and scholarship policy.</td><td>Example: new assessment and competence-based curriculum, attention to diversity, positive actions for extremely complex schools.</td><td>Example: accreditation of competences, going back to school, vocational education organised into modules, adult schools, second-chance schools.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">They attack and neutralise the primary effects of inequality.</td><td>It attacks the secondary effects of inequality.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Negative freedom:
Allows individuals to exercise their free will.</td><td colspan="2">Positive freedom:
Individuals can exercise their free will because they are equipped to do so.</td></tr>
</table>

Source: Author.

2. Teacher professionalisation in a context of accountability

One of the most prominent of the multiple ongoing debates in the sociological research of education in on teacher professionalism. The publication of the book by Amitai Etzioni entitled *The Semi-Professions and Their Organization: Teachers, Nurses, Social Workers* (1969) sparked a great deal of research lasting until today. In Etzioni's opinion, teachers hold a unique status as a "semi-professionals", which they share with nurses and social workers. All three were and are occupations associated with the expansion of the civil service and welfare services (education, healthcare and social policy), and they also stand out for their high degree of feminisation and their focus on caring for people. The prevailing sexism in the social coding of the professions renders it disputable and unfair to describe these three caregiving roles as "semi-professionals" because of the inferior connotations of this expression. In any case, this has been used as a descriptive sociological category which reveals its ambivalence compared to the more prestigious middle-class liberal professionals (doctors and lawyers).

Another sociologist, Erik O. Wright (1989), stresses the same ambivalence when referring to teachers as "salaried intellectuals" with a contradictory class position which situates them between the middle class and salaried working class. The factors that lean teaching towards the professionalism common to the middle class include intellectual freedom, expert cultural capital and social and symbolic recognition. However, these "professionalising" factors coexist with factors that more resemble salaried work, such as dependence on the state and businesses, like contractors, or the bureaucratic regulation which determines their working conditions.

Since the early 21st century, there has been an intriguing debate on teacher "professionalisation" around educational restructuring based on neoliberal models and the new public administration (Lefresne & Rakocevic, 2016). With the expansion of the accountability mechanisms that seek to make schools and teaching teams more transparent and effective, there has been a great deal of controversy over the consequences of what is known as the *evaluating state* on teachers' professional autonomy (Maroy & Voisin, 2013; Neave, 2012; Whitty, 2000). However, we should distinguish between two types of accountability, which reflect two distinct neoliberal and educational policy restructuring systems that are often conflated (Dutercq & Maroy, 2017).

The first model corresponds to the neoliberal system that promotes the publication of school rankings that allow families to choose freely by creating quasi-markets and conditioning teachers' salaries (Mons, 2004; Martínez-Celorrio, 2003). This is the most widespread model in the English-speaking world (England, Australia, New Zealand and the United States) and in Holland and Sweden under right-leaning liberal governments (Lefresne & Rakocevic, 2016). The neoliberal model of educational policy is grounded upon external accountability, which confers power on the demand (families) to choose the school and shape the school market in such a way that the independent capacity for exchange between faculty and collaborative and online work are neutralised as professionalising spaces. The predominant result is teacher de-professionalisation (Whitty, 2000) because of the 'Taylorisation' based on the principle of teaching to the test and the consequent nullification of teachers' pedagogical independence, factors which trigger abandonment of the profession due to competitive stress and the outcomes to which they are subjected.

The second distinct model of accountability is policies in which teachers are held responsible not through the publication of rankings but instead evaluation-diagnosis and educational audits, which activate teacher training and development processes, as well as incentives for internal improvement and pedagogical innovation (Dutercq & Maroy, 2017). This is a kind of internal accountability that seeks to reactivate and improve the supply (the school's ability to attract) while trusting the faculty as independent agents of change and educational innovation with more responsibility for their social impact, especially in socially disadvantaged or highly complex settings. When properly applied, this model leads to teacher re-professionalisation, since it manages to successfully cope with new social and educational needs (Whitty, 2000).

Distinguishing between these accountability models is becoming increasingly necessary given the confusion which certain academic sectors and opinion streams have fuelled by taking the English-speaking neoliberal model as a whole that can be applied across the board instead of adapting it to their respective national, cultural and political settings. In this article, we assert that policies holding faculty responsible do not have the same consequences on teaching as neoliberal policies based on setting standards, teaching to the test and open competition among schools on market terms.

Teacher responsibility policies reflect the political objective of elevating the efficacy of the system, as well as the progressive objective of improving the equity of outcomes and boosting equal opportunity by delegating more independence to teacher professionalism (Maroy & Voisin, 2013). Teachers have to demonstrate "reflective independence", even though they have to do so under a framework of more control and accountability, which also encompasses equity objectives (Lessard & Tardif, 2004). The association between teachers' reflective independence and the improvement in equity and outcomes in disadvantaged environments has a long history in education, even though it has tended to be camouflaged or marginalised.

What stands out in Murillo's review (2005) is an entire tradition of research since the Coleman Report (1966) on outlier or exceptional schools which do not fit the expected pattern of social determinism, that is, schools in disadvantaged settings which stand out for their unexpected exceptional outcomes and the high degree of reflective independence of their instructors, who defend the educational project carved out in adverse conditions. All of these studies were systematically reviewed by Edmonds (1979), who summarised what was called the five-factor model that explains the success of these resilient, exceptional schools: leadership, high expectations, good school climate, a learning-centred orientation and finally continuous assessment and monitoring.

The tradition of research on school effectiveness focused on disadvantaged neighbourhoods has assembled a considerable body of concurring empirical evidence which, nonetheless, has been minimised by the sociology of education since the canonical influence of the Coleman Report (1966) and its social determinism. Outlier or exceptional schools and their educational transformation processes led by the teaching teams have been downplayed by sociological theorisations, which have regarded them merely as exceptions that prove the usual fatalistic rule of social reproduction.

3. The role of instructors and schools in equity

The conclusions of the infamous Coleman Report (1966) can be summarised by the catchphrase "school doesn't matter" as an instrument to lower inequality, which signalled the end of the egalitarian euphoria around the equalising power of schools in the face of external social factors. The report stated that "schools exert little influence on students, and their performance cannot be claimed to be independent of their status and social setting" (Coleman, 1966, p. 325). The three main results from the Coleman Report were:

a) Inequalities in school success by social class and ethnicity are not due to educational policy factors or resources (public spending, school facilities, teachers, ratios, curriculum, etc.) but to the external conditions of the families' socioeconomic and cultural deprivation.

b) The socioeconomic characteristics of the students and their classmates – and therefore, schools' social composition – are very strong external determining factors that limit schools' ability to equalise opportunities. One significant cause is the segregation of students by grouping them according to their socioeconomic status and ethnicity within the same school. The report stated that there was a great deal of racial segregation in schools in the United States. Eighty percent of white students went to schools where 90-100% of their classmates were from the same ethnic group, while 65% of the African-American students attended schools with classmates from their same ethnic group.

c) The importance of out-school inequality and social factors explains around two-thirds of the inequalities in school outcomes. Therefore, the priority should be lowering poverty and the social, cultural and job inequality that affect families, while also equalising the schools by eradicating segregation.

The different waves of PISA have confirmed that out-school social factors are the most determining in the inequality of outcomes, as reported in the Coleman Report and upheld by subsequent theories of social and cultural reproduction (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1978; Baudelot & Establet, 1986). School success or failure, academic careers and student performance are largely conditioned by the prevalence of what are called primary effects, which act in combination: social class, family cultural capital, parenting styles and family social capital (Gorard & See, 2013; Ferrer, 2011; Jackson et al., 2007). Numerous authors in the economics of education have also focused on the influence of social factors on students' performance and careers (Calero, 2007; Hanushek & Wößmann, 2005).

In countries like Great Britain, the relative contribution of primary effects on the total inequality of outcomes once reaching adulthood is quite strong (76%) (Jackson et al., 2007). In the United States, primary effects, and therefore out-school inequalities, explain more than 66% of the inequality of outcomes between white and African-American students (Phillips et al., 1998).

Coleman (1966) revealed that schools' pedagogical actions and resources explained 4.95% of the variance in mathematics performance at the age of 14 for white students and 8.73% for African-American students, without bearing in mind the socioeconomic status of either group. The outcomes of the canonical Junior School project in Great Britain reveal that the magnitude of the equalising effect of school was 10% (Mortimore, Sammons, Stoll, Lewis, & Ecob, 1988). In Spain,

Murillo (2005) rated the equalising effect of schools at 10% of the variance in mathematics and 4% in language, natural sciences and social sciences.

Other studies prior to PISA estimated the equalising impact of schools at around 20%, and there is continued confirmation that it is higher in mathematics than in the other subjects (Teddlie & Reynolds, 2000). More recent comparative studies, especially in the "effective schools" vein, have also demonstrated that schools' net contribution to equalising and neutralising the social inheritance stands at around 20% (Sammons, 2007), an added-value magnitude that is not negligible but actually quite respectable given the major conditioning power of out-school inequalities.

We know that the strongest equalising impact exerted by the educational system comes in preschool, a period when the children of families with low cultural capital and no reading skills benefit the most compared to students from other social backgrounds (Cebolla-Boado et al., 2015). According to this research, the equalising effect of preschool gradually diminishes throughout primary school (ages six to eleven) until reaching secondary school (ages twelve to sixteen), when it disappears entirely and the reproduction and magnification of the original inequalities predominate. For this reason, the equalising investment, either large or small, made in preschool ends up being squandered because of the academic and selective logic imposed in secondary school, which later translates into excessive early drop-outs among youths with low employability in the job market, most of them from low and modest social backgrounds.

However, theories of the reproduction or evidence of social determinism in school outcomes tend to capture the structural pattern but do not sufficiently explain the dispersion of outcomes within either schools or social classes (Torrents et al., 2018). Nor do they explain why certain schools in disadvantaged neighbourhoods achieve high outcomes and overcome the expected social determinism, or why other schools in advantaged settings achieve lower outcomes than expected given their social composition. This is what is known as the *school effect* in the sociology of education.

In fact, the school effect was actually captured by Coleman (1966) when he demonstrated the enormous influence that good teachers exerted on African-American students and students from other poor minorities (Crahay, 2000). Other authors like Jencks and Phillips (1998) also reconsidered their 1972 position on the impact of socioeconomic factors on school performance. Drawing from more recent databases, they concluded that the school's influence on students was not insignificant but rather the best predictor of performance, especially among students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

The research by Calero and Escardíbul (2017) in Spain found that the best teachers – those who had the greatest net impact on learning – are over-represented in publicly-subsidised private schools and among socially advantaged students. The distribution of good teachers in the system is therefore regressive and not equitable, and it comes at the expense of the more disadvantaged students, who need them the most and whose outcomes are the most sensitive to whether or not they have good teaching teams. Comparative research continually finds that socially disadvantaged students tend to attend poorly equipped schools with worse teachers and less instruction time (OECD, 2010).

Recent studies show the unequalising role of schools. For example, Schmidt et al. (2015) demonstrate how didactics and the way maths are taught explain 37% of the performance gap between socially advantaged and disadvantaged students in the United States. In Spain, according to this research, didactic in-school factors explain 42% of the gap in outcomes in mathematics. Therefore, despite the strong influence of out-school social determinants of inequality, there is also significant room for improving equity and reversing the reproduction of educational inequalities. The system itself produces social selectiveness and unequalises capacities with didactic practices, routines and inappropriate designs that deprive disadvantaged students of opportunities for meaningful learning, even though they are paradoxically the ones that need the school effect the most (Hanushek & Wößmann, 2010; Causa & Chapuis, 2009).

Therefore, despite the fact that the weight of out-school factors is crucial in explaining the inequality of outcomes, we cannot ignore in-school and pedagogical factors; indeed, stratification at selective points in the system, didactics, assessment, student organisation and the tradition of making students repeat years are all key factors in schools' reproducing the social determinism of outcomes. For example, numerous studies demonstrate the negative effects of having students repeat years and grouping them by ability, which are direct causes of inequality, demotivation, bullying and abandonment without any proof that they boost graduation rates (Bridgeland, 2010; Brophy, 2006).

Finland has a comprehensive system based on constant personalised support and optional modularisation of the baccalaureate, which includes contents delivered both inside and outside the schools, such that students create their own curriculum. Instead of repeating an entire year, they only repeat those modules or areas that they did not pass. Their repeat rate is 4% (Välijärvi & Sahlberg, 2008). In Spain, 33% of students aged 15 have repeated some year throughout their school careers. The problem is that this rate is 53% among students from disadvantaged backgrounds. In fact, at the same PISA competence level, the system makes disadvantaged students in Spain repeat up to four times more than other students (Martínez-Celorrio, 2017). How can we explain this discrimination but through the action of in-school factors?

The annual cost of repeating years is 14% of the spending in primary and secondary school in Spain (OECD, 2011). In Catalonia, which has a lower rate of repeaters in primary and secondary school, the cost of repeating may account for 7.5% of total school spending, which is equal to 320 million euros per year. This amount could be capitalised by eradicating repeats and earmarking the resources to more personalised solutions, mentoring, modularisation and inclusive comprehensiveness, as Finland does.

On the other hand, the sociological literature has shown that grouping students by ability levels, also known as streaming, in all classes is not an occasional, reversible measure but the polar opposite: it ends up being instituted in schools as an irreversible measure of horizontal segregation. What is more, the assignment to levels is based on performance and behaviour criteria, behind which lie the factors of social class, ethnicity and poverty. Oakes (2005) demonstrated that the poorest youths and those from ethnic minorities are more likely to end up low-level groups, even if they have higher abilities. Nusche's (2009) meta-analysis reached the same conclusion. Once again, regardless of cognitive capacities,

schools reproduce the Matthew Effect, which penalises the most disadvantaged sectors that are the most prone to benefit from good teachers and good schools.

In Catalonia, it is estimated that around 30% of students age 15 are grouped into low-level streams, predominantly in the public education network and among students with lower-class social backgrounds, even though this measure improves neither their outcomes nor their aspirations (Aymerich et al., 2011; Ferrer, 2009). Streaming in all classes works as a negative Pygmalion effect, a self-fulfilling prophecy which leads the most vulnerable students who are the least motivated by the contents towards abandonment, insufficient competences and a rejection of school.

We need an in-depth reconsideration of how to educate the new adolescents under a framework of more inclusive, personalised and efficient comprehensiveness, without repeating or streaming; we need a framework where a more collaborative and a less individualistic and balkanised teaching culture prevails (Hargreaves, 1996). According to the OECD's TALIS report (2013), 87% of Spanish secondary school teachers have never observed other teachers in the classroom, a figure which is twice the OECD mean, and which plunges as low as 5% in Korea. Almost half of Spanish teachers (48%) have never participated or collaborated in joint activities with teachers in other subjects. This is also twice the OECD average (23%), while in countries like Poland and Denmark, this individualistic profile applies to only 10% of teachers.

Secondary school has been made to resemble baccalaureate by many teachers, who have never actually assimilated comprehensiveness and the increased diversity in the classroom as challenges to their professional and teacher growth. The new out-school social changes require an in-depth revision of the curriculum and the ways of teaching and learning at school, not limited to the classroom (Fernández-Enguita, 2016). The prescribed curriculum has to be trimmed and made more flexible, and more organisational freedom of spaces and time should be given to teaching teams that are better trained and use active methodologies and interdisciplinary approaches (Coll, 2016; Martínez-Celorrio, 2016). The over-academisation of secondary school is a process that has distorted the original features of attention to diversity that must be remedied, and the purposes and methodologies of secondary school teaching have to be redefined with an eye to the future.

Therefore, schools and teaching teams do not play a neutral role, and they "do matter", especially when they are effective in disadvantaged settings or offer appropriate attention to the socio-educational complexity not by lowering levels but via curricular justice and encouraging designs that generate resilience and new aspirations to overcome (Connell, 2006; Levin, Roldán & Garchet, 2000; Apple & Beane, 1997; Slavin, 1996). We need to gain a more detailed understanding of the educational transformation processes led by the teaching teams in exceptional schools which overcome the social determinism of their settings and the role the reflective autonomy of the teaching teams plays in this.

4. School autonomy and genuine school restructurings

Decentralising schools and giving them autonomy is a way states can distribute power in a bid to increase efficacy, better adapt to students and channel the stakeholders' democratic participation (Meuret, 2004). Pedagogical,

organisational and administrative school autonomy is conditioned upon outcomes as an evaluative way to monitor the system. Both factors, autonomy and accountability, are crucial in improving educational quality, as stated in different reports (Woessmann, Luedemann, Schuetz & West, 2009). It is worth noting that only certain English-speaking countries have published school rankings to promote market logics, but many countries use the diagnostic evaluation of outcomes as an internal measure of improvement.

Despite the existing cases of school change and transformation processes stemming from diagnostic evaluations or internal self-diagnostics in Catalonia, even now these processes have been neither mapped nor described in all their typological diversity. For this reason, we need to focus on at least two new research questions which have barely been examined in countries like ours:

a) What type of reflective autonomy among teachers appears in the change processes influenced by pedagogical audits and internal evaluations?

b) How does teacher reflective autonomy incorporate equity in the reformulation of the new educational plans?

We do not know whether we can compare what types of reflective autonomy or what associated approach to equity exist either in recent experiences of educational change (anonymous schools, Escola Nova 21 and Xarxes per al canvi [Networks for Change]) or in more longstanding experiences like communities of learning, which have never been evaluated or compared to each other. More fieldwork and systematic case studies are needed to generate new empirical, well-grounded information which would help capture how reflective autonomy and the explicit or latent conception of educational equity and inclusion have strengthened these change processes.

Since there is no systematic information on the school effect and the teacher effect in improving the equity of outcomes in our country, simplifying mythologies which see the neoliberal hand everywhere and mistrust any discourse on accountability are more easily perpetuated without contestation. However, for decades, sociological and pedagogical research into educational change has shown that teachers' reflective autonomy can feasibly lead to genuine school changes that do not cater to market interests. Genuine educational change is a concept that was coined in the United States in the mid-1990s to define public school restructuring and transformation processes that met the following characteristics (Goodman, 1995; Lieberman, 1995):

- They are restructurings led by the teachers themselves, and therefore not innovations prescribed by others.
- They share the objective of transforming not only classroom didactics but also the school's pedagogical plan by redefining the purposes of education in order to adapt them to social and cultural changes.
- They stem from a shared, well-grounded diagnosis among all the stakeholders in the educational community.
- The teachers accept and embody values like mutual trust, reflective professionalism, intellectual rigour and community, which stand in contrast to the values upheld by the top-down, technocratic restructuring of education (efficacy, performance, standards and school rankings).

- Finally, they surpass and go beyond the traditional models of pedagogical and classroom innovation which have been subordinated to improvements in academic productivity.

Genuine restructuring is based on schools' autonomy and freedom to innovate in order to meet the diverse range of needs and to promote valuable performance without lowering levels through active pedagogies and radical transformations in the school space/time. Therefore, they are bottom-up responses by certain groups of teachers and schools that do not share the techno-bureaucratic model which has stripped the core purposes of the system down to efficacy, productivity and improvements in academic outcomes. Perhaps the example of the most advanced, consolidated genuine restructuring in Spain is Amara Berri in the Basque Country in preschool and primary school (Martínez-Celorrio, 2016).

Spain is a country that does not stand out for the high degree of autonomy conferred on schools in international comparisons. Great Britain, Holland and the Scandinavian countries have given their schools more freedom in terms of both curriculum and resource management, and historically they have operated through municipal control and school districts. Compared to the OECD mean, Spain gives schools little autonomy in defining their curricula, hiring teachers or financially managing their budgets. Even countries like France, Italy and Germany grant more financial autonomy than Spain does, although the curricular autonomy of their schools is lower than in Spain (Consejo Escolar del Estado, 2015).

Innovative schools with genuine internal changes have taken advantage of the scope of autonomy regulated by the successive Spanish education laws since LOGSE (1990), LOPEG (1993), LOE (2006) and LEC (2009). The current education law encourages educational experimentation and innovation, as reported in article 1n of the LOE (2006), which the LOMCE (2013) retained verbatim. The schools that have been transformed bottom-up by their teaching teams have defined their school education plans, outlined their year-by-year breakdown and decided on their own methodologies, teaching materials, student groupings, cross-curricular topics and timetables. Optimising their freedom to take decisions in these areas, these schools have ventured to experiment with new pedagogical models that go beyond mere classroom innovation. In order to outline what innovative schools are like and what they do, we can list a decalogue of the characteristics they have, with differing degrees of intensity, which also enables us to distinguish them from other schools in the system (Martínez- Celorrio, 2016):

1. They exemplify genuine school restructuring processes which take advantage of school autonomy to transform the organisation, the spaces and times, the methodologies and the relations with students by agreeing to a new school project that is global and systematic, with a unique, creative response that is not prescribed or imposed from above (administrations, universities or experts).
2. They prioritise students and their right to learn at the core, as opposed to conveying teacher-centred subjects, and they put into practice teaching and evaluation methodologies that seek to personalise, attend to diversity and achieve authentic, motivating performance.
3. They have overcome the constraints of the official curriculum and textbooks by putting into practice project-based learning, curricular globalisation and

competence-based learning as invisible pedagogies based on the cross-cutting nature of knowledge.

4. They practise formative evaluation with feedback for students to measure successes, creations and competences qualitatively, overcoming the routine of the exam and the traditional numerical, summative, classificatory evaluation.
5. The schools' focus on invisible pedagogies allows them to change the rigid structure of times and spaces and instead create flexible time brackets, classroom corners and new classrooms designs and spaces for teamwork.
6. They allow and promote a diversity of ages in classrooms and work groups by mixing students so they interact and take responsibility among their peers in order to overcome the traditional school model which rigidly classifies students by grades and ages.
7. The school projects are legitimised by the active participation and horizontal engagement of the administration, teachers, families and students, whose mutual trust coalesces around a living, dynamic project in constant improvement designed to be lasting and to be updated over time.
8. They focus on invisible pedagogies and cooperative work, which allows students to be framed and treated in a different way and dissolves problems of coexistence and demotivation by generating a warm school with an affective and positive emotional climate.
9. The key to the change process is reflective teachers who act and get involved in a truly collaborative professional culture, with an interdisciplinary, comprehensive approach to education and a strong school identity that overcomes the isolated identities of subjects, which tends to balkanise teaching teams.
10. In this new shared school culture, the classic division between formal and informal learning is blurred. This makes the school an organisation open to its setting, which it enriches and from which it learns, and with which it forges collaborative networks and mutual alliances.

Our thesis is that the innovative or advanced schools which are part of the current wave of genuine change in Catalonia and Spain have successfully experimented with and created a new matrix and new school format based on reflective teacher autonomy (Martínez-Celorrio, 2016 & 2017). For this reason, their change processes have an authentic or genuine meaning. These schools restructured themselves without external prescriptions, appropriating school autonomy to transform the classic teaching matrix inherited and reproduced by the rest of the system.

In the specialised literature on educational change, there is a high degree of consensus on the harmful effects of systemic, centralised reforms or changes prescribed top-down which hinder or eliminate schools' autonomy. As Darling-Hammond (2001) stated, new didactic models appear every decade which tend to be recycled old ideas, like the new maths, modular timetables or goal-based management. The administration or those prescribing these models introduce them in schools, but they tend to be poorly digested since they seem removed from real practice, accepted routines and crystallised didactic conceptions.

The sociology of education has amply demonstrated how schools change, distort and recontextualise reforms so they appear to be following the dictates to such an extent that their original meaning vanishes (Tyack & Cuban, 2001; Bernstein, 1998). Technocratically planned top-down reforms or innovations are not adopted as expected. What prevails in the school world is a micro-policy of informal changes, resistances to change and conflicts over the meaning of the innovations prescribed top-down. The end result is "pedagogical hybrids" in which old and new practices are mixed together, making a "de facto curriculum" that does not match either the official curriculum or the legitimate practices expected by the government. In contrast, when the educational restructuring comes bottom-up based on the reflective autonomy of teaching teams, a much more coherent, articulated and engaged educational and curricular project takes shape which once again evinces the five-factor model: leadership, high expectations, good school climate, a learning-centred orientation and continuous assessment and monitoring.

There are case studies in the United States on genuine restructuring and the way public schools have appropriated and internalised them as a transformative project (Lieberman, 1995). It should be borne in mind that the peculiar way education is governed in that country has allowed the paradigm of school-based management (SBM) to blossom and expand. Initiatives like charter schools and whole school designs are other examples of genuine restructuring which the teachers involved consider their own. Whole school design is an example of the global transformation of public schools allowed by school districts which tend to be drawn up by foundations and university research centres as an alternative to overcome the traditional compensatory education in disadvantaged places. Examples include the Success for All programme designed by Slavin (2008), and the accelerated schools formulated by Levin (Levin, Roldán & Garchet, 2000), with solid *ex post* evaluations of their outcomes and impacts.

In Spain, the learning communities promoted by the Community of Researchers on Excellence for All (CREA) research group at the University of Barcelona are a transfer of Henry Levin's model of accelerated schools. However, unlike them, CREA does not allow schools flexible leeway, since they have to incorporate methods and recipes deemed "successful", which are imposed as prescriptions for three years. Nor does Spain have any rigorous evaluations of outcomes with control groups, *ex post* outcomes of students' academic careers (even though they have been in place for some time), comparisons among them or experiences which have failed. In fact, even though it comes from a university research centre, its promoters have been more focused on publishing self-referentially in academic journals than on objectively and scientifically demonstrating what works and does not work in their uniform prescription, despite the fact that they present themselves as supporters of scientific information (Fernández-Enguita, 2014; Coronado, 2013). Nonetheless, CREA learning communities have spread quite successfully around Spain and become a powerful network of 200 new schools, even though many of them do not adopt the identity of a learning community. Still, their peculiar form of prescriptive experimentation, the lack of reliable and independent evaluation and the excessive mobility of teachers and their abandonment of the schools prevents them from being considered examples of genuine restructuring springing from the reflective autonomy of the teaching teams themselves.

As Antúnez (2001) points out, the feasibility of educational changes depends on teacher initiatives and leadership, as they act as an internal engine in schools which think of themselves based on reflective and collaborative professionalism. Achieving this sophisticated degree of critical mass and authenticity is not at all easy in the system as a whole, and therefore innovative schools are "islands of change" which go against the stream of the standardised school model, and some of them located in extremely complex socio-educational settings actually become outliers or exceptional schools because they manage to overcome the social determinism of their settings.

5. Accountability with regard to equity in primary school

The accountability existing in the Catalan school system reflects the model of teacher responsibility based on diagnostic evaluations which activate internal change processes. These are local, micro-situated projects in specific schools which have embarked on internal improvement processes. Despite the interest in ascertaining the similarities and differences among all these multiple processes, no comparative, anonymised research has been published in Catalonia that enables us to deduce lessons and successful experiences of both failed and successful internal change processes. In contrast, in the Basque Country a comparative study was published on schools with a high and low added value, bearing in mind their social settings of educability (Lizasoain, 2015).

Recently, the Education Consortium of Barcelona (Consorci d'Educació de Barcelona, 2017) has publicised the outcomes of the basic competence tests in the sixth grade of primary school in all the public schools in the city of Barcelona for the first time, bearing in mind their degree of socio-educational complexity. The publication of this information enables us to tentatively analyse whether or not there are exceptional schools which get high or good outcomes despite the adversity of their neighbourhoods and the socio-educational complexity with which they have to cope. Table 2 shows the total number of schools classified by their complexity (very high, high, medium-high, medium-low and low), as well as the intervals of students who receive lunch aid (as an indicator of poverty and family deprivation). First, we can see how the ranges or intervals of lunch aid recipients are not coherent with the degrees of high or low socio-educational complexity, despite the fact that a more proportional fit it would be more coherent. Secondly, it is worth pointing out that only 40% of public schools (58 in total) have medium-low or low socio-educational complexity, while the remaining 60% have extreme or accentuated conditions of complexity and poverty. As we have no data on the city's publicly-subsidised private schools, we cannot calculate how the ratio of complexity and poverty is distributed among all the primary schools in the city's system, even though we can guess that they primarily fall on the public schools.

Table 2. Socio-educational complexity of the public primary schools in the city of Barcelona

Socio-educational complexity of the school	Ranges of lunch aid recipients	Total number of schools	%
Very high	66% - 19%	29	20%
High	43% - 15%	27	18%
Medium-high	38% - 8%	32	22%
Medium-low	15% - 3%	58	40%
Low	16% - 1%		
Total Barcelona		146	100%

Source: Author based on data from the Education Consortium of Barcelona (2017).

However, here we are more interested in ascertaining how many schools are capable of overcoming the social determinism of their expected outcomes on basic competence tests. Out of a total of 146 public schools in the city of Barcelona, 106 (73%) achieve the outcomes expected given their social setting: low and medium-low outcomes in situations of very high, high and medium-high complexity on the one hand, and high and medium-high outcomes in schools with medium-low and low complexity on the other. That is, 73% of the schools evince social determinism in their outcomes.

The remaining 27% of primary schools in the city of Barcelona can be broken down into 20% outlying or exceptional schools which overcome the social determinism of their settings characterised by high or medium-high complexity, and 7% of schools in settings of medium-low or low complexity that show lower than expected outcomes, which we call under-performing schools (low and medium-low outcomes). Accountability makes it easier for public school administrators to have access to this information, which can be shocking or unexpected for the educational community. In fact, among the 58 public schools with medium-low complexity, or indeed with no complexity and lunch aid lower than 16%, we can find 10 under-performing schools with low and medium-low outcomes, as shown in Table 3.

If we break schools down by degree of complexity, we see that 93% of the schools with very high complexity reproduce the social determinism of their disadvantaged settings, and only 7% are resilient or exceptional schools which show much higher outcomes than expected given their settings of multiple deprivation. Likewise, 33% in contexts of high complexity are exceptional. In contrast, 59% of schools with medium-high complexity are resilient. Therefore, we can posit a hypothesis that as there is a lower concentration of students with direr family deprivation, and as the social composition is more inter-class, the likelihood of finding resilient, exceptional schools increases. The second hypothesis is that they are resilient or exceptional because of their innovative use of the schools' autonomy and the transformative and re-professionalising power of the reflective autonomy of teaching teams until they have crystallised a more equitable, inclusive educational plan.

Table 3. Schools with or without social determinism in the outcomes in the public primary school network in the city of Barcelona

Socio-educational complexity of the school	Total number of schools	Number of schools with social determinism	%	Number of schools without social determinism	%
Very high	29	27	93%	2	7%
High	27	18	66%	9	33%
Medium-high	32	13	41%	19	59%
Medium-low					
Low	58	48	83%	10	17%
Total Barcelona	146	106	73%	40	27%

Source: Author based on data from the Education Consortium of Barcelona (2017).

If we jointly consider schools with high and medium-high complexity (a total of 88) in the city of Barcelona, we find that 37% are resilient or exceptional. What is worrisome is that no public primary school in the Ciutat Vella district is resilient; however, at least 50% of the public schools in the Nou Barris district are (with high or medium-high outcomes despite the setting of difficulty and socio-educational complexity). Why do schools with the same profile in disadvantaged settings in the same city generate such unequal outcomes? The question to ask is not why 37% of the school are resilient and exceptional but why education policies allow 63% of the schools with very high and high complexity to produce low outcomes at the end of primary school.

6. Conclusions: Towards an explicit framework of educational equity

The accountability generated by diagnostic evaluations tends to re-professionalise teaching teams, which undertake restructuring and transformative innovation processes in their schools. We need more empirical information and case studies on the types of improvement and their scope in the system as a whole. Despite the crucial importance of external inequality factors, schools and teaching teams cannot ignore the internal factors that affect educational equity. Certain exceptional or resilient schools attain high and medium-high outcomes despite the settings of socio-educational complexity in which they exist. In the city of Barcelona, they account for 20% of public primary schools, a percentage which is significant enough that they should not be treated as a trivial, anecdotal exception. Their restructuring projects, which belie social determinism, have been based on the reflective autonomy of the teaching teams and their commitment to equity, inclusion and high expectations of success for all students. They tend to contest and somewhat nuance the classic results of the Coleman Report and subsequent reproductionist theories solely focused on the social determinism of outcomes.

The reflective autonomy and professionalism of teaching teams make it possible for 20% of the public primary schools in the city of Barcelona not to reproduce the social determinism of their settings. In the usual discourses and rhetorics of much of the educational community, accountability and diagnostic tests are mistrusted as a neoliberal, mercantile anathema which avoid a more solid, proven debate. The model of conferring responsibility on teaching teams which

stems from accountability is accepted by certain teaching teams, who end up consolidating sound educational projects based on their reflective autonomy and achieve outlying or exceptional outcomes in extremely difficult settings.

However, what is missing is strong leadership in public policies to encourage reflective autonomy among teachers and improve outcomes as a replicable model in settings of high complexity. Nor is there a middle ground of cooperation and reciprocity among schools in complex settings which would allow for networking and mutual enhancement of teaching teams. To remedy this situation, the erratic state and current tentativeness of education policies in equity matters must be overcome in order to boost accountability, teachers' reflective autonomy and the construction of professional capital capable of overcoming the social determinism of the setting.

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