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## School leadership for inclusive education: theoretically relevant dimensions for its development

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, inclusive leadership has become established as a theoretically relevant approach for schools committed to equity, social justice and diversity. However, there is less theoretical background on its practices compared to other leadership approaches. The aim of this paper is to conceptualise inclusive school leadership from a critical and socially grounded perspective by proposing five theoretically relevant dimensions of practice that support the development and enactment of inclusion in schools. These dimensions are as follows: (1) management of pedagogical processes to cater for diversity; (2) development of an inclusive school culture; (3) promotion of whole school participation; (4) professional development of the whole school community; and (5) interpersonal resources for inclusion. For each dimension, a set of practices, narratives, competencies, and evidence that support their development and enactment in school contexts are presented. The conclusion is that inclusive leadership is grounded in social justice, critical reflection and contextualisation. This approach is indispensable to overcome the limitations imposed by traditional structures and standardised solutions that can hinder true inclusion in school contexts.

### KEYWORDS

Inclusive education; school leadership; leadership practice; educational theory; diversity

## Introduction

Since inequity and segregation have been highlighted as educational problems, inclusion has become a fundamental proposition in educational policy and research (Ainscow, 2020; Norwich, 2022). Consequently, the need for deep transformations in school communities has been emphasised, significantly impacting leadership practices, which are essential for promoting collective change (Leithwood et al., 2020). As Fullan (1996) argues, leadership is not about technical implementation, but about fostering change processes that engage schools with broader social dynamics.

Schools have been described as institutions that limit participation for certain groups (Ryan, 2006), where leadership can act as a response to exclusion (Blount, 2013). According to Riera Romani et al. (2018), school leadership must guide the ethical horizon of education and respond to social crises with a commitment to justice. In this regard, it becomes relevant to leadership practices respond to profound, ethical and social purposes that are comprised in the educational process (Wilkinson, 2017). This requires problematising current notions of leadership that tend to be associated with efficiency and lack a deeper understanding of its social and even scientific nature (Evans, 2022; McGinity et al., 2022). Thus, it becomes necessary to gather evidence and develop theoretical frameworks that better illuminate leadership for inclusion. Rather than offering a fixed or normative definition of inclusive leadership, this paper conceptualises inclusive leadership as a socially situated, critical, and practice-based approach. From this perspective, inclusive leadership is understood not as a technical or managerial function, but as a set of relational and ethical practices through which power, participation, and justice are negotiated in everyday school life. This conceptualisation, which underpins the argument developed in this paper, challenges dominant functional and instrumental models of school leadership by foregrounding inclusion as a political, cultural, and moral project. The aim of this paper is to conceptualise inclusive school leadership from a critical and

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socially grounded perspective by proposing five theoretically relevant dimensions of practice that support the development and enactment of inclusion in schools. This paper explicitly positions inclusive leadership within a socially critical tradition of educational leadership, drawing on perspectives that conceptualise leadership as a relational, ethical, and political practice rather than as a functional or managerial role.

However, finding common ground between inclusion and school leadership is complex. While inclusion promotes democratic, multidimensional school processes (Ryan, 2016), traditional leadership is often centred on principals and academic outcomes (Biesta, 2017; Horn & Marfán, 2010). Although pedagogical, distributed, and instructional leadership approaches have gained prominence (Bush, 2016; Daniëls et al., 2019; Weinstein et al., 2019), inclusive leadership remains underexplored (Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2021).

This limited articulation between leadership and inclusion can be explained by at least four interrelated reasons that reflect dominant assumptions in the field of school leadership. First, the strong emphasis on academic results has prioritised effectiveness and performance over equity and participation (Bolívar, 2010; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006; Day et al., 2016). Second, the predominance of an individual, principal-centred and managerial focus reinforces hierarchical views of authority, constraining collective, participatory, and inclusive practices (Hitt et al., 2018; Weinstein & Muñoz, 2012). Third, neoliberal policy influences have further consolidated instrumental and accountability-driven approaches to leadership (Allbright & Marsh, 2020; Campos et al., 2019; Sisto, 2019). Finally, persistent conceptual ambiguities and weak methodological debates have limited the development of robust theoretical frameworks for inclusive leadership (McGinity et al., 2022; Thomson, 2017). Taken together, these conditions reveal the need to move beyond descriptive or functionalist accounts and to develop a critical conceptualisation of inclusive leadership grounded in practice, power relations, and social justice. Therefore, it is essential to conceptualise and propose theoretically grounded dimensions that problematise the conditions under which more inclusive leadership practices can be developed and enacted.

This article makes three interrelated contributions to the field of educational leadership research. First, it advances a critical conceptualisation of inclusive leadership that moves beyond normative, managerial, and implementation-oriented approaches by foregrounding leadership as a socially situated practice shaped by power relations and struggles for justice. Second, it proposes five theoretically relevant dimensions of practice that do not function as prescriptive guidelines, but as analytical lenses to examine how inclusive leadership is enacted in everyday school contexts. Third, by articulating these dimensions within a socially critical and practice-based tradition of leadership, the paper contributes to ongoing debates on how inclusion can be understood not merely as a policy aspiration, but as a political, relational, and ethical project embedded in school life.

In this sense, the emergence of inclusive leadership should not be understood in isolation, but as part of a broader critical trajectory in educational leadership research that has challenged managerial, instrumental, and technocratic assumptions by foregrounding power, democracy, and social justice as central analytical lenses (Bates, 1989; Eacott, 2015; Ryan, 2006; Shields, 2010; Smyth, 1989; Theoharis, 2007). Our proposal builds on this trajectory, extending it to the contemporary challenges of inclusion. Recent studies show that leadership research has undergone a significant shift from administrative and managerial approaches to more humanistic, sustainable, and socially responsible models (Hariyanti et al., 2025), with educational inclusion being a major concern, given that all countries around the world are seeking quality education for all (Ainscow, 2025). This implies that the study of inclusive leadership and the deepening of its dimensions are becoming increasingly relevant.

## Relationship between leadership and inclusion in education

Inclusive education has developed as a socially driven movement, promoted globally through international organisations and non-governmental efforts (Ainscow, 2020). In the 1970s, there was an attempt to integrate students with disabilities into mainstream classrooms, although this shift did not fundamentally transform school structures or practices (Ortiz-González, 2023). Over time, inclusion has evolved into a holistic vision that demands schools adapt to diverse student needs, fostering environments responsive to all learners. Inclusive education critiques traditional schooling practices that perpetuate exclusion, calling for a redefinition of “normality” to prevent subtle but persistent forms of marginalisation (Skliar, 2017; Slee,

2020). Such transformation requires not only pedagogical shifts but also ideological change – especially in leadership.

To advance this purpose, inclusive leadership has been addressed as a fundamental practice (Kugelmass, 2003; Ryan, 2011). Nevertheless, relating leadership to inclusion requires a deeper problematisation around its nature and social role. Critical approaches to educational leadership contribute to this discussion, addressing how leadership practices are embedded in power structures and cultural settings (Smyth, 1989; Wilkinson & Bristol, 2017), which challenges the idea of leadership as a neutral or technical practice. On the contrary, leadership often operates by building hegemonic discourses and responding to predominant instrumental interests of educational institutions (Bates, 1989; Eacott, 2015; Niesche, 2018). In this line, socially just leadership traditions have underscored the ethical and political responsibilities of leaders to confront inequities and promote democratic and culturally responsive practices (Shields, 2004, 2010; Furman, 2012; Theoharis, 2007). These approaches emphasise that leadership is not merely an individual function but a collective, value-driven practice aimed at advancing justice and equity in schools (Jean-Marie et al., 2009; López, 2011).

From this perspective, inclusive leadership must be conceived as a critical and socially embedded form of leadership. This paper therefore rejects approaches that focus solely on individual authority and functionalist perspectives. Instead, it proposes a complex, distributed view of leadership embedded in everyday relationships and oriented towards equity and justice as critical and transformative purposes. Inclusive leadership must support institutional transformation and foster new school cultures where inclusion is collectively enacted and reimaged.

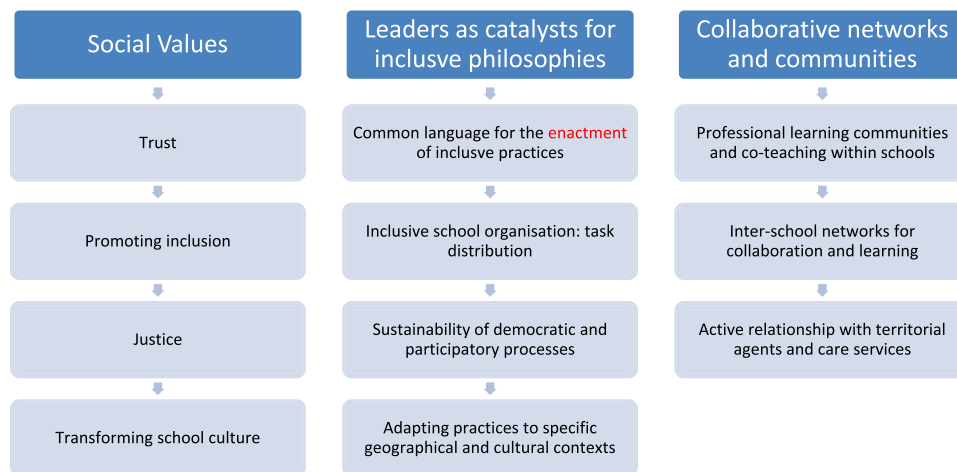
### Leadership for inclusion

Building on the above positions, a clearer relationship between leadership and inclusion in schools can be constructed. To this end, it is necessary to understand that leadership is not limited to a technical exercise: on the contrary, it is a social practice that marks a relationship between the subject, the organisation and reality (Greenfield, 1993). Therefore, leading for inclusion and justice becomes a deliberate and necessary response to socio-educational dynamics that perpetuate segregation, inequity and discrimination (Ryan, 2016). This understanding of school leadership not only responds to existing structural inequalities but also makes school cultures more complex.

From this standpoint, international agencies have explicitly called upon school principals and leadership teams to assume a central role in advancing inclusive reforms (UNESCO, 1994). The Salamanca Statement, for example, underscores the responsibility of educational leaders to establish flexible management procedures, redistribute pedagogical resources, diversify educational options, promote mutual support among students, and strengthen collaboration with families and communities (p. 23). These guidelines not only define the specific demands placed on those in leadership positions but also situate leadership as a crucial mechanism for transforming schools into inclusive institutions. This is the origin of inclusive school leadership as a perspective that defends inclusion as a global project (Thompson & Matkin, 2020).

This leadership approach is not assumed to be exclusive, as it is strongly influenced by other styles, such as democratic, instructional or distributed leadership (Ryan, 2006). In fact, the most recent systematic reviews on leadership tend to highlight its relation to pedagogical or instructional leadership (Caingcoy, 2020; Daniëls et al., 2019; Özdemir et al., 2022; Toprak, 2020). However, in recent years, scientific production on inclusive school leadership has increased (Thompson & Matkin, 2020) revitalising the need for updated definitions.

The literature highlights several key characteristics of this approach. For example, it has been pointed out that inclusive leadership practices are deeply connected with *social values such as trust, furthering of inclusion, promotion of justice and transformation of school culture* (ARUTHOR, 2020; DeMatthews & Mawhinney, 2014; Francis et al., 2016) (See Figure 1). In addition, the crucial role of non-formal leaders or middle leaders as catalysts for inclusive philosophies in schools has been recognised (Gómez-Hurtado et al., 2021). These leaders play a key role in building a common language that facilitates the implementation of coherent and effective inclusive practices (Queupil et al., 2021). The influence of inclusive leadership on school organisation has also been highlighted, promoting the distribution of efforts and capacities among teams (Gómez Hurtado & Ainscow, 2014),



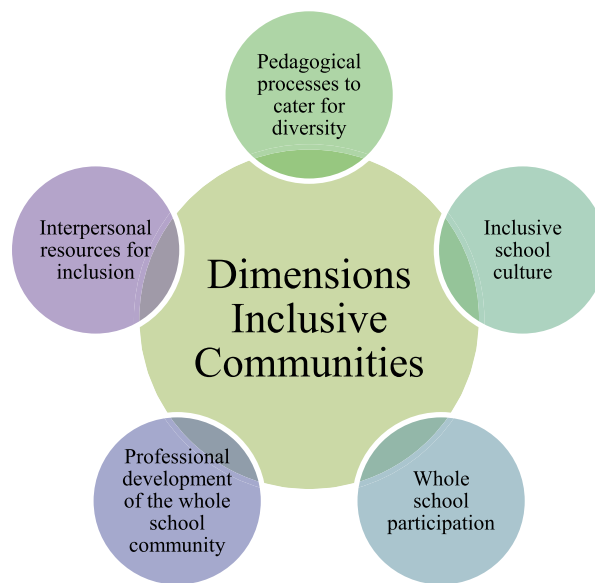
**Figure 1.** Characteristics of an inclusive approach.

the sustainability of democratic and participatory processes (Ruairc et al., 2013) and the adaptation of practices to specific geographical and cultural contexts (González González, 2008). Finally, forging partnerships with networks and other agencies is considered essential to strengthen the capacity of schools to respond to the demands of inclusive education and social justice (Vasallo, 2021). This set of characteristics is summarised in the studies by Valdés (2022) and Valdés (2023), which show that inclusive leadership is a contextual and collective approach. Such leadership seeks to promote school cultures that value diversity, advocate for inclusion, strengthen democracy and consciously address structural inequalities. As illustrated in Figure 1, these characteristics can be grouped into three broad features: (1) a foundation in social values such as trust, justice and inclusion; (2) the catalytic role of leaders – formal and informal – in promoting inclusive philosophies; and (3) the importance of collaborative networks and communities to sustain change. These three features provide the conceptual basis for the five key dimensions proposed in this paper, offering a bridge from general principles to specific practices. Throughout this paper, the concept of enactment is deliberately used instead of implementation to emphasise that inclusive leadership does not operate through linear or technical processes, but through situated, interpretative, and relational practices shaped by context, agency, and power relations.

Figure 1 presents an analytical synthesis developed by the author based on a critical reading of the literature on inclusive school leadership. Rather than representing a model or a prescriptive framework, the figure summarises three broad conceptual conditions that recurrently underpin inclusive leadership approaches across previous studies: (1) a grounding in social values such as trust, justice, and inclusion; (2) the catalytic role of formal and informal leaders in promoting inclusive philosophies; and (3) the importance of collaborative networks and communities for sustaining inclusive change. This background shows that inclusive leadership is not limited to organisational structures but also encompasses dynamics within and around schools. Building directly on the characteristics summarised in Figure 1, the following five dimensions (Figure 2) further specify how inclusive leadership can be operationalised in school contexts, highlighting competencies, practices and discourses that enable the enactment of inclusion. Building on the conceptual conditions outlined in Figures 1, 2 advances the analysis by translating these broad features into five theoretically relevant dimensions of practice. While Figure 1 operates at a conceptual level, Figure 2 focuses on how inclusive leadership can be enacted in everyday school practices through specific dimensions that make these conditions analytically and empirically visible.

## Dimensions and associated practices

Building on existing research, this paper draws on and critically systematises the available evidence in order to conceptualise inclusive school leadership through five theoretically relevant dimensions of practice.



**Figure 2.** Dimensions for the enactment of inclusive leadership in schools.

### ***Dimension 1: pedagogical processes to cater for diversity***

The first key dimension identified in the specialised literature concerns the management of pedagogical processes to ensure that all students can learn (Conrad & Brown, 2011; Lindqvist & Nilholm, 2014; Miskolci et al., 2016; Osiname, 2017; Wanjiru, 2019). One of the most complex inclusive processes is enabling every student, regardless of their characteristics, to build his or her own curricular trajectory (Booth & Ainscow, 2015). Recent studies highlight that leadership teams play a critical role in sustaining inclusive pedagogical processes, fostering positive identity development for students with disabilities (DeMatthews & Mueller, 2021) and navigating the challenges that arise when schools attempt meaningful transformations towards inclusion (DeMatthews & Mueller, 2021).

Research on inclusion and leadership also shows that leadership teams promote non-judgemental, reflective, and inclusive teaching practices (ARUTHOR, 2020; Garrido-Fonseca et al., 2024). Teachers supported by inclusive leaders often re-evaluate their methodologies, engage in collaborative planning, adopt new spatial and communicative strategies, and foster respectful, student-centred school climates (León et al., 2018; Rodríguez-Izquierdo, 2016). In this sense, pedagogical leadership for inclusion connects directly with broader projects of school change, where distributed forms of leadership orient the curriculum towards social transformation and equity (Traver-Martí et al., 2021).

In a context dominated by standardisation and neoliberal pressures, Skliar (2017) and Brailovsky (2019) highlight the need for leadership teams to drive pedagogies that embrace diversity and adapt to new educational demands. This involves promoting a “pedagogy of power” as a socially and culturally situated practice that empowers teachers to experiment and innovate confidently across interdisciplinary boundaries. Inclusive leadership, in this sense, embraces a broad view of learning—one that recognises diverse support needs, adapts contexts, and avoids deficit-based narratives (Valdés, 2023). It aligns with frameworks such as inclusive pedagogy, wherein leaders co-construct dynamic and collaborative environments (Florian & Spratt, 2013). Garrido-Fonseca et al. (2024) further argue that such leadership enables sustained creative pedagogical practices and holistic approaches to student learning.

A central element is fostering professional trust to support innovation and experimentation (Brailovsky, 2019), along with distributing leadership to enable collaborative practices (Rönn-Liljenfeldt et al., 2023). These strategies position inclusive leadership not as an abstract ideal, but as a concrete set of practices that support teacher agency and responsive pedagogy. In fact, evidence from inclusive schools in Chile demonstrates that pedagogical processes aligned with inclusive leadership are key to reconciling academic results with the principles of equity and diversity (Valdés, 2023). As Shaked (2023) notes, unlike instructional leadership – often focused on overall school performance – inclusive leadership prioritises significant

learning for all students, actively challenging inequalities linked to race, class, gender, disability, and socio-economic background.

### ***Dimension 2: inclusive school culture***

A second relevant dimension is the building of school cultures based on inclusion as a guiding principle, which characterises inclusive leadership. Inclusive culture stands out as a distinctive feature of leadership committed to equity and diversity, as it translates into schools that are safe, welcoming, collaborative, and stimulating, where values are shared, and each person is valued (Ashikali & Groeneveld, 2015; Booth & Ainscow, 2015; Moliner García et al., 2016). Recent studies confirm that management teams play a decisive role in shaping such cultures, fostering organisational conditions that allow the inclusion of all learners (Fernández et al., 2022; Valdés, 2022).

Building inclusive cultures requires deep and sustained change. Research shows that leaders must generate long-term processes supported by collective commitments to inclusive values, which can only be consolidated through collaborative and participatory practices (Francis et al., 2016; Garrido-Fonseca et al., 2024). In this sense, school culture emerges not as a static construct but as an evolving process that demands coherence between institutional projects and the professional growth of the school community.

Furthermore, contexts of crisis and uncertainty – such as the COVID-19 pandemic – have highlighted the importance of inclusive leadership in strengthening collective sense-making and sustaining school cultures that resist fragmentation (Ganon-Shilon et al., 2022). Likewise, international evidence indicates that principals who position inclusion at the centre of their school vision are more effective in establishing cultures where equity, justice, and diversity become everyday references (Neves et al., 2023).

Finally, decision-making processes become a key arena for reflecting on and modelling shared values. Inclusive leadership requires culturally sensitive and care-based actions, grounded in justice, trust, and respect (ARUTHOR, 2020). In this sense, the construction of inclusive cultures is sustained by continuous negotiation and reflection, which allows values to be reinterpreted and reaffirmed over time (Booth & Ainscow, 2015).

### ***Dimension 3: whole school participation***

An inclusive school is, by definition, also a democratic school. In this context, participation emerges as an essential aspect, and leadership is expected to play a crucial role in bolstering and expanding it. However, this participation must be holistic, equally involving all voices in the school community. Recent evidence from Chile and Spain highlights that inclusion is strengthened when leadership not only ensures student participation but also actively incorporates the perspectives of families and communities as legitimate actors in school transformation (Crisol-Moya et al., 2022; Gómez & Sepúlveda, 2022).

In principle, leadership is inclusive when it includes the voices of students. This is fundamental to understanding the school from their perspective and, from there, designing changes that transform exclusionary dynamics. In contexts of migration and cultural diversity, such participation becomes even more relevant, as leadership must generate spaces that legitimise students' experiences and identities (Chaparro & Sepúlveda, 2022; Espinoza & Torrego-Egido, 2023). These processes of dialogue not only make students more visible in school actions but also become key mechanisms for consolidating inclusion and social justice.

Beyond student voice, inclusive participation requires involving families, teachers, and non-teaching staff in decision-making and everyday school practices. Studies emphasise the role of middle leaders in mediating between management teams and broader school communities, facilitating collaborative dynamics that sustain inclusion over time (Valdés & Pérez, 2023). In this way, participation is not reduced to consultation but becomes a shared construction of meaning and responsibility across the school.

As can be seen, participation involves gathering voices, transforming dynamics within the school, and taking a position in relation to the community and the social context. Inclusive school leadership thus goes beyond a narrow focus on improvement and becomes a practice with social and political implications. Participation transforms leaders' views of their community members and redefines their own role, opening up possibilities for new forms of democratic engagement and collective action.

#### **Dimension 4: professional development of the whole school community**

This dimension refers to the need for leaders to know their teams in depth, identify professional resources, empower informal leaders, and create stimulating organisational conditions to generate new learning at both collective and institutional levels. Recent research highlights that inclusive leadership depends largely on the professional and personal profiles of school principals, as their capacity to manage diversity, foster collaboration, and promote continuous learning directly influences the success of inclusive practices (Chen-Quesada et al., 2023).

At an interpersonal level, professional development is strengthened when leadership recognises the autonomy of teachers and promotes spaces of trust where they can innovate and adapt practices to student needs. This requires leaders to position professional growth as a central axis of school improvement, creating conditions for reflective and collaborative teaching (Améstica, 2023). In this sense, leadership is not only about technical management but about enabling teachers to become active agents of inclusion.

Fostering professional development also requires systemic approaches. Distributed leadership has been shown to mediate the relationship between teacher autonomy and inclusive school improvement, especially in contexts where underserved groups are at risk of exclusion (Oduro & Kobeli, 2025). Similarly, specific training programmes for school leaders, such as those developed to respond to the challenges of refugee education, demonstrate the importance of equipping administrators with competencies to address cultural and linguistic diversity (Gümüş & Buyukgoze, 2023).

At the organisational level, professional development cannot be reduced to individual efforts; it must be embedded in the institutional culture and projected as a long-term commitment. Systematic reviews confirm that effective leadership styles are those that link professional growth to broader organisational strategies, ensuring that learning is collective, sustainable, and contextually responsive (Groenewald et al., 2024). In this way, inclusive school leadership projects itself as an endeavour that redefines spaces, programmes, and roles based on personal talents and community needs. By positioning equity and justice as long-term horizons, professional development becomes a transformative tool that strengthens the school's capacity to respond to diversity while renewing its organisational structures.

#### **Dimension 5: interpersonal resources for inclusion**

Finally, literature has shown the importance of interpersonal resources in leading inclusive schools. Leadership is not only an organisational function but a practice of interpersonal and collective interaction (Bolden, 2011; Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Gronn, 2000). Recent studies emphasise that inclusive leadership practices are sustained through relationships of trust between principals, teachers, families, and students, which directly influence school climates and the credibility of leadership (Ağalday, 2022; Gómez-Hurtado, 2012).

One relevant characteristic is the break away from the individualism and competitiveness that is often associated with leadership positions (Raelin, 2018). Evidence indicates that in daily teamwork, conversations and reflections become privileged spaces for exchanging dilemmas, enriching shared discourses, and rethinking practices (Espinoza & Torrego-Egido, 2023). This involves specific attitudes such as openness, transparency in working relationships, reciprocity, and shared responsibility. These dynamics foster holistic learning and diversification of perspectives, strengthening teachers' commitment to collective renewal and sustaining inclusion as a cultural project.

At the same time, inclusive leadership requires acknowledging that interpersonal exchanges are embedded in power relations. Leadership must therefore democratise its own practices, balancing influences on decision-making and sustaining equitable, collaborative environments (Fairhurst et al., 2020; Gajardo Espinoza et al., 2023). This implies continuous self-reflection and the willingness to question assumptions, particularly those that reproduce exclusionary logics.

A growing body of literature also underscores the role of care and belonging as ethical and political dimensions of interpersonal leadership. In Latin American contexts, inclusive leadership has been characterised as inseparable from solidarity, empathy, and collective responsibility (Murillo & Duk, 2023, 2024). Likewise, research on intersectionality has shown that leaders who integrate

caring practices with explicit commitments to equity – particularly at the intersections of race, disability, and poverty – are better positioned to confront systemic inequalities (Voulgarides & DeMatthews, 2024).

From this perspective, inclusive leaders are not only expected to design policies or manage resources, but to embody values of trust, fairness, and respect in everyday interactions. By fostering high expectations of diversity and affirming the dignity of all members of the school community, leaders transform interpersonal relationships into powerful resources for building more just and inclusive schools.

## Final considerations

This article has argued that inclusive school leadership is best understood as a critical and socially grounded form of leadership, rather than as a normative or managerial approach. By proposing five theoretically pertinent dimensions of practice—(1) pedagogical processes to cater for diversity; (2) inclusive school culture; (3) whole school participation; (4) professional development of the whole school community; and (5) interpersonal resources for inclusion – the paper advances a conceptual framework for analysing how inclusive leadership is enacted in everyday school contexts.

These dimensions are not isolated from the broader field of leadership studies; on the contrary, they are informed by critical and socially just leadership traditions that understand leadership as an ethical, political, and transformative practice. Inclusive leadership, in this sense, extends and deepens those traditions by situating equity and diversity at the very core of school transformation. Inclusion and social justice are difficult to disentangle, as both involve the commitment to ensuring that all members of the school community are recognised, able to participate, and supported to succeed.

The analysis offers a broad and deep view of inclusive school leadership (Valdés, 2022). It highlights that inclusion goes beyond the simple presence of diversities in the school community, encompassing all forms of exclusion, both visible and invisible, as a trigger for deep school transformation. Furthermore, leadership is not only conceived as a managerial practices oriented to functionalist ends, but as a reflective and critical process that requires a constant questioning of pedagogical practices, policies and approaches. A critical approach here is essential, as it enables leadership to align its actions with the goals of inclusion, promoting an environment where equity and social justice are fundamental principles (Lewis & Tatli, 2015; Ryan, 2006). As it has been discussed, this lens allows to unveil power dynamics and interests that surround leadership, and that seems critical to release its emancipatory role (Bogotch, 2002).

The proposed dimensions do not operate in isolation but are intertwined in all spheres of school life. Moreover, they not only promote inclusion, but also challenge traditional school structures, fostering a more democratic and equitable environment. At the same time, approaches that seek to compensate for the deficits of students are abandoned in favour of approaches that represent and empower the different identities that converge on the school scene. This has two implications for so-called inclusive school leadership. First, it requires an approach to inclusion in dialogue with social justice, so that it is not limited to the attention of specific sectors and incorporates a critical reading of different forms of oppression (Theoharis & Scanlan, 2022). Secondly, it is seen as a leadership that reflects on its own role in constructing meaning about what is legitimate and acceptable within the school, thus taking charge of its educational, social and political role (Eacott, 2015).

For these dimensions to become important, certain considerations must be taken into account. One is that proposing inclusive leadership is not just about standardised actions, but about a critical review of the very place that leaders occupy within the school system. In this respect, those who opt for leadership are challenged to take a stance on the challenges of building greater levels of inclusion in neoliberal contexts (Waitoller, 2020), where performance pressures and standardised testing can be obstacles to achieving greater levels of inclusion. In this sense, the dimensions do not seek to prescribe “what should be done”; on the contrary, they are dimensions that illuminate questions for individual and collective reflection. At the basis of this proposal is the interest in generating opportunities to transform everyday actions into processes where the question of inclusion is established and sustained.

Educational inclusion is not a matter of recipes but rather of ingredients that provide essential elements for the construction of an inclusive school, including educational leadership. In the same way as there are no single models of inclusive schools, there is no single type of leadership for an inclusive school, but rather

different aspects (Ainscow, 2020), as we have seen in the different dimensions, which can lead to leadership that promotes school inclusion.

This article has argued for a critical and practice-based conceptualisation of inclusive school leadership by proposing five theoretically relevant dimensions through which inclusion can be understood as an enacted, relational, and socially situated process. While these dimensions provide a robust analytical framework for examining how equity and social justice are pursued in schools, inclusive leadership remains an evolving field, particularly within rigid organisational structures and neoliberal policy contexts that prioritise efficiency and accountability. Future research should therefore explore how school leaders enact, adapt, and sustain these dimensions across diverse educational settings, attending to contextual conditions, power relations, and everyday practices. Moreover, incorporating these dimensions into leadership preparation and professional development programmes is essential to strengthen their transformative potential and to advance more just and inclusive education systems.

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