

# **Initial vocational education and training in a second chance school in Andalusia (Spain): A case study**

**Juan Carlos González-Faraco · Antonio Luzón-Trujillo · Celia Corchuelo-Fernández**

## **Abstract**

Since the last decade of the twentieth century, school systems have confronted the dialectic between those increasingly widespread policies primarily aimed at increasing productivity and efficiency and other policies focussed on equity and educational and social inclusion. In this inherently contradictory scenario, in order to improve their inclusive capacity, school systems usually design programmes aimed specifically for delivery to their most vulnerable students. Paradoxically, these differentiated programmes can themselves produce or enhance outcomes of segregation. To highlight this dilemma, in this article, we present the case of a second chance Spanish school, which has developed an alternative educational model explicitly intended to reduce these effects. Specifically, we analyse its Initial Vocational Education and Training Program, which is constructed for those students who, given their problematic scholastic trajectory, do not have even the possibility of completing lower secondary education. As a result, they run a serious risk of early school leaving, of unemployment and of social exclusion. Although this is a single case study, the model developed by this school offers various pedagogical alternatives to conventional programming that could be applied, with appropriate adjustments to local circumstances, in other national and international contexts.

**Keywords** School outcasts · Social exclusion · Inclusive education · Learning community · Initial vocational education and training · Second chance school

---

## Introduction

Despite the global hegemonic position that neoliberal policies occupy today, typically privileging notions of meritocracy and performance (Jessop 2002; Harvey 2007; Hall 2011), equal opportunities for all students, especially the most vulnerable ones, remain a priority for educational research (Ballarino et al. 2009); and for educational practice in some schools, especially for those that welcome students at serious risk of educational and social exclusion. Using whatever degree of autonomy at their disposal, such schools attempt to promote inclusive policies that implement differentiated programmes with different contents and scopes. To illustrate and reflect upon these issues, this article presents a case study<sup>1</sup> that describes and analyses the alternative educational model of a second chance school and, in particular, its basic Vocational Education Program for those students with the highest rates of previous failure and worst expectations for school success.

This case study took place in Spain, more specifically in Andalusia, where, as in other regions of southern Europe, the effects of neoliberal policies over the past decades have been especially disconcerting. In fact, the Spanish rates of early school leaving (18.2%) and youth unemployment (38.6%) are among the highest in Europe (Eurostat 2018a). In Andalusia, the southernmost community in Spain, these data are even worse (23.5% and 47.3% respectively), which make it one of the poorest regions of the European Union, with 37.3% of its population *at risk of poverty or social exclusion* (AROE rate), compared to 26.6% in Spain and 23.5% in the EU (Eurostat 2018b; Llano Ortiz 2018). This all reflects a disturbing situation, to which a string of political measures have been applied, aimed at rectifying: social programmes of compensatory education; targeted psycho-pedagogical programmes; and, especially, programmes to develop and improve the standards of Vocational Education and Training. So far these programmes have not been successful, as is shown by the fall in recent years of the mean level of equity in the Spanish education system, according to the PISA 2015 Report (Sicilia and Simancas 2018, pp. 28–39).

One of the most recent of these efforts has been the creation of *Formación Profesional Básica* (Initial Vocational Education and Training, IVET). IVET follows two earlier programmes (*Programa de Garantía Social* and *Programa de Cualificación Profesional Inicial*) both of which sought to increase students' permanence in the system, to reduce the social vulnerability of the most disadvantaged and to encourage their access to the labour market. However, in the case of IVET the emphasis is more economic and less social than its predecessors, in line with what Olofsson and Persson-Thunqvist have referred to as the “liberal turn” (2018, p. 133) that has influenced some VET models, including, for example, those in Sweden and other Scandinavian countries (see also: Pilz 2012). Its primary objective is to improve student entry into the contemporary labour market. Since its appearance, IVET has attracted

---

<sup>1</sup> This case study comes from the Research Project *Analysis and evaluation of Vocational Educational and Training Programs in the transition from youth to adult life* (code: EDU2014-52702-R), approved and funded by the National Program of Research, Development and Innovation, of the Spanish Government (2015–2018). This Program requires researchers to accept and observe a set of ethical obligations.

vigorous criticism. Some see it as hiding dark political intentions to reduce the high levels of early school leaving in Spain by a sort of statistical engineering (i.e. Aunión 2013). Others warn of its possible segregating effect, as IVET once again proposes a separate, parallel path for secondary education for students from 15 to 17 with a higher level of school failure and severe risk of social exclusion (i.e. Bolívar 2015).

While recognising some basis for these criticisms, in this article we present the case of a *second chance school* that holds some hope. In examining this particular case, we attempt to answer an underlying question affecting all school systems: How can we combat the foreseeable segregating impact of these differentiated programmes, while at the same time increasing their educational efficacy and inclusive capacity?

Most of the neoliberal education policies claiming to defend greater equity tend to deploy separate or specific programmes that centre on individual capabilities, quite apart from underlying conditions of class or social advantage or disadvantage. From our perspective, IVET in the Spanish education system could be a potential factor in creating, rather than diminishing, discrimination and exclusion.

Conversely, the micropolitics analysed in this case study are aimed at strengthening and encouraging equality of opportunity by seeking an horizontal equity that does not merely invest in strategies and special resources, but that also considers the different social situations in which cultural transmission and training processes take place. In this way, they attempt to produce an “ecology of equity” (Ainscow et al. 2012, p. 198), in which achieving more equitable results depends neither solely on the educational practices of the teaching staff, nor on the participation of families and institutions, but also on a consideration of a broader range of social and cultural factors in the hope of contributing to true empowerment not only of young people, but also of their community and its surroundings (Rochex 2011). In short, the goal is to build what François Dubet (2004) called an *école des opportunités*.

However, although their good intentions are explicitly framed, the policies linked to the idea of equity have clear limits. These policies aim to combat or at least alleviate the effects of meritocratic models, for which only individual skills count, regardless of class conditions or social advantage/disadvantage. However, these policies are often reduced to operations designed to compensate for inequalities by placing their confidence in legal rules, resources and technical measures favouring inclusion. IVET is an excellent example of the type of policy that rarely involves a radical questioning of the system. Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000) point out that contemporary politics (fundamentally the social democratic reforms of the second half of the twentieth century) and educational research have largely adopted this approach to the “problematic of equity”. They refer to it as such because this approach revolves around the concept of *equity*, understood precisely as a fundamentally technical operation, i.e. as the implementation of practices that contribute to improving the access of individuals to conventional educational programmes, in accordance with commonly accepted national or international standards. But these practices, which can be considered “benevolent”, do not adequately address the cultural complexity of the phenomenon of social inclusion/exclusion and so overlook the decisive role played in the school of systems of reason underlying the classifying, ordering and assigning of identities (González-Faraco et al. 2013; see also: Hall 2011).

---

These systems are often labyrinthian and convoluted, and frequently operate outside the precepts of political reforms and institutional rules. As a result, they can produce inequalities. Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000, p. 6) refer to this way of thinking about the issue of inclusion/exclusion, and, therefore of guiding research and educational practice as a “problematic of knowledge”, understanding “knowledge” to be systems of reason or narratives that assign meaning to individuals and, consequently, establish differences. These processes take place in the cultural space of interpersonal relations, so that comprehending these relationships is vital for the development of an educational model that actually reduces the risk of exclusion. According to Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000), because both approaches (based on *equity* and *knowledge* respectively) obey disparate rationalities, they should be structured to complement one another if effective equity is to result. In the case that follows, this is what is described. Indeed, in the framework of school culture, it is possible both to interpret political regulation and to offer an alternative response to most serious problems (McGregor and Mills 2014), even under the most extreme circumstances, such as those of the school we shall henceforth refer to as the Andalusian Alternative School (AAS).

## **Initial vocational education and training: light and dark**

Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Spain consists of Initial VET, Intermediate VET and Higher VET. IVET constitutes the first stage of VET, and was specifically conceived to accept students unable to complete compulsory education, and who are in general very vulnerable. IVET began to be implemented in the 2014–2015 school year and is formally equivalent to the ISCED3 international category<sup>2</sup> (Upper Secondary Education). It leads to a Basic Technician (level 1) qualification in around 20 professional fields, and grants access to Intermediate VET, as well as the examination for the Lower Secondary Education Certificate.

As already suggested, many mistrust the efficacy of IVET to truly reduce school failure and early leaving (Abiétar et al. 2015; Marco-Pérez and Sancho 2014; Cutanda 2014). Also, with the creation of two parallel student itineraries, the comprehensive nature of obligatory education is broken (Casal et al. 2007; Bolívar 2015). While most of the students continue their general academic training, the less advantaged are channelled into IVET, conceived as a secondary path (García et al. 2013). The OECD itself (2012) has questioned this type of precocious differentiated trajectory, because it can lead to discrimination and damage the equity of the system. In fact, any educational differentiation can potentially lead to discrimination and create ghettos (Rose 2005; Stanley 2007).

A recent study on the extent of school segregation by socio-economic level (Murillo and Martínez-Garrido 2018) places Spain among the European countries with the worst indicators in this regard. For its part, the OECD (2017) found that Spain has a low proportion of 15 to 19 year olds registered in vocational training

---

<sup>2</sup> International Standard Classification of Educational Levels. UNESCO 2011 and 2013.

programmes in comparison with other OECD countries (12% as against 25%). Traditionally, in Spain and other southern European countries, VET has been curiously underrated in favour of general education oriented to university education (Luzón and Torres 2013).

Nonetheless, for those directed towards IVET, a drastic change is presented—to leave secondary education and enrol in a basic programme of training for employment. This new path presents obstacles for many such students, however. The job market demands new competencies and a level of responsibility for which they are often not prepared, given their previous poor performance in school and their limited cultural capital (Bourdieu 1986). As suggested by the metaphor of *yo-yo transitions* (Du Bois-Reymond and López-Blasco 2004) or failed trajectories, the results of these policies of equity centred on school integration can, in fact, cause more exclusion and social stigmatisation. As noted above, these policies by themselves are incapable of counteracting the mechanisms of organisation, labelling and differentiation, which are so powerful in school culture, partly because, paradoxically, they can themselves empower these mechanisms (González-Faraco et al. 2013).

In addition, in the age of globalisation, the socialisation of young people is neither linear nor predictable. Their expectations are exposed to unforeseen changes and multiple transitions (Johansson 2017). In this context of uncertainty and volatility, the conditions of social and school disadvantage of those registered in IVET can be decisive, as they fully affect the construction of their identities as young people and, consequently, the effectiveness of their training (Walther 2006). Any educational change requires enough time to pass for its adequate application, and the gradual development of good teaching and social practice needs to take into account how the biographies and subjectivity of the participants interact with their changing situation (Monserrat and Melendro 2017; Tarabini et al. 2017; Eizagirre et al. 2018). This perspective was adopted from the beginning by the AAS as it designed and implemented its programmes of Lower Secondary Education and IVET.

## **Methodology: a case study**

The Andalusian Alternative School (AAS) can be considered a *second chance school* (Oster et al. 2000; Gallagher 2010; Polidano et al. 2013), although it could also be called a *flexible learning centre* or *alternative school* (Riddle and Cleaver 2015; Vadeboncoeur and Padilla-Petry 2017). On a very small scale, the aim of our study is to describe and analyse the case of this school, and specifically its IVET programme. Unlike other school establishments, in AAS IVET has not been radically separated from Lower Secondary Education, but takes part in the same organisational and teaching system and, to a certain extent, is coordinated within this system. This model is adapted to the profile of its students, most of whom are excluded from the education system and at serious risk of beginning a pattern of job insecurity and social marginalisation.

On a larger scale, this research should also serve to better understand the complex relations between education and social exclusion, and their relevance for public policies attempting to combat inequality (Ballarino et al. 2009;

---

Martínez-García and Merino 2011; González-Faraco et al. 2012). As already mentioned, these policies usually turn on the question of *equity* rather than the problematic of *knowledge* (Popkewitz and Lindblad 2000). This theoretical approach clearly suggests an ethnographic type of analysis, for which case study research is highly appropriate. In fact, as Stake argues (2005, p. 443), the “case study is not a methodological choice, but a choice of what is to be studied”. In the case of the AAS, it allows us to discover how an educational community, by way of its autonomy of management and reflexive cooperation— a concept that takes us back to John Dewey’s notion of *Creative Democracy* (1995)—can reinterpret and significantly reduce school failure and the risk of social exclusion in its most severe forms. More than a *generalisation*, in the manner of quantitative and experimental studies, the case study seeks to provide an *explanation* (“clarification, illumination, enlightenment”) of something complex on the basis of deep analysis of a case (Thomas 2017, p. 258). As Thomas states (2017, p. 254), what is important is “to be clear about what the case study is a case study of. A case study, as a study (as distinct from a case illustration or a case history), must in some sense explicate a wider theme: it must help in our understanding of some theoretical issue”. In other words, its heuristic potential resides in the relation between the research problem and the unit of analysis. However, according to Thomas (2017, p. 258), “the analyses come not from the kind of pre-packaged theorization which so often guides the understanding of putatively gold standard experimentation, but rather from insights which emerge from the authors’ own experiences as people and as professionals”.

This research on IVET is part of a larger set of investigations concerning the problem of social and educational exclusion in different contexts, described in González-Faraco et al. 2012 (see also: Luzón et al. 2009; Luzón and Torres 2013; Corchuelo 2015). Specifically, our study of the educational model of the AAS is based on a prolonged immersion in this educational community, by means of an observation programme that has resorted to a set of techniques intended to give the study greater reliability:

- a. An interview with open questions which, after being suitably validated, was conducted with twenty teachers (out of a total of 30), with the aim of exploring their discourses and practices. The 19 questions of the interview looked into key issues such as: the characteristics of the students and their families, their relations with the school, optimal qualities desired of the teaching staff and their didactic methodology, the organisation of the class group, evaluation procedures, strategies to encourage coexistence, and so on. We used the *Atlas.ti* programme to undertake a content analysis of these interviews, providing a variety of discourses on the aforementioned categories or questions. We then determined the most frequent discourses occurring on each question and, qualitatively, the degree of agreement they found among the interviewees. Finally, this information is compared with that deriving from the field observations mentioned below. Once suitably synthesised, this information is used to reconstruct the educational model of this school as a single narrative, as will be seen in the following sections, although focussing only on its fundamental aspects.

- b. A systematic record of 77 observation sessions of the 20 teachers interviewed, with the aim of verifying and completing the information collected in the interviews, especially those concerning the teaching model employed and the behaviours of students and teachers. To this end, we drew up an observation scale, based on the principles of *authentic instruction* by Newmann and Wehlage (1993), with a control list and an estimation scale of a series of observation units. In order to guarantee trustworthiness, we used experienced observers, with two present for each session.
- c. The systematic study of all the documents regulating life in the school, drawn up by the educational community and approved by the School Council, with representation of parents, teachers, students and headteachers. The most general document is the School Education Project, which reflects all the basic aspects of the institution. It is followed by the Curricular Project, which serves as a basis for drawing up the Didactic Schedules of the teaching staff according to cycles, levels and subjects. Other relevant documents include: the Attention to Diversity Plan, specifically aimed at students with special educational needs; the Tutorial Action and Educational Guidance Plan; the Educational Compensation Plan, designed to encourage the socio-educational inclusion of the students with the most disadvantaged social situation; and, finally, the Annual Report prepared by the teachers and the school's management team at the end of each academic year.

## **The students and their social context**

The AAS is a state-aided private school with a Catholic ethos. It offers its services to students at no charge. It is located on the outskirts of a medium-sized city in southwest Spain, the least developed region in the country, in a neighbourhood with very low education levels, high unemployment, poverty, drug trafficking and consumption, chronic dependency upon social assistance and, generally speaking, little participation in community and school activities (Corchuelo et al. 2016).

The AAS has a total of 355 students in Lower Secondary Education and IVET, although this figure is subject to constant fluctuation. 90% of the AAS students have a history of school failure and dropouts, with an average gap of at least two school years for their age. They come from very varying backgrounds. Most come from nearby community, but others are from other schools located some distance away, from which they have sometimes been expelled. 12% are connected with the public child protection system; some are subject to legal measures because of criminal activity, while others live in juvenile welfare homes because of family abandonment. Cultural diversity is thus, feature of this school, for around 25% of the students are from ethnic minorities, such as the Rom community, or are immigrants (including students of Moroccan, Latin American and Romanian background, for example). Approximately 40% of the students have special educational needs requiring specific individualised support. Upon entering the school, almost all students show clear signs of maladjustment including the rejection of school life (Corchuelo et al. 2016). In the case of IVET, the characteristics and risks just described tend to be more accentuated.

---

The few data available on IVET in Spain show a high degree of failure and school leaving before the training period of at least 2000 h concludes (Sancha and Gutiérrez 2016). At first glance, the data from the AAS are not exceptional, but they improve if we consider them comparatively, i.e. by taking into account the special characteristics of its students. Despite that, the AAS achieves more than acceptable results, over a two–four-year period managing to save a significant group of these students who arrive as the “outcasts” of the school system, to use Bauman’s term (2004).

At present 66 students are taking part in IVET at the AAS in the *Cooking and Catering* and *Hairdressing and Aesthetics* specialities. Since 2009, both subjects were already present in previous programmes, and so had sufficient teaching staff and educational infrastructure when IVET began in 2014. Over a period ranging from two to four years at this school, IVET has achieved good levels of school rescue (retention and re-engagement in the system) and success (two thirds of the students obtain their diploma and most find a job). How can we explain these and other promising processes?

## **In search of harmony: an alternative educational pattern**

Making use of its autonomy, the AAS has created its own model for secondary education. This strategy is based on the harmonisation of curricular competences with other competences of a professional nature, which requires substantial changes to which both teaching initiative and collaboration are fundamental. In order to know and understand the alternative nature of the AAS model, we approach the policy of this school as translated into a set of singular educational practices (McGregor and Mills 2014; Botha and Kourkoutas 2016; Ainscow 2016; Riddle and Cleaver 2015). By means of these practices, borne out of experience, agreement and cooperation, schools—in some cases more than in others—tackle and resist the pressure of reforms and the processes of globalisation and standardisation of education (Dussel 2013).

Following this logic, the educational model of AAS autonomously promotes a number of operational norms and educational and social activities, based on long-shared professional experience, which it implements in an own educational project known colloquially to the school community as *Formación para la Vida* (*Training for Life*). Naturally, in underprivileged contexts such as this, some flexibility in developing the educational plans is prudently foreseen in the regulations. To this end, specific support mechanisms are available to compensate and correct the training deficiencies and inequalities of one or another origin. However, these mechanisms can be insufficient for students hardened by long experience with such institutions and teaching procedures, and whose academic competences have gradually deteriorated since primary school. On the basis of this realisation, the AAS creates its own, constantly revised, model for Secondary Education and extends it to IVET.

## A different curricular model

The curriculum of the AAS is organised around centres of interest, which combine general training, focussing on instrumental subjects, with a variety of hands-on workshops that motivate the students in their learning. The content is presented in an integrated manner, connecting with students' life experiences, and using didactic materials created by teachers. In all cases, the most value is placed on knowing how to act, i.e. knowledge applied to real situations.

In order to guarantee the acquisition of the basic competences of secondary education, the curriculum is organised around a set of strategies that require flexible distribution of the school timetable, unlike the usual patterns of conventional Spanish schools, where the timetable is exclusively based on standardised academic or bureaucratic criteria and is relatively rigid. AAS, however, uses its autonomy to allow for the organisation of time to adapt to the characteristics of its own pedagogical model. Therefore, for example, in order to make the workshops technically viable, the school team uses different periods scattered over the weekly timetable, brings them together and uses them for subjects such as Cookery, Gardening, IT, Renewable Energies, Leather, and so on. Each workshop has a specialised instructor, supervised by a teacher. This pattern is repeated in the specialities of IVET (Cooking, and Hairdressing and Aesthetics), with the same staff, although technical training is much more relevant in IVET than in Lower Secondary Education, both inside and outside the school (in this case, thanks to a good number of agreements between the school and local companies, under supervision of the public authorities). Two supervisors undertake the day-to-day monitoring of each student in the programme—one on behalf of the firm, and another a teacher from the school. School choice of firms is exhaustive, following objective criteria. Job placement of the students is continuously evaluated for at least a year within a specific school programme school known as *Incorpora (Integrate)*. These agreements also help to improve the students' self-esteem and social capital, thus reducing the risk of exclusion. As part of the AAS, they also form part of a community network that the school has gradually built up with local society.

Under this model, the distribution of school time has some differences. Each school day is divided into three sections. The first of these, occupying 10% of the day, is dedicated to dialogue, with the students recounting and sharing their previous day's experiences outside school. In the second section, 30% of the time, the learning content is laid out using examples from the students' own context. Finally, the remaining 60% of the time is spent on normally playful and engaging practical activity. The aim is for the student to concentrate on the tasks, reduce their lack of attention and avoid possible disruptive behaviour.

The *tutor referente (referring tutor)* has great importance in this model. As in most schools, pupils of each group are assigned a *tutor* or main teacher who takes an interest not just in academic affairs, but also in the personal and family aspects of the group. In Spain, unlike some countries, this assignment is normally made annually. At the AAS, however, there is a single tutor for the whole length of the group's time at the school, and therefore for each student, which makes that staff member a key figure for him/her. The tutor takes charge of the first time period in the day.

---

In addition to conversing with the students, he or she monitors attendance, because many pupils have a long history of absenteeism prior to enrolling in AAS and this habit can easily recur. In cases when absence does occur, the tutor informs the family. Thus, the tutor acts as a leader, providing consistency for the group, and in this manner, has contributed to a drastic reduction in absenteeism and school dropout.

In a system of individualised teaching and continuous evaluation, conventional exams lose relevance. At AAS, they are only used when a positive result is guaranteed, so that they become a motivational tool for students. Being successful in exams, perhaps for the first time in their lives, represents a valuable reward for students.

## **A learning community**

In contexts of diversity and social exclusion, creativity, initiative and cooperation among teachers are of capital importance (Riddle and Cleaver 2015). The teaching model of the AAS is based on a forward-looking agreement among the teaching staff, borne out of their experience and personal commitment. In fact, most of the staff have worked with these pupils for an average of 10 years, teaching in both Secondary Education and IVET (or previous programmes). The chances of success increase when, in the normally traumatic transition from Secondary Education to IVET, the students recognise continuity in the teaching model and in the staff (Baroutsis et al. 2016).

Another contributing fact in reducing the gap between students and school culture is the teacher's permanent availability. In this school, attention to education is placed before bureaucratic regulations to such an extent that, if necessary, this individualised attention extends to the pupil's home. The teaching staff also have the assistance of a psycho-pedagogical team, who are drawn upon when specific, specialised attention is required. In any event, such attention is carried out as part of the daily life of the classroom by means of inclusive actions involving the whole group.

The teaching staff practise and record their daily observations, regularly encourage dialogue and empathy, and take great care about the construction of class atmosphere. It should be remembered that the AAS students are weighed down by a history of maladjustment, family neglect or estrangement, low self-esteem and, in some cases, criminal behaviour. The first weeks of each school year are essential for observing the group, discovering disruptive individuals, and establishing and clarifying the basic rules of coexistence operating at the school. These practices form part of a policy of conflict prevention based on a few very clear rules, agreed upon by all the teachers and known and accepted by the entire community, including the families.

School culture is full of rituals, the result of tradition and the teaching *habitus*. In the AAS, however, each rite responds to an often pressing need. Every day, when classes change, the teacher leaving waits for the incoming teacher to exchange information about what has taken place during the class. Although brief, this information is very useful, reinforcing collaboration among teachers and giving their work more coherence.

Students, families and teachers make up the three pillars of the educational community. The school is a learning context for all of them. In the AAS every project, almost every daily action, represents a collective challenge. The students' extremely problematic school history is normally worsened by a lack of family support. According to the data collected through the interviews with the teachers and the annual reports of the school, the parents generally have little regard for formal education and have very low expectations for their children, who in turn lack sufficient autonomy to make their own way in life. Consequently, AAS policy regarding the family is based on two principles: first, to educate and orient families, and second to stimulate family participation in school life. The relationship between family and school is sealed by a sort of contract the very day the pupil enters the school, when they must be accompanied by an adult representative. This establishes a serious commitment of responsibility between the parties, which is essential for the student's educational and social future.

### **Walking in a good direction**

The results of this educational model are quite visible. According to the data included in the annual reports, the teachers interviewed and the members of the school psychopedagogical team, in the Andalusian Alternative School there is a high level of daily attendance, which is the first symptom of re-engaging students with a long history of absenteeism.

Many students achieve the curricular goals set and successfully conclude their compulsory education. A significant percentage of them also obtain their IVET diploma, and most of them find work after their training period. A relevant number of students continue their school life in Upper Secondary Education or other non-formal teaching that helps them in the transition into adult life and in their professional development. In general, throughout their stay at AAS, the disruptive behaviour of the students is considerably reduced, and they improve their degrees of motivation and life expectations. In this alternative school, many students, formerly lost causes in the system, gain a sense of empowerment with consequent positive repercussions in the community itself (Rochex, 2011).

The only way to discover the resilience of a system is to take it to the limit. Many of the principles of school reform turn out to be merely formal or rhetorical when subjected to a stress test. Inclusion is usually one of these (Pereyra et al. 2009). In the case analysed here, a model of inclusive education is proposed and executed in an extremely disadvantaged context, but nonetheless, it achieves results that are as promising as they are unexpected. In this sense, it resembles a *school of opportunities*, such as Dubet (2004) observed in his research on the suburbs of large French cities.

### **Discussion and conclusion**

Although this article is based on a case study, it raises more than purely local issues. The production of inequalities and educational and social exclusion represents a central problem in all school systems, albeit accentuated in some by the neoliberal

---

policies of recent decades, by means of which, as Hall (2011, p. 726) puts it, “the sense of ‘social’ has fractured”. This study puts together substantive ethnographic knowledge and analyses the educational model of a school that faces, on a daily basis, this problem in its most serious expression.

Throughout this analysis, we have emphasised the importance of autonomy as a key strategy to develop an alternative school model. However, autonomy alone is not a sufficient condition to achieve higher levels of equity and educational inclusion. In fact, policies favouring the autonomy of educational establishments are a common trend in many parts of the world. According to Ainscow (2016), such policies usually defend the parents’ right to the free choice of education for their children, in the belief that the schools will be more productive if they decide their own operational strategies. This is, for example, one of the typical proposals of the PISA Report (OECD 2016, Chapter 4). Putting great emphasis on the improvement of results under criteria of accountability, such policies have encouraged the proliferation of a certain type of usually private schools in many parts of the world, such as Academies in England, Charter Schools in the USA, Free Schools in Sweden, Independent Public Schools in certain areas of Australia, or some schools, both Catholic and lay, in Spain. Ainscow (2016, p. 160) states that, because of these policies, “there is growing evidence from a range of countries that they are leading to increased segregation that further disadvantages learners from economically poorer backgrounds”.

However, there are also examples of systems, such as in Finland (Andere 2014), which have achieved a good balance between quality and equity by strengthening the autonomous management of schools. In reality, as Ainscow repeats (2016, p. 161), “the challenge for practitioners and policy makers is to find the way of breaking the link between disadvantage and educational failure”. Of course, there are different ways of approaching this challenge.

The AAS has used its autonomy of management as a strategy to avoid, where possible, bureaucratisation, stale teaching routines, the cultural isolation of many private or public schools, and their evident inability to deal with highly disadvantaged social contexts and problematic students. The AAS has put its trust in the capacity for action of educational communities as communities of experience and practice, gradually managing to create an ecology of equity, as described by Ainscow et al. (2012, p. 198).

Educational reforms can and should be interpreted culturally and locally. The AAS has applied all the stimuli and tools provided by policies of equity, but it has also made its own interpretation of the educational process from the viewpoint of the identity and subjectivity of the students, most of whom are labelled at school and stigmatised socially. It has thus created a project of training for life that goes beyond the school and is not simply a sum total of fragments, but a narrative in which everything comes together in favour of a fairer, more inclusive education that is also more efficient and useful for the students. In this sense, this project could be considered an example of *meaningful education* (McGregor et al. 2015, p. 611), “programmes that resonate with the needs and aspirations of young people who find themselves on the outside of mainstream schooling pathways”.

This educational model, subjected to successive processes of evaluation and adaptation, today represents a relatively unique model in the south of Spain. As we

have seen, the central ideas of this teaching model are: harmonisation between general education and technical training oriented towards employment; the close relation of the school with pupils' families and with its social and economic surroundings; personalised attention to pupils; and the collaboration of teachers as a means of research and learning, teaching practice and political action (Vadeboncoeur and Padilla-Petry 2017). The mobilisation of this sort of social intelligence is a key factor without which such a complex and demanding educational project would not be possible. According to Ainscow (2016, p. 171),

this reinforces the argument that school improvement is a social process that involves practitioners in learning from one another, from their students, and from others involved in the lives of the young people they teach. As we have seen, an engagement with evidence can be a powerful catalyst for making this happen.

In the AAS, IVET is based in and developed through a network of experiences in which all the teaching staff are involved, together with the school as a whole, to produce a safe sanctuary for those that inhabit it (O'Gorman et al. 2016). It is precisely in this professionalism and shared ethical commitment that this school's greatest strength lies when it comes to making possible an integral programme of inclusive education (Hargreaves and Shirley 2009). In the end, this is neither theoretically nor practically possible if it is reduced to a partial narrative or adopted as a mere teaching tool. As Popkewitz and Lindblad (2000) stated, policies of equity are not enough in the face of processes of exclusion. Inclusion and exclusion do not behave as conflicting categories. As Hall (2011, p. 726) notes, "lines of belonging and exclusion are no longer so simple or rational". There are no clear set frontiers between them, for they both form part of an uncertain, changing semantic continuum. These policies can improve the situation through appropriate governance practices, but they do not make a complete, profound interpretation of the problem of how inequalities are caused at school. Their origin has much more to do with building young people's identities in a cosmopolitan society with increasingly more prescriptive standards and a commitment to "freedom" (of choice, of consumption) that is as much vaunted as it is illusory (Han 2017). Schools must therefore seek a path of active resistance by working out their own hermeneutics. In other words, they must change their policies of knowledge, in order to produce and freely share other systems of reason (Popkewitz 2007), other representations and images, and develop other radically integrating practices.

## References

- Abiétar, M., Navas, A., & Marhuenda, F. (2015). Aportaciones desde la Justicia Social para una Educación Justa. La Identidad Pedagógica en Formación Profesional Básica. *Revista Internacional de Educación para la Justicia Social (RIEJS)*, 4(2), 145–161.
- Ainscow, M. (2016). Collaboration as a strategy for promoting equity in education: Possibilities and barriers. *Journal of Professional Capital and Community*, 1(2), 159–172.
- Ainscow, M., Dyson, A., Goldrick, S., & West, M. (2012). Making schools effective for all: Rethinking the task. *School Leadership and Management*, 32(3), 1–17.

- 
- Andere, E. (2014). *Teachers' perspectives on Finnish School Education. Creating Learning Environments*. Switzerland: Springer International.
- Aunión, J. A. (2013). Ingeniería estadística para reducir el abandono escolar. *Diario El País*. Retrieved July, 15 from [https://elpais.com/sociedad/2013/07/14/actualidad/1373810408\\_617614.html](https://elpais.com/sociedad/2013/07/14/actualidad/1373810408_617614.html).
- Ballarino, G., et al. (2009). Persistent Inequalities? Expansion of Education and Class Inequality in Italy and Spain. *European Sociological Review*, 25(1), 123–138.
- Baroutsis, A., McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2016). Pedagogic voice: Student voice in teaching and engagement pedagogies. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 24(1), 123–140.
- Bauman, Z. (2004). *Wasted lives: Modernity and its outcasts*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.
- Bolívar, A. (2015). The comprehensive school in Spain: A review of its development cycle and crises. *European Educational Research Journal*, 14(3–4), 347–363.
- Botha, J., & Kourkoutas, E. (2016). A community of practice as an inclusive model to support children with social, emotional and behavioral difficulties in school contexts. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 20(7), 784–799.
- Bourdieu, P. (1986). The forms of capital. In J. Richardson (Ed.), *Handbook of theory and research for the sociology of education* (pp. 46–58). Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Casal, J., García, M., & Merino, R. (2007). Los sistemas educativos comprensivos ante las vías y los itinerarios formativos. *Revista de Educación*, 342, 213–237.
- Corchuelo, C. (2015). Buenas prácticas docentes en contextos de exclusión social. *Cuestiones pedagógicas*, 24, 25–42.
- Corchuelo, C., Cejudo, A., González-Faraco, J. C., & Morón, A. (2016). Al borde del precipicio: las escuelas de segunda oportunidad, promotoras de inserción social y educativa. *International Journal of Educational Research and Innovation*, 6, 95–109.
- Cutanda, M. (2014). De los Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial (PCPI) a la Formación Profesional Básica. *Hekademos*, 16, 69–79.
- Dewey, J. (1995). La démocratie créatrice. La tâche que nous attend. *Horizons philosophiques*, 5(2), 41–48.
- Du Bois-Reymond, M., & López-Blasco, M. (2004). Transiciones tipo yo-yo y trayectorias fallidas: hacia las políticas integradas de transición para los jóvenes europeos. *Revista de Estudios de Juventud*, 65, 11–29.
- Dubet, F. (2004). *L'école des chances. Qu'est-ce qu'une école juste?*. Paris: Seuil.
- Dussel, I. (2013). The Assembling of Schooling. Discussing concepts and models for understanding the historical production of modern schooling. *European Educational Research Journal*, 12(2), 176–189.
- Eizagirre, A., Imaz, J. I., & Rekalde, I. (2018). Characterization of best practices in the development of cross-curricular competences in Vocational Education and Training: Case study in the Basque Country. *Journal of Vocational Education & Training*, 70(1), 47–65.
- Eurostat. (2018a). *Early leavers from education and training by sex and labour status*. [http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database?node\\_code=edat\\_lfse\\_14](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/data/database?node_code=edat_lfse_14).
- Eurostat. (2018b). *People at risk of poverty or social exclusion*. [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People\\_at\\_risk\\_of\\_poverty\\_or\\_social\\_exclusion](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/People_at_risk_of_poverty_or_social_exclusion).
- Gallagher, E. (2010). The second chance school. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(4), 445–459.
- García, M., Casal, J., Merino, R., & Sánchez, A. (2013). Itinerarios de abandono escolar y transiciones tras la enseñanza secundaria obligatoria. *Revista de Educación*, 361, 65–94.
- González-Faraco, J. C., Jiménez, J. R., & Pérez, H. M. (2013). Bitter strawberries: the construction of differences in a multicultural school: a case study. *Intercultural Education*, 24(6), 592–604.
- González-Faraco, J. C., Luzón, A., & Torres, M. (2012). La exclusión social en el discurso educativo: un análisis basado en un programa de investigación. *Archivos Analíticos de Políticas Educativas*, 20(24), 1–19.
- Hall, S. (2011). The neoliberal revolution. *Cultural Studies*, 75(6), 705–728.
- Han, B. C. (2017). *Psychopolitics: Neoliberalism and new technologies of power*. New York: Verso.
- Hargreaves, A., & Shirley, D. (2009). *The fourth way: The inspiring future for educational change*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Jessop, B. (2002). Liberalism, neoliberalism, and urban governance: A state-theoretical perspective. *Antipode*, 34(3), 452–472.

- Johansson, Th. (2017). Youth studies in transition: Theoretical explorations. *International Review of Sociology*, 27(3), 510–524.
- Llano Ortiz, J. C. (2018). *El estado de la pobreza. Seguimiento del indicador de pobreza y exclusión social en España 2008–2018*. VIII Informe AROPE (At Risk Of Poverty and Exclusion). Madrid: European Anti Poverty Network—Spain (EAPN-ES). <https://www.eapn.es/estadodepobreza/index.php>.
- Luzón, A., Porto, M., Torres, M., & Ritacco, M. (2009). Buenas prácticas en los programas extraordinarios de atención a la diversidad en centros de educación secundaria. Una mirada desde la experiencia. *Profesorado. Revista de currículum y formación del profesorado*, 13(3), 217–238.
- Luzón, A., & Torres, M. (Eds.). (2013). *Las políticas de formación profesional en España y en Europa: perspectivas comparadas*. Barcelona: Octaedro.
- Marco-Pérez, J. M., & Sancho, T. (2014). Formación Profesional Básica ¿un acierto o un error? Un reto. *Forum Aragón*, 12, 53–55.
- Martínez-García, J., & Merino, R. (2011). Formación profesional y desigualdad de oportunidades educativas por clase social y género. *Témpora*, 14, 13–37.
- McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2014). Teaching in the ‘margins’: Rekindling a passion for teaching. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 35(1), 1–18.
- McGregor, G., Mills, M., Te-Riele, K., & Hayes, D. (2015). Excluded from school: getting a second chance at a ‘meaningful’ education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 19(6), 608–625.
- Monserrat, C., & Melendro, M. (2017). ¿Qué habilidades y competencias se valoran de los profesionales que trabajan con adolescencia en riesgo de exclusión social? Análisis desde la acción socioeducativa. *Educación*, 20(2), 113–135.
- Murillo, J., & Martínez-Garrido, C. (2018). Magnitud de la segregación escolar por nivel socioeconómico en España y sus Comunidades Autónomas y comparación con los países de la Unión Europea. *Revista de Sociología de la Educación*, 11(1), 37–58.
- Newmann, F. M., & Wehlage, G. G. (1993). Five standards of authentic instruction. *Educational leadership*, 50(7), 8–12.
- OECD. (2012). *Equity and quality in education: Supporting disadvantaged students and schools*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- OECD. (2016). *PISA 2015 Results (Volume II): Policies and Practices for Successful Schools*. Paris: OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264267510-en>.
- OECD. (2017). *Education at a Glance 2017. OECD Indicators*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- O’Gorman, E., Salmon, N., & Murphy, C. A. (2016). Schools as sanctuaries: A systematic review of contextual factors which contribute to student retention in alternative education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 20(5), 536–551.
- Olofsson, J., & Persson-Thunqvist, D. (2018). The modern evolution of VET in Sweden (1945–2015). In S. Michelsen & M.-L. Stenström (Eds.), *Vocational education in the Nordic Countries. The historical evolution*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Oster, K., Linna, E. K., Jansen, J., & Carvalho, R. (2000). *Second Chance Schools, Summary Report on the evaluation of the European Pilot Schools*. Berlin: BBJ Consultancy for European Commission, Directorate General of Education and Culture.
- Pereyra, M., González-Faraco, J. C., Luzón, A., & Torres, M. (2009). Social Change and Configurations of Rhetoric: Schooling and Social Exclusion-Inclusion in Educational Reform in Contemporary Spain. In R. Cowen & A. Kazamias (Eds.), *International Handbook of Comparative Education* (pp. 217–238). London: Springer.
- Pilz, M. (2012). *The future of vocational education and training in a changing world*. New York: Springer.
- Polidano, C., Tabasso, D., & Tseng, Y. P. (2013). A second chance at education for early school leavers. *Education Economics*, 23(3), 358–375.
- Popkewitz, T. S. (2007). *Cosmopolitanism and the age of school reform: Science, education, and making society by making the child*. New York: Routledge.
- Popkewitz, T. S., & Lindblad, S. (2000). Educational governance and social inclusion and exclusion: A conceptual review of equality and post-modern traditions. *Discourse*, 21(1), 1–44.
- Riddle, S., & Cleaver, D. (2015). Working within and against the grain of policy in an alternative school. *Discourse*, 38, 498–510.
- Rochex, J. Y. (2011). Las tres ‘edades’ de las políticas de educación prioritaria: ¿convergencia europea? *Propuesta Educativa*, 35, 75–84.

- 
- Rose, M. (2005). *Lives on the boundary: A moving account of the struggles and achievements of America's educationally underprepared*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Sancha, I., & Gutiérrez, S. (2016). *Vocational education and training in Europe–Spain*. Cedefop Reference Net VET in Europe reports 2016. [http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/2016\\_CR\\_ES.pdf](http://libserver.cedefop.europa.eu/vetelib/2016/2016_CR_ES.pdf).
- Sicilia, G., & Simancas, G. (2018). *Equidad educativa en España. Comparación regional a partir de PISA 2015*. Madrid: Fundación Ramón Areces.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). Qualitative case studies. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stanley, G. (2007). Education for work: The current dilemma of post-compulsory education. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 34(3), 91–99.
- Tarabini, A., Jacovkis, J., & Montes, A. (2017). *Los factores de la exclusión educativa en España: Mecanismos, perfiles y espacios de intervención*. Madrid: UNICEF.
- Thomas, G. (2017). Progress in social and educational inquiry through case study: Generalization or explanation? *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 45(3), 253–260.
- Vadeboncoeur, J. A., & Padilla-Petry, P. (2017). Learning from teaching in alternative and flexible education settings. *Teaching Education*, 28(1), 1–7.
- Walther, A. (2006). Regimes of youth transitions. Choice, flexibility and security in young people's experiences across different European contexts. *Young*, 14(2), 119–139.

**Publisher's Note** Springer Nature remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

**Juan Carlos González-Faraco** is a Professor in the Department of Education, University of Huelva, Spain, and an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Anthropology, The University of Alabama, USA. His research interests focus on cultural and political studies on education.

**Antonio Luzón-Trujillo** is an Associate Professor in the Department of Pedagogy, University of Granada, Spain. His research interests focus on International and Comparative Education. Currently he is a director of the Research Group "Educational policies and reforms".

**Celia Corchuelo-Fernández** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Education, University of Huelva, Spain. She is a Psychologist and also the Principal of a Secondary School. Her research interests focus on social and educational exclusion.