Inclusive and democratic practices in primary school classrooms: A multiple case study in Spain

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ABSTRACT
Background: In order to offer all students the opportunity to progress and grow to their full potential, teachers must positively recognise and value the different expressions of diversity of all the class members. One of the biggest educational challenges that teachers face today is how to address classroom practices from a truly inclusive and democratic perspective. Purpose: The main aim of this study was to explore, in a Spanish context, how primary school teachers articulate and implement inclusive and democratic practices in their classrooms. Design, sample and methods: The methodological design of this study was situated within a qualitative research approach. A multiple case study structure, comprising three case studies, was utilised. Data collection was carried out via interviews, classroom practices inventories, scientific observation and analysis of documentation. The study was carried out over three academic years and had three phases. Data were analysed thematically. Findings: In the three cases analysed, the analysis identified different possibilities in terms of the implementation and articulation of pedagogical differentiation (the structures, content, process and product) and democratic classroom management (collaborative culture, a shared leadership, democratic participation and school linked to environs). Conclusions: The analysis highlights the need to support the formation of a critical citizenship within inclusive contexts, as well as the need to develop a sense of belonging to the educational community.

Introduction
Historically, different approaches have been adopted regarding the diversity construct in education (Moliner and Moliner 2010). From being first understood as a deficit (segregationist and assimilationist) model and going through a standardised approach (integrationist) model, a positive evaluation of diversity (inclusive model) has emerged. This current approach implies that teachers positively recognise and value the different expressions of diversity of all the class members, in order to offer each of them the opportunity to progress and grow to their full potential. The UNESCO Guidelines for Inclusion (UNESCO 2005, 10) define the term as follows: 'Inclusion, thus, involves adopting a broad vision of Education for All by addressing the spectrum of needs of all learners, including those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion.' The management of diversity in the classroom using an inclusive approach (Bergeron 2015; Nilholm and Alm 2010) implies developing the teaching and organisational strategies

that enable each student to learn. However, in addition, there needs to be a contextual framework through which a climate of interdependence and acceptance can be created, where democratic coexistence governs the relationships between the students. The focus of our study was how primary school teachers articulate and implement inclusive and democratic practices in their classrooms.

Background Pedagogical differentiation for the management of an inclusive classroom Based on the notion of a positive evaluation of diversity, the concept of pedagogical differentiation from an inclusive perspective emerges strongly from the international literature. This concept has a long tradition, both in the English-speaking context (Bender 2012; Campbell 2008; Gregory and Chapman 2013; Heacox 2002; Levy 2008; Tomlinson and Imbeau 2010) and in the French-speaking one (Aylwin 1992; Caron 2003; Meirieu 1996; Perrenoud 1996; Prud'homme et al. 2016). Nevertheless, in the Hispanic context, it is important to recognise that this concept has not proliferated either with the same meaning or with the same connotations. This is because, for historical reasons, differentiated education has been understood as referring to the completely different concept of segregating boys and girls into separate classrooms. In a positive conceptualisation of diversity, awareness of the great plurality in the classrooms requires that teachers manage diversity from a differentiated instruction perspective, understood as a way of meeting the students' different learning needs (Bender 2012; Tomlinson and Imbeau 2010). According to Gregory and Chapman (2013), through the use of varied learning strategies and activities, teachers satisfy the students' individual needs. Therefore, it is the teachers' responsibility to differentiate: 1) the learning environment: those elements related to the classroom organisation, i.e. groups, working modalities, times, spaces and the material and/or personal resources (Caron 2003; Leroux and Paré 2016); 2) the content: what students must understand, know and be able to do in order to demonstrate what they have learnt (Tomlinson and Imbeau 2010); as well as the tools that put students in direct contact with the information to be learnt (Leroux and Paré 2016); 3) the process: the way in which the teachers teach, focusing on how students learn depending on their field of interest, previous knowledge, level of competence, motivation towards the task, etc. (Levy 2008; Leroux and Paré 2016) and 4) the product: the way in which students demonstrate what they have learnt (Caron 2003; Levy 2008) through different means of expression, addressees, production and learning evaluation methods (Leroux and Paré 2016). There are a range of ways in which differentiated instruction can be implemented as an inclusive strategy. Aylwin (1992) includes a helpful description of the various dimensions and possibilities: (a) minimum/maximum: the teacher can offer the whole class a variety of means of expression, modes of interaction, learning approaches (minimum) or, at the other end of the scale, each student the opportunity to choose the teaching formula, the contents, the paces and the assessment method (maximum); (b) collective/individual: all students subject to the same methods of differentiation (collective) or each subgroup/ student, can have its own objectives, contents, exercises, means of expression and time (individual); (c) simultaneous/successive: different tasks are given to different subgroups at the same time, depending on their interests or pace (simultaneous) or variety is found during the different educational stages (successive) and (d) inside/outside: it may be developed in different learning environments (i.e. inside or outside of the classroom). In terms of instructional strategies, Arnaiz (2011) considers that educating for diversity in an inclusive classroom also requires promoting cooperation, solidarity and tolerance between students. Accordingly, this demands that all students are recognised, valued and respected, giving the same importance to both

what is taught and how it is taught (Stainback and Stainback 1996), as well as the creation of a learning environment in which everybody feels that they are part of what happens in the classroom. The inclusive classroom is, or must be, a space for everybody, which has been thought about and developed as a participatory community. In this way, as Stainback and Stainback (1996) contend, the concept of community is built on the assumption that all its members belong to it. It implies that each member has the right to feel, as a social actor, that he/ she participates in his/her environment, is recognised as such and that all have the possibility of participating in it as full members.

Democratic management of the inclusive classroom The notion of full participation corresponds to an image of the inclusive classroom as a democratic classroom. In such a classroom, democratic structures and processes that organise the school life and the curriculum are created (Apple and Beane 1995). Ashenden et al. (1988) (cited by Guarro, 2005) suggest that a democratic curriculum should be based on the following principles: being common, co-operative, worthwhile, inclusive, practical, doable, reflective, moral, structured and coherent. Similarly, Escudero (2006) contends that a curriculum is democratic if: 1) it upholds the values of social justice, 2) the contents and processes are the results of the participation, 3) it is designed and established through democratic processes of participation and 4) it has tensions and a sense of idealism but is still anchored to the context. In previous studies, Moliner et al. (2016) have proposed strategies that enable the construction of democratic schools. These derive from their experiences of supporting schools that are transforming to become more intercultural and inclusive. The most important of these strategies are promoting a collaborative culture, fighting against exclusion and valuing diversity, redefining democratic values, participation and community decision-making, using a participatory research-action approach, self-learning in democratic participation and developing shared projects between the educational institution and its environs. Collaborative culture in the creation of democratic and inclusive environments, inclusive leadership and engagement with the community are key elements to be considered in inclusive and democratic school contexts (Murillo 2006). The interrelationship between school, families and community is thought to be indispensable in order to achieve the high demands that inclusion aims at, through democratic participation in the educational context (Simón, Giné, and Echeita 2016).

The convergence between inclusion, democratic participation and pedagogical differentiation Some studies, such as the one by Fillion et al. (2016), indicate, theoretically, the convergence points between school inclusion, citizenship education and differentiated instruction. These are 1) democratic values of justice and equity, 2) recognition and consideration of diversity and 3) participation and learning to coexist. Similarly, Waterman (2007) employs the term differentiated democratic classroom in order to describe a classroom in which the teachers work together with their students, listening to their wishes and points of view regarding learning and developing a shared leadership. All these principles help us to advance towards more active and critical citizenship in education. Nevertheless, promoting, through education, the adherence to democratic principles is not enough, on its own. Rather, it is also necessary to develop active citizenship, in order to help young people to feel part of the continuous building of democratic society. Fillion et al. (2016) discern between three types of citizenship: 1) personally responsible citizenship, 2) participatory citizenship (engagement) and 3) justice-oriented citizenship.

Purpose

In this article, we start from the hypothesis that teachers, when implementing pedagogical differentiation processes in order to respond positively to diversity, are, at the same time, developing democratic management processes. Thus, they are facilitating opportunities for learning the values of inclusion and democratic coexistence in the classroom. Therefore, the main objective of this study was to investigate how primary education teachers design and implement inclusive and democratic practices in their classrooms.

Method

This study is framed within the qualitative research paradigm. We constructed an instrumental case study Stake (1995). The issue that we found interesting to investigate and understand was articulated as follows: How do primary school teachers articulate and implement inclusive and democratic practices in their classrooms? In order to address this research question, we designed a collective (or multiple) case study, which included three specific case studies. We took the classroom as the unit of analysis. It is important to recognise that case studies cannot be generalised and this was not the intention of the research. As Flyvbjerg (2006, 241) observes, case-study research is a necessary 'and sufficient method for certain important research tasks in the social sciences, and it is a method that holds up well when compared to other methods in the gamut of social science research methodology'. This kind of study is based on detail and uniqueness, which can help us to understand other cases, which differ from the current one (Smith 1978). Through selecting a case study methodology, it was our intention to collect rich data and undertake in-depth analysis in order to address the research question.

Ethical considerations

In order to carry out this research, the principles, criteria and commitments set out in the Code of Good Practices (CBP) of the Doctoral School of the Universitat Jaume I (2015) were followed. The ethical and professional principles that governed this educational research was: a) Freely given and informed consent by the subjects to be investigated, b) Respect for the fundamental rights of the person, c) Respect for the private sphere: privacy and confidentiality, d) Return of research results, e) Use of the information collected and f) Personal responsibility and collective solidarity.

Sample

Six criteria were taken into consideration in order to choose the case studies (Tochon 2004). By adhering to the criteria, it was more likely that the case studies would help us to learn and give insights into our research topic. The case-selection criteria were as follows:
● Primary school classrooms with students with learning difficulties, special needs education or students proceeding from other countries.
● Teachers with more than 10 years of teaching experience.
● A setting from a nearby area.

● A setting which had been implementing inclusive and democratic practices in the classroom for at least two years.

● A setting which was involved in research-action or educational innovation processes. The teachers were those who had been recognised by others in the field (e.g. peers, directors, educational psychologists, etc.) as experts in the management of diversity. In this way, the case selection was purposeful and deliberate: we were already familiar with the teachers' methods and practices in the classroom because they participated in a seminar at the university and they had previously collaborated with us in university activities. Table 1 presents the participant teachers in each case study in the context of their classroom settings. The first case study is a classroom in the fifth grade (pupil ages 10–11) of a primary school in a Childhood and Primary Education School (CEIP). The second case study consists of two classrooms (2.1 and 2.2) in the second grade (pupil ages 7–8) of a primary school in a Childhood and Primary Education School (CEIP).

Table 1. Participants in the case studies.

CASE Teachers	Students	Trainee Teachers	Families
1	25 (whole class) *8 (interview)*	1	0
2.1	28 (whole class) *6 (interview)*	0	2 mothers
2.2	27 (whole class) *8 (interview)*	1	6 mothers 5 grandparents
3	21 (whole class) *9 (interview)*	0	1 mother

These were treated as a single case, due to the teachers' joint work. The third case is a multi-level classroom in the fifth and sixth grade (pupil ages 10–12) of primary school in a Childhood and Primary Education School (CEIP). In this case study, in addition to the tutor, the music teacher also participated. Table 1 also gives an idea of the classroom context, in terms of the number of students, pre-service teachers and voluntary helpers. All the case studies were carried out in classrooms in which the management of the students' diversity (e.g. aspects such as capacities, learning styles, motivations) raised challenges for the teachers.

Research procedure This study was performed during three academic years, following three phases:

(1) Pre-active phase. During the initial planning of the research, the epistemological foundations were defined and the main actions were organised. Then, the case studies were selected following the aforementioned criteria, and the datagathering instruments were developed or adapted. Permission documents (authorisations and informed consent) were generated and access to the field was arranged.

(2) Interactive phase: fieldwork and data preparation. In this phase, the data gathering process was started. After the signing of the informed consent form by each of the teachers, the necessary authorisations were requested. Then, an initial interview was arranged with the selected teachers, and a Classroom Practice Inventory was drawn up. After that, the classroom situations were observed and followed up, and the participants of each case study were interviewed.

The data collection techniques and instruments were:

(a) Interview. This technique allows the researcher to discover and portray the multiple views of the case (Simons 2009). For each of the interviewed groups (see Table 1), a semi-structured script was used.

(b) Classroom Practice Inventory. Once the initial interview with the participant teachers was finished, a Classroom Practice Inventory was developed together with them (Heacox 2002). This inventory consisted of 16 practical assumptions in which the teacher has to locate his/her practice, based on a Classroom Practice Continuum. Hence, the repertoire of the teachers' practices, as well as their behaviour and action patterns (Malo 2005), was gathered through interviews (initial and final) and the Classroom Practice Inventory.

(c) Non-participant observation. In order to observe classrooms situations, a record sheet was used. This had five general elements, which were gradually specified within the different items that had to be observed (Prud'homme, LeBlanc, and Paré 2013). These were: 1) rigour and coherence between pedagogical intentions, contents and activities; 2) anticipation (planning) and recognition of diversity; 3) teaching and evaluation practices; 4) learning environment and management and 5) resources allocated to perform adaptations, modifications and offer specific support. Furthermore, in order to complete this record sheet, we used a tool called DCOS-Assessing Classroom Differentiation Protocol–Revised (Cassady et al. 2004).

This instrument made it possible to record and codify the cognitive activity and the students' level of engagement towards the task. In addition, during the sessions, some field notes, photographs, and video and audio recordings were taken.

(d) Documentary analysis. We explored various materials in paper, video or audio format which allowed us to complement the observations performed (Álvarez (2008)). During the field access sessions, different documents (or photographs of them), which had been created either by the teachers in order to develop their classroom practice (e.g. visual supports, instructions, etc.) or by the students (e.g. notes, dossiers), were gathered. The information collected was transcribed. Table 2 presents a synthesis of the data gathered.

Table 2. Synthesis of the data gathered in each of the cases

CASE	Non-participant observations	Interviews	Documentary analysis
1	-8 classroom practices: research groups (2 working sessions and 2 exhibition sessions), we read in pairs (3 sessions; one each term), dialogic literary circle (2 sessions), books' exhibitions (5 exhibitions) storytelling and theater in preschool (2 sessions), letters to the school C. and other written productions (1 session), experiments in Natural Sciences (1 session), and the evaluation (1 session)	-Teacher: initial, practice inventory and final -8 students -1 Primary Education student	- Project: "What purpose does the tongue serve? Taste…by the tongue" -Activities and readings -Self-evaluation sheets -Rubrics -Posters
2	-6 classroom practices: Working projects (The prehistory: the origin of the human being (15 sessions) and How does time pass by? B. Our town (15 sessions)), interactive groups (2 sessions), storytelling in preschool (1 session), inter-level workshops (1 session), and the evaluation (1 session).	-Teacher: initial, practice inventory and final. -6 students (case 2.1) -2 mothers (case 2.1) -8 students (case 2.2) -1 Primary Education student (case 2.2)	-2 project's dossiers -Activities -Self-correction guidelines, parts of the Letter

		-6 mothers (case 2.2)	
		-5 grandparents (case 2.2)	
3	-12 classroom practices: The work plan (1 session). Project of the Centre "THE CINEMA" and classroom activities (1 session), we read in pairs (2 sessions), puzzle of Aronson or jigsaw (1 session), workstations (2 sessions), the sciences workshop (1 session), dialogic literary circle (2 sessions) and books' exhibition (2 exhibitions), Project LÓVA (5 sessions), workshops of Thursdays (1 session), gymkhana (1 session), work corners (1 session) and the evaluation (1 session).	-Teacher: initial, practice inventory and final -9 students -1 mother -1 music teacher	-Activities and readings -Self-evaluation sheets -Posters, murals and documents. -Rubrics -Dossier -Project

(3) Post-active phase: Data analysis, data writing and returning. For the data analysis, a thematic type content analysis was carried out (Paille and Mucchielli 2003). Stages of data reduction and interpretation were undertaken (Miles and Huberman 1994). Data were processed using the software ATLAS.ti. During the categorisation phase, deductive reasoning was used. In other words, we started from the four theoretical constructs which referred to differentiated instruction from an inclusive perspective: (1) differentiation of learning environment, (2) differentiation of content, (3) differentiation of process and (4) differentiation of product, taking as a reference point the contributions made by expert researchers in the field (Tomlinson and Imbeau 2010; Leroux and Paré 2016). Some expert judges validated the content of each construct (Escobar-Pérez and Cuervo-Martínez 2008). Specifically, there were 10 expert judges (as Hyrkäs, Appelqvist-Schmidlechner, and Oksa (2003) consider that this number of judges offers a reliable estimation of content validity). The judges rated the theoretical constructs from 1 to 10 and the validity of the construct was considered adequate. New categories did not emerge in the codification process and this first level of analysis was considered sufficient. The interrater agreement between researchers made it possible to connect and rank the categories, which is shown in the relational map as part of the findings section. A report of each case study was returned to the teachers, who were invited to the public presentation of the investigation's research findings.

Findings and discussion

The research question we addressed was how primary education teachers design and implement inclusive and democratic practices in their classrooms. Our thematic analysis of rich data from the three case studies allowed the identification of categories and subcategories that shed light on the ways in which the teachers designed and implemented inclusive and democratic practices in their classrooms. Figure 1 presents a complex, relational map which represents our analysis of the case studies. In the paragraphs below, we describe the findings of our analysis in relation to this map. Where relevant, anonymised and translated examples and quotations from the case study data are included to illustrate main points.
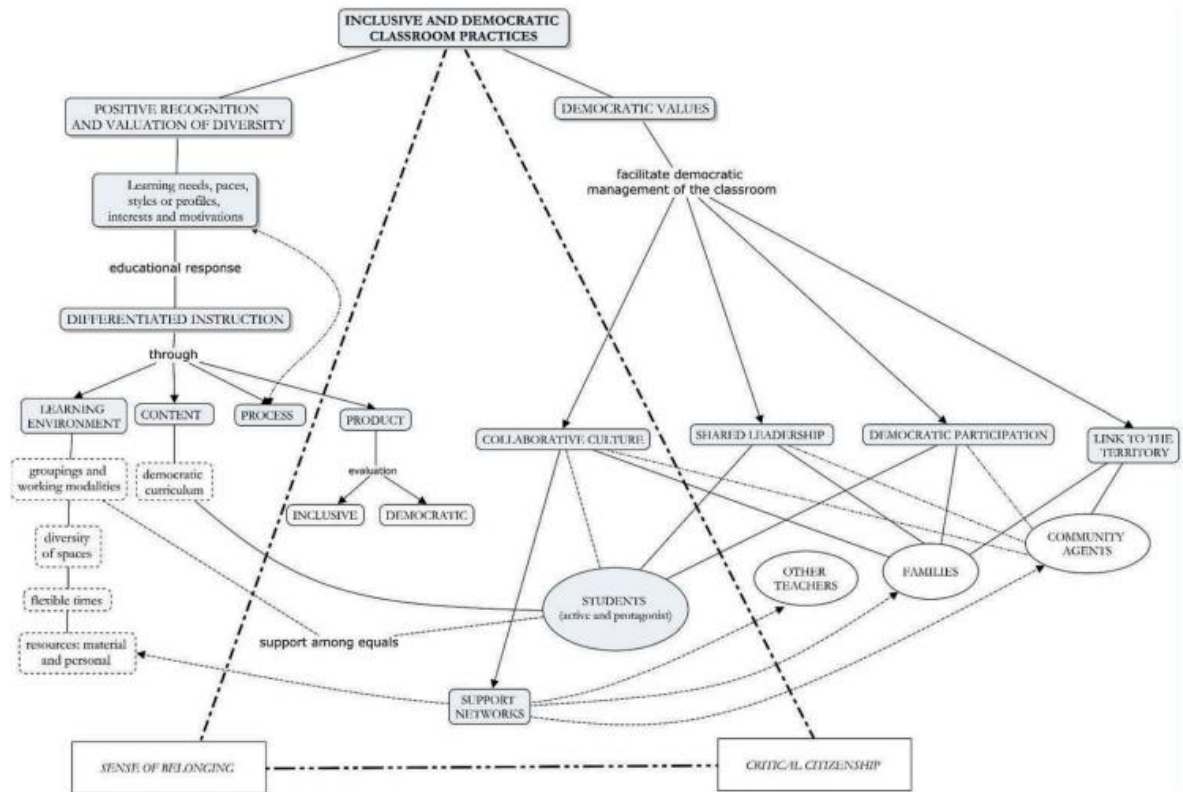
Figure 1. A relational map of the inclusive and democratic practices identified in the thematic analysis.

On the complex relational map, our findings about inclusive and democratic classroom practices are organised on two axes: 1) positive recognition and valuation of diversity, and 2) democratic values. During the research, we found that teachers' rationales and explanations for their teaching practices were mainly based on how they conceptualised education: i.e. on their beliefs, attitudes and values – for example: in order to offer a more fair, more solidarity, more participative, more creative and more open education (Teacher, Case 1); in order to value the person, the human being and foster coexistence, participation, and the emotional side (Teacher, Case 2); the beliefs, values and opinions, the teacher's motivation, and the feeling that all the teachers of the educational institution follow the same line of work (Teacher, Case 3).

Exploration of axis 1: positive recognition and valuation of diversity

In this axis, we observed how the positive recognition of diversity requires the teachers' understanding of the students' different learning needs, pace, styles or profiles, interests and motivations. This is what leads the teachers to differentiate the instruction. The first category here is Differentiated instruction. In terms of the first sub-category – Learning environment – in all the cases, a wide variety of groupings was used, depending on the working modality and purpose: e.g. an individual grouping for writing tales, letters, weekly texts. As the teacher in the first case study explained, 'We group the children at tables, in groups of diverse students, heterogeneous and with different capacities, with different aptitudes [. . .]'. During the observations, we saw working in pairs for the activity 'we read in pairs' and the project's dossier, and working in groups for the

research works, working projects or the dialogic literary circle (Cases 1 and 3). Nevertheless, the majority of the work proposals required an interaction between the students; there was a smaller number of proposals that required working on activities individually. This organisational element was linked to the Collaborative culture category (in Axis 2). In terms of the differentiation of spaces, in all three case studies, some activities inside and outside of the classroom were proposed. For example, in the Opera project LÓVA, the teacher observed: 'we are assigned different spaces to work in groups in the school, the opera was performed in the local Auditorium, and then the students went with the music teacher to the Palace of Arts and Sciences to tell their experience to other teachers' (Teacher, Case 3). Further, on the research groups: 'two groups of students work in the library, others in another room and others in class. It favours the choice of spaces to work, so that the students are at ease' (Observation notes Case 1). This modality was much more evident in Case 3, given that during the 'work corners' activity they even left the school to go to the place where retired people were (located side by side with the school), in order to interview the elderly residents of the city. As far as time is concerned, simultaneous differentiation (we read in pairs, group activities, product development) and successive differentiation (e.g. to choose the content block and create the working teams in the research groups, or working projects exhibitions, or the gymkhana) were both observed. Another element that manifested itself strongly in the study was the differentiation of material and personal resources. In the three case studies, the use of visual supports to guide students who needed it to perform the task (e.g. poster of the group's roles, guideline for the activity 'we read in pairs', letter writing script and writing the basic instructions to resolve the activity on the board) was frequently apparent. In terms of personal resources or supports, it is important to highlight that, in all the cases, the support resource that was mostly used were peers (for example, in 'we read in pairs' activity), followed by the presence of the therapeutic pedagogy teacher or other support teachers in the classroom (Cases 2 and 3). It is also important to emphasise that families were also a vital support resource in the development of practices, and they went to the classroom in order to help with the working projects, workshops and interactive groups; as one mother remarked, 'I love to collaborate and come whenever I am asked'. Furthermore, an expert in the field was always invited to the working projects, in order to introduce other voices into the classroom: 'they introduce other ways for knowledge to reach the classroom, not just because the teacher says so' (Teacher, Case 2). This research evidence from the analysis indicates how some support networks were developed between educational and community agents.

In our analysis, the differentiation of content (Sub-category 2) was the element that led to the democratisation of the curriculum. In this way, it was more directly related to those democratic practices that involved a greater amount of students' decision-making power. This was shown very clearly in some practices such as the research groups (Case 1) and the working projects (Case 2), in which each group had the opportunity of studying a block of contents in more depth: 'Well, today we've begun to choose what each of us has to study.' (Student, Case 2). Also, in the book's exhibition 'each student presents the chosen book to his/her classmates, and they ask him/her questions' (observation notes, Cases 1 and 3). In the activity 'we read in pairs', we observed a clear differentiation throughout the academic year. Specifically, in the first term, the teacher provided the tutor with the text and the activities; in the second term, the teacher provided the text and the tutor prepared the activities and in the third term, the tutor was the one who chose the text and developed the activities: 'That sounds good to me

because you can choose the reading topic that you find interesting for your partner' (Student, Case 1) The same happened in the Storytelling in preschool education (in the first term, the student chose a tale from the classroom library in order to read it; in the second term, the students wrote and created the tale). In the interactive groups, the differentiation of content was evident, since, in 1 hour and 30 minutes, different maths and language activities were simultaneously performed (Case 2). The differentiation of content also became apparent in the activity of the jigsaw or a puzzle (Case 3), in which each student solved some blocks of mathematical problems in the inter-level workshops (Case 2). Sub-category 3 was the differentiation of process. This was observed in some practices such as the research groups (Case 1) or in the project LÓVA (Case 3), when choosing roles or professions depending on interest or motivation. In the Opera project, the differentiation of product (Sub-category 4) was also very clear, because every role or profession must perform different tasks and products: '[Name] is working on a computer preparing a diptych. The scenographers are also working on the poster in the corridor and others on the decorations in class. The musicians are playing in the garden with the actors' (observation notes, Case 3). In Case 2, the differentiation of product was observed in the productions made within the working projects (e.g. timeline, prehistoric cave, game of 'the village over time'). In turn, the differentiation of product involved a more inclusive and democratic evaluation. It was noteworthy that the presence of the students' voice was evident in some of the practices studied, including exhibitions of the research groups, evaluation of the classmates' notebooks using a rubric and self-evaluations in 'we read in pairs'. In this regard, the Case 1 was particularly significant.

Exploration of axis 2: democratic values

This axis refers to the different teachers' democratic values that led them to foster and facilitate a more democratic management of their classrooms. As stated above, collaborative culture (Category 1) is a theoretical construct that was highly related to the groupings and to the personal resources or supports. Similarly, in terms of the differentiation of product, collaborative culture can underpin the idea of collective knowledge construction, starting from the premise that every student can contribute. Families' participation is also important here, as the parents or grandparents are often in charge of helping, explaining or contributing in the classroom. It must be emphasised that, in Case 3, this collaborative culture was particularly evident at the educational institution level (it was established by the presence of another teacher in the classroom in order to help and collaborate in the activities). From this category, the concept of support networks was also triggered (i.e. teachers' training supported by the Teachers Training Institution, sending letters to the students of other educational institutions (Case 1)). In working projects, they went to actors from the immediate environment so as to share their were drawn together with experts from the area who could contribute to the working project, collaborations between the school and the Adult Education School (Case 2.2). In project LÓVA (Case 3), the music teacher was reinforced and supported by the classmates who took the course with this teacher. Shared leadership (Category 2) was an important element that needs to be emphasised within the parameters of democratic education. The way in which teachers relinquished the classroom and group management to the students was observed. When this happened, the students adopted a series of roles or functions which they had to perform, both for the good functioning of the classroom and for the good functioning of their own group (posts and roles, Case 1 and 3). In Case 2, for example, there was a student who was in charge for the day. This

required the engagement and involvement of the members of the classroom since they had to know how to meet and respect the different needs therein required. In the research groups and projects, for example, 'the students themselves are responsible for inquiring, and latter explaining to their classmates, the block of contents that they have studied' (observation notes, Case 1). Democratic participation (Category 3) was materialised in the classroom through the choice of the contents (differentiation of content and process depending on the interest, preferences or motivations) that the students had to study in the research groups and working projects (Case 1 and 2). This element was also linked to the presence that the students had in their own and their classmates' evaluation: 'Well, first after we shared, everyone put notes and then as a group we talked and came to an agreement on what qualification to put' (Student, Case 1). The dialogic literary circle (Case 1 and 3) was another example of a stage in which everybody participated, as everybody contributed experiences and comments in terms of respect for and listening to all the voices: 'in charge of managing the speaking rounds, encouraging the participation of all members in the reading and writing a summary of the session'. (Student, Case 3). Furthermore, a relation of horizontality in the relationship between the teacher and the students was fostered. The assembly as an organisation for participation and collective decision-making was also noted (Case 2). Again, the families' participation was very significant in many of the projects and activities. In all the case studies, an initial meeting was held with the families, in which the methodology and the way of working in the classroom was explained to them. In particular, grandparents' strong involvement was evident in one of the working projects 'How does time pass by?' in Case 2.2: 'You have to know your ancestors. What the people have been, what their families have been and what they have been [. . .]' (Grandparent, Case 2). This project also leads us to the notion of link to the environs or 'territory' (Category 4). This was another important component within the second axis of analysis. We noticed how it emerged in some of the practices studied. For example, in research groups, the text of 'we read in pairs' (Case 1), the project of the village over time (Case 2.2), and in 'work corners' (chronicle's corner): 'Of our town, of a monument or something that interested you and then the next week you had to say what you wanted to investigate' (Student, Case 3).

knowledge or experiences in the classroom (Case 2). For example, these were informal networks that Exploration of transversal categories Finally, we identified two transversal categories that went across both axes: a sense of belonging and critical citizenship. These are represented in the form of a triangle in Figure 1. In all of the case studies, different experiences in the school context were procedurally built in both of these categories. These transversal categories represent a way of working that involves democratic participation, collaborative culture, shared leadership between the teacher and other actors (students, families and experts), and their continuous reflections, discussions or consensus-building, which contribute to build a higher level of critical thinking, and with it, an engaged critical citizenship. The same occurred with the sense of belonging. Students realised that their voices counted, and that they could make decisions in the organisations intended for that purpose, that they can help or be helped by different persons in the classroom in the educational institution or from the immediate environment who participate in the learning situation. This generated a collective identity, a social cohesion which enabled the creation of emotional and affective bonds, as well as the experience of feeling valued.

Further discussion of findings

In the practices analysed, in terms of the differentiation of structures, groupings become particularly significant, as they had a direct impact on the creation of a collaborative culture. Reaching a higher level of collaboration between the students increased motivation and mutual support. In addition, the differentiation of the open and flexible working modalities that have been shown in the cases enables the access and participation of all the students in the learning (UNESCO 2005). And in this regard, time flexibilization makes it possible to adapt to the students' different paces (Kahn 2010). Results also show that the multiple resources and visual supports used (posters, self-instructions) help the students to perform the task facilitating self-regulated learning (Jorba and Cassellas 1997) – one of the main strategies in inclusive classrooms. Furthermore, personal resources or supports are designed as supports at different levels: 1) support offered by equals, provided through cooperative learning (Johnson, Johnson, and Holubec 1998); 2), by other teachers in the classroom who offer their support and collaboration to the whole class under the guidance of the tutor (Benoit et al. 2011); 3), the families' support facilitated and favoured by the teachers (Moliner and Traver 2016) and, 4) by community agents. Therefore, the conjunction of personal resources underlies a collaborative culture from which teachers weave support networks between the community agents. According to Florian (2017, 249), inclusive education based on the culture of participation and co-operation opens space for every pupil to work towards the highest personal result and mature in the environment of respect and trust. The link of the school to the territory (Sales et al. 2018) emerges tentatively in the study, which indicates that this relationship is found more at a theoretical level than in the teachers' perception. Moreover, the differentiation of content is the element that enables the democratisation of the curriculum (Ashenden et al. 1988 (cited by Guarro, 2005); Escudero 2006; César and Oliveira 2005), when allowing the students to choose the topics they are going to study and promotes the students' participation in the school context and a feeling that they are part of the classroom. In shared leadership (Muijs and Harris 2006), it is evident how a students' active role is adopted. Also, regarding the differentiation of product, and in relation to democratic participation, the study offers examples of the use of different instruments and evaluation sources such as rubrics and self-evaluations which point towards a more democratic and inclusive evaluation (Wanner and Palmer 2018; Murillo and Hidalgo 2016; Waterman 2007). Furthermore, teachers listen to their students' voices (Fielding and Moss 2011) in practices such as the dialogic literary circle or the assembly (Sapon-Shevin 1999) that are configured as stages where everybody participates (Hargreaves and García-Carrión 2016). And within this democratic participation framework, family's participation is especially significant (Moliner and Traver 2016; Simón, Giné, and Echeita 2016; Blanch et al. 2013). In the practices analysed, a personally responsible citizenship and a participatory citizenship are more promoted than a critical citizenship since they are not so oriented to the resolution of injustices (Fillion et al. 2016). Regarding the sense of belonging, the practices analysed – which we have called inclusive and democratic – foster positive personal interactions of support, collaboration, respect and solidarity. Inevitably, this study has some potential limitations. This is an investigation based on data from only three case studies in one location, involving few students. For that reason, we want to emphasise that the intention of the study is not to generalise, but rather to present a rich, qualitative thematic description of insights from our data.

Conclusions

In the three cases analysed, we have described some different possibilities in the implementation and articulation of pedagogical differentiation and democratic classroom management. In this research, the valuation and recognition of students' diversity in the classroom was based on how teachers understand education, and on the beliefs, attitudes and values that lead teachers to implement differentiated instruction. In so doing, they avoid teaching-learning processes based on homogeneity and characterised by a standard presentation addressed to a notional 'average' student (Arnaiz 2011; Gregory and Chapman 2013). The conclusions of the study can be summarised as follows: (a) Flexible working modalities promote collaborative culture and participation of all the students. (b) Optimal management of available support resources enables community participation and link to the environs. (c) The presence of the students' voices in the teaching and learning process facilitates the democratisation of the curriculum. In short, inclusive and democratic practices are related to democratic values, recognition and valuation of human diversity, participation and learning to coexist. Teachers are able to implement processes of pedagogical differentiation in the classroom that facilitate, at the same time, processes of democratic management and learning active citizenship. However, although we know that some educators develop inclusive and democratic practices in their classrooms and are prepared for it, it is also evident that the actual practice beyond some classrooms is limited. It is, therefore, important to understand the factors that determine whether or not teachers develop these practices. By understanding this, we can contribute to the development of an inclusive pedagogy in schools, guided by principles of equity and social justice. In order to support the formation of a critical citizenship within inclusive contexts as well as developing a sense of belonging to the educational community, it is necessary to continue researching in order to shed light on these different aspects.

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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