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## Diversity and Equity in Compulsory Education: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Official Documents from Public Primary Schools

Diversidad y equidad en educación obligatoria. Análisis crítico del discurso expuesto en los documentos oficiales de los CEIPs

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### Abstract

*This study explores how diversity is addressed in Spanish schools through the analysis of institutional documents. Grounded in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), it examines 24 official texts—including School Educational Projects, Annual General Programs, and Coexistence Plans—from seven public primary schools involved in the TRANSFORMA project. The aim is to identify how concepts such as diversity, equity, inclusion, and social justice are articulated in school practices. Findings indicate that terms like diversity, participation, and respect are frequently emphasized, whereas equity, social justice, exclusion, and segregation are largely absent. This suggests that schools reinforce a normative and superficial approach to diversity, centered on the management of differences, while neglecting structural conflicts that sustain inequality. The study concludes that institutional documents reflect a limited commitment to educational transformation. It advocates for intercultural and democratic practices that move beyond rhetoric and position diversity as a key driver of equity and social change.*

**Keywords:** Diversity; schools; inclusion; transformation.

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## Resumen

*Este artículo analiza las prácticas relacionadas con la diversidad en diferentes centros educativos a través del estudio de sus documentos institucionales. Partiendo de un marco teórico que cuestiona la visión compensatoria de la diversidad y su instrumentalización en políticas educativas, el estudio busca identificar cómo se articulan nociones de inclusión, equidad y justicia social en la práctica escolar. Para ello nos hemos basado en una metodología cualitativa a través del Análisis Crítico del Discurso (ACD). Se ha analizado la documentación de ocho centros públicos de Educación Primaria de distintas comunidades autónomas participantes en el proyecto TRANSFORMA. La muestra documental incluye 24 textos oficiales —Proyectos Educativos de Centro, Programaciones Generales Anuales y Planes de Convivencia—, que se han examinado en torno a conceptos clave como “diversidad, equidad, igualdad, inclusión, discriminación, segregación, respeto, participación y transformación”. Los resultados muestran una alta frecuencia de términos como diversidad, participación y respeto, mientras que otros como equidad, justicia social, exclusión o segregación aparecen de manera residual o inexistente. Como conclusión se observa que los documentos escolares refuerzan una visión superficial de la diversidad, centrada en la gestión de diferencias, pero evitan abordar los conflictos estructurales que generan desigualdad. Se propone avanzar hacia prácticas educativas interculturales y democráticas que conviertan la diversidad en motor de transformación y equidad.*

*Palabras clave:* Diversidad; centros educativos; inclusión; transformación.

## Introduction

Diversity as a concept is approached differently in current educational policies, with the term varying according to cultural, political and temporal contexts. It is a concept entirely influenced by these factors, such that it is not conceived in the same way in some contexts as in others. In the Spanish school and compulsory education system, diversity is understood as the respect for and appreciation of individual differences among pupils, including cultural, linguistic, gender, ability and learning style differences (Law 15/2022 on equal treatment and non-discrimination). UNESCO (2017) promotes inclusive education that guarantees the right to education for all, recognising diversity as an enriching value that improves the quality of education.

Far from being unambiguous, diversity has become an “extremely problematic concept from the very moment of its designation” (Díaz de Rada, 2023, p. 5) and is often instrumentalised under logics of homogenisation or stigmatisation. As Gil-Jaurena (2009) warns, within the school setting, diversity is often perceived as a difficulty, leading to compensatory pedagogical responses that classify pupils according to their “lack of achievement”, thereby generating normalised pedagogical segregation.

Similarly, Flores (2016) points out that there is a constant rise in inequality in Spain and that practices that foster diversity must be increased. According to UNICEF (2022),

Spain is one of the countries with the highest levels of school segregation in Europe. For its part, *Save the Children* (2018) notes that 'ghetto' spaces are created in many schools and warns that if the education system is unable to address high levels of inequality, it will lead to a breakdown in social cohesion with serious social consequences in the future.

From this political perspective, diversity refers to 'non-discrimination' or to compensatory measures in situations that are, or should be, part of everyday school life; for instance, recognising that schools are not homogeneous spaces and that their functioning needs to be restructured so that we can stop talking about diversity as a compensatory measure (Aguado, 2023). Similarly, Apple (2001 [1996]) argues that dominant curricula tend to operate under a monocultural logic, presenting diversity from a reductionist perspective, "focusing on the ever-ideological 'us'", and relegating "people of colour, women and the 'others'" to superficial or folkloric references (p. 60). This perspective reinforces an educational model that legitimises inequalities. Thus, as Matarranz and Aguado-Odina (2025) assert, the education system has failed to serve as a tool for equity; rather, it has reproduced and deepened social inequalities by segregating, labelling and classifying students.

Some recent studies show how the concept of diversity is attributed to singular focuses on the academic performance of students from minority groups (Cernadas et al., 2021). As Garreta-Bochaca et al. (2022) mention in a study analysing intercultural educational practices, only 42.3% of teachers work from an intercultural approach, compared to 62.4% who take these aspects less into account. The only way in which an approach or paradigm, such as the intercultural one, can become a reality is through the teaching staff. They are directly responsible for ensuring that this perspective is put into practice (Aguado-Odina and Sleeter, 2021).

Understanding a diverse environment requires starting with practices that ensure equity and recognise the complexity of individuals, their backgrounds and contexts (Ballesteros and Gil-Jaurena, 2012; Ghiso, 2000). Therefore, educational practices must aim to be sustainable, innovative, effective and replicable (Gómez-Nashiki and Quijada-Lovatón, 2021), which implies that the active and effective participation of the educational community is key to the constant review of pedagogical processes (Mateus et al., 2017).

Similarly, in the current European context, the importance of implementing intercultural educational practices is accentuated by the growing cultural diversity in various countries and the rising intolerance towards that diversity within those same countries (Al-Afifi et al., 2025). The Eurydice Report by the Publications Office of the European Commission (2024) on the promotion of diversity and inclusion in European schools explains that inequality stems from disadvantages or discrimination due to a range of personal and social characteristics, such as sex, gender, ethnic origin, migrant background, religion, disability, socio-economic status and sexual orientation. People in these social categories are not disadvantaged per se, but because structures exist that often deny access to resources (such as quality general education or appropriate services) or create barriers to accessing such resources. LGTBIQ+ students, for example, continue

to face high levels of bullying, whilst the Roma community, particularly women, suffers profound inequalities in education, employment and health (European Commission, 2024). Similarly, racism is identified as a discriminatory practice stemming from ideologies and ideological constructs that manifest themselves at individual, social and structural levels (Arneback and Jämte, 2021). Although many policy frameworks promote the inclusion of migrant, disabled or ethnic minority students, other areas such as sexual orientation or gender equality are addressed less frequently. Furthermore, more than half of education systems lack accurate data on discrimination and diversity in the classroom, and teacher diversity remains very limited, negatively affecting the most vulnerable pupils (European Commission, 2024; UNESCO, 2017).

In accordance with Organic Law 3/2020, amending the Organic Law on Education (LOMLOE), the Spanish education system must be governed by a series of principles of equity and inclusion as a means of addressing personal, cultural, economic and social inequalities. The LOMLOE includes recognition of Romani culture and other minorities, but its approach remains essentialist and culturalist (Jiménez Morales, 2021). The problematisation of diversity, and “its solution, is culturalised by reinterpreting socio-economic, legal and political inequalities as supposed cultural differences” (Dietz, 2017, p.202).

Given the need to delve deeper, through official discourse, into the reality experienced by educational institutions, this research aims to examine the educational practices related to diversity carried out in eight Spanish schools .

## **Method**

To carry out this study, we have drawn on Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA); this is an approach that enables us to examine how language constructs meanings, identities, power relations and social phenomena. As a methodology, it “involves a way of engaging with discourses” from a cognitive, contextual and discursive perspective (Taboada, 2022). It is not merely a matter of analysing “what is said”, but how it is said, who says it, in what context, with what intentions and, above all, what effects it produces (Van Dijk, 2003). The choice of CDA in this case stems from its suitability for determining how schools use language to promote their own interests and influence the perceptions of, in this instance, the school community, so that these align with the image they seek to convey (Tan-de Ramos, 2024). These objectives range from the simplest, such as encouraging readers to take specific actions, to the most complex, such as expressing ideologies or representing the writers’ identity through discourse. In short, it involves a type of research carried out by critical analysts who oppose all forms of social inequality and focus on studying how inequality is represented, reproduced and legitimised (Van Dijk, 2017), in this case, within educational contexts.

## Participants

The research was conducted in eight state primary schools located in different autonomous communities of Spain, as participants in the TRANSFORMA project, selected on the basis of their willingness to take part in the project. To facilitate a comparative analysis and ensure anonymity in later stages of the study, both the schools and the neighbourhoods in which they are located have been identified using the names of trees. Below is a brief description of their local contexts. The content of the characteristics is drawn from the descriptions the schools themselves provide in their respective school educational projects (PEC).

Table 1

*Participating schools, location and context.*

School (pseudonym)	Location	Characteristics of the socio-educational context
CEIP Castaño	Community of Madrid	Located in a neighbourhood in the south of Madrid; an area with high socio-economic vulnerability and significant cultural diversity. The school welcomes pupils from over 30 nationalities, with a high proportion of working-class families, migrants and Roma families, many of whom are in situations of rehousing or social exclusion.
Álamo Primary School	Galicia	It is located in Cambados (Pontevedra). It serves a predominantly middle-class population, with a strong presence of families linked to the maritime sector. There is notable socio-cultural and educational diversity, including pupils with special educational needs.
CEIP Alcanforero	Aragón	It is situated in one of the most densely populated neighbourhoods. This is an area where the population has limited financial resources and includes people from different countries.
CEIP Olivo	Castile-La Mancha	This school is situated in a neighbourhood with a high proportion of children and young people; the majority are from immigrant families, and almost the entire Roma community within the population lives here. On the other hand, the adjacent, newly built neighbourhood is home to an upper-middle-class population
CEIP Fresno	Community of Madrid	Located in the town of Soto del Real, the school is characterised by having pupils whose families have a cultural background encompassing primary and

		secondary education, as well as university studies. It also caters for a minority population, primarily Moroccan, South American and Romanian. This school has pupils enrolled from all sectors of the local community.
CEIP Ciruelo	Murcia	Located in the town of Alcantarilla, this school is characterised by high social vulnerability and a significant presence of Roma and immigrant communities. Most families have low levels of education and face unemployment or precarious employment. The school actively participates in community projects to promote inclusion and combat early school leaving.
CEIP Morera	Community of Madrid	The school is situated in a neighbourhood of Getafe, with families of a middle and lower-middle socioeconomic status. The immigrant population has gradually been joining the school, which has allowed for greater integration and opportunities for educational support; however, the personal, social and economic circumstances of these families require increasing levels of assistance each year.

*Note:* Prepared by the author.

### **Strategies and analysis of the information**

On the one hand, a documentary analysis of the schools has been carried out by reviewing, classifying and interpreting the information contained in three key documents from each school: the School Educational Project (PEC), the Annual General Programme (PGA) and the School Community Plan. The aim is to analyse and compare how the concepts of *diversity, equity, equality, inclusion, educational justice/social justice, inequality, discrimination, exclusion, segregation, respect, participation, democracy* and *transformation* are articulated discursively. These concepts form part of the official discourses within schools and are evident in their institutional documents, which allows us to identify the key elements for their critical analysis, as well as proposals for revision and reinterpretation from an intercultural and transformative perspective. The selection of these concepts stems from the purpose of the R&D project within which this analysis is framed: to identify the practices and discourses that reinforce segregation and inequality in students' experiences and achievements, with the aim of making them explicit and preventing them. This process reinforces the need to promote a critical review of school documents in order to challenge and transform the conditions of discrimination, inequality or segregation that are reproduced in schools, whilst emphasising the perspectives proposed on the basis of the concepts presented as desirable values.

## Methodology

The study adopts a qualitative research perspective, focusing on the documents that articulate the pedagogical and organisational framework of each school. The content analysis of the three documents was not approached in a linear, ordered or mechanical manner, but rather as a process structured around three complementary perspectives. The first was descriptive in nature, consisting of a detailed review of the texts to gain an understanding of the institutional reality represented in them, as briefly outlined in Table 1. The second, interpretative in nature, sought to understand how these discourses produce meaning, examining the data within their context of production, their omissions and their ideological implications. In this phase, a preliminary count of key terms was carried out and their presence, absence or symbolic treatment in the texts was examined. The third perspective involved the manual and critical analysis of the set of documents (24 in total), selecting significant fragments and categorising them according to the concepts developed within the framework of the project. To extract the results, a concept-based analysis was carried out based on prior coding undertaken by all members of the research and working group of the referenced R&D project, who compiled the use of all concepts in the analysed documents from each educational centre.

This process was guided by criteria specific to *the ACD: discourse*, through the contextualised and situated description of school discourses; *cognition*, through a systematic procedure of analysis and categorisation; *society*, recognising the research team's position as an active participant in the production of knowledge; *intertextuality*, by considering links with broader normative and social frameworks; and *ideological critique*, as a guiding principle of the analysis. With regard to ethical rigour, institutional confidentiality has been ensured through the anonymity of the schools by means of pseudonyms and informed consent for the use of the documents and materials generated within the framework of the project; documents which, moreover, are of a public nature and publicly accessible.

The following table summarises the document analysis process followed.

Table 2

### *Analysis procedure*

Phase and perspective of analysis	Description of the process	Analytical purpose (ACD)
Descriptive	Detailed and systematic review of institutional documents (PEC, PGA and Coexistence Plan)	To situate the discourse within its institutional and educational context; to identify recurring themes and the general structure of the discourse.

Interpretative	Counting of key terms and analysis of their presence, absence, meaning or symbolic treatment.	Understanding the cognitive and ideological frameworks that shape institutional discourse; identifying silences and discursive hierarchies.
Critical	Manual and in-depth analysis of the entire corpus (24 documents), through the selection of significant excerpts and their categorisation according to the project's concepts (diversity, equity, participation, democracy, etc.).	Linking discourse, cognition and society; identifying how the texts reproduce or challenge inequalities and power relations.

*Note.* Prepared by the author.

## Results

The first step, according to Pardo Abril (2013), consists of: the definition and characterisation of the units of analysis, which involves establishing lists of occurrences and their frequencies, where an occurrence is understood as the appearance of a word, a text segment or a rhetorical figure, and frequency as the number of times the unit is repeated in the corpus (p.124)

The following tables show the frequency of the concepts analysed according to their occurrence in the three documents reviewed. Each table corresponds to one of the documents: PEC, PGA and the Coexistence Plan. The presentation of the frequency is directly related to the ACD criteria of discourse and intertextuality. In this case, discourse is understood as being constructed from the intentions, plans, knowledge and ideologies intended to influence the educational community (Van Dijk, 2017), and intertextuality is understood through an analysis of language in the discursive construction of patterns of domination and resistance (Olave Arias and Londoño Zapata, 2019), which this critical research aims to analyse.

Table 3

*Frequency of concepts in the School Educational Project of each CEIP*

Concept	CEIP							
	Castaño	Poplar	Camphor	Olive	Ash	Plum	Mulberry	Almond tree
Diversity (diverse, diversities)	13	14	2	18	5	28	34	6
Equity	2	–	-	6	1	4	–	1
Equality	8	8	1	25	–	29	–	2
Inclusion	2	7	7	29	–	2	3	2
Educational justice/ social	–	–	-	2	-	1	–	–
Inequality	4	–	-	1		3	–	–
Discrimination	4	4	-	8	–	6	1	1
Exclusion	1	–	-		-	1	–	–
Segregation	–	–	-	--	-		–	–
Respect	12	17	4	23	-	32	3	7
Participation (to participate, participatory)	21	37	4	31	1	21	13	4
Democracy (democratic)	5	1	-	6	-	3	4	1
Transformation (transformative)	–	–	1	5	-	2	1	–

*Note:* Compiled by the author.

Table 4

*Frequency of concepts in the Annual General Programme of each primary school*

Concept	Primary School							
	Castaño	Poplar	Camphor	Olive	Ash	Plum	Mulberry	Almond tree
Diversity (diverse, diversities)	27	22	26	9	10	13	8	4
Equity	8	–	5	5	–	2	4	–
Equality	9	5	14	14	–	2	1	2
Inclusion	11	4	71	11	4	--	13	1
Educational/social justice	–	–	1	--	–	--	–	–
Inequality	–	–	1	--	–	--	2	–
Discrimination	2	–	1	2	–	4	–	–
Exclusion	3	1	1		–	1	–	–
Segregation	2	–	2	2	–		1	–
Respect	15	5	2	3	4	21	–	–
Participation (to participate, participatory)	29	23	36	47	10	12	31	3
Democracy (democratic)	2	–	1	2	1	--	–	–
Transformation (transformative)	7	–	7	15	–	--	3	1

*Note:* Compiled by the author.

Table 5

*Frequency of concepts in the coexistence plans of each primary school*

Concept	Primary school							
	Castaño	Poplar	Camphor	Olive	Ash	Plum	Mulberry	Almond tree
Diversity (diverse, diversities)	16	25	–	9	16	8	29	13
Equity	4	–	1	1	6	2	4	1
Equality	20	5	2	19	37	5	23	11
Inclusion	–	15	9	2	9	3	2	7
Educational/social justice	–	–	–	--	–	1	–	–
Inequality	–	1	–	--	–	--	1	–
Discrimination	5	5	1	--	5	--	19	10
Exclusion	–	1	–	–	–	1	1	–
Segregation	–	–	–	--	–	–	–	–
Respect	60	48	6	3	28	1	38	3
Participation (to participate, participatory)	59	56	25	1	29	6	55	5
Democracy (democratic)	8	2	–	1	5	--	5	–
Transformation (transformative)	–	3	2	--	–	--	–	–

*Note:* Compiled by the author.

The frequency of concepts in each of the institutional documents analysed shows that terms such as *participation*, *diversity* and *respect* occupy a clear central place in the discourse, particularly in the Coexistence Plans, where they are set out as guiding values for behaviour and everyday school life.

Similarly, there are striking omissions regarding the concepts of *equity*, *social justice*, *exclusion* or *segregation*, as they barely appear or are entirely absent from a large proportion of the documents. In light of this, the question arises as to whether this invisibility might reflect a lack of conceptual understanding or internalisation, or rather the deliberate avoidance of terms that imply a critical perspective on the structural inequalities present in the education system or in the very contexts in which the schools are situated.

Another aspect that stands out is the clear alignment of the documents' content with official regulatory frameworks, such as the principles of equality or inclusion enshrined in education legislation, the constant reference to conflict resolution protocols, the definition of the concepts themselves in accordance with regional regulations, and the way in which spaces and opportunities for participation by the school community are organised. All of this is done without developing or proposing a critical engagement aimed at transforming these frameworks.

## **Diversity**

The prominence of the concept of *diversity* reveals a concern, as a hallmark, among several schools regarding the management of coexistence, although this is not always accompanied by a structural questioning of the conditions that determine it. Generally speaking, it is possible to link the meaning of diversity to clear references to nationalities, support for pupils with special educational needs, and references to disability, inclusion or diversity. However, the particular case of CEIP Morera stands out, with the intention of defining the school's identity when addressing affective-sexual diversity to prevent acts of LGBTIphobia. A protocol for action and guidance has been established, in accordance with the current regulations of the Community of Madrid, including corrective measures such as the Coexistence Plan, class assemblies, the organisation of workshops involving families, and the 'mixing' of pupils of different ages as a compensatory or extraordinary measure.

The case of CEIP Alcanforero can be regarded as an exception, as it links diversity to understanding the context and the family, but only within the coexistence plan and through the guidance team.

Similarly, the frequent use of the term 'diversity' (CEIP Morera, CEIP Fresno, CEIP Álamo) implies the intention to categorise pupils by gender, age, background, language or cognitive ability, which informs action plans designed to address or accommodate diversity.

## **Equity, equality and inclusion**

Equity, equality and inclusion are concepts that we analyse jointly due to their contextualisation in the three documents examined, with particular emphasis on the apparent equivalence of equity and equality or inclusion as a means of ensuring equality. In the documents analysed, equality and equity appear interchangeably in most instances. Above all, as a descriptive concept aimed at providing quality education.

There is constant talk of equal opportunities, stemming from the awareness that situations of poverty and segregation exist in school settings. However, from our ADC perspective, we ask what specific, context-specific practices are developed to identify the causes, analyse the consequences and propose transformative actions at the micro-level, based on the criteria that define us as researchers. Following a thorough review, *inclusion* is intended to be ensured through transitional measures so that pupils diagnosed or considered vulnerable can reach an acceptable level and integrate as soon as possible into 'mainstream' classes, where they would not be subject to any special treatment. Thus, what is not envisaged—or rather, what is postponed—is the implementation of educational practices aimed at transforming and adapting school organisation, the attitudes of staff and pupils, teaching materials, and teaching-learning strategies (Martín Rojo, 1997).

One of the strategies that stands out is the introduction of the Community of Madrid's bilingual programme at CEIP Castaño, as a means of promoting equity and an attraction for families in the neighbourhood to this school. At CEIP Olivo, as at most schools, if the word 'equity' appears in documents, it is precisely because of participation in the TRANSFORMA project, as this includes equity as its central focus and aim: 'the development and dissemination of a collaborative, intercultural and critical model of action aimed at promoting equity and tackling segregation in Spanish compulsory education schools'.

As for the term '*equality*', it is undoubtedly linked to gender equality: as a goal to be achieved (CEIP Olivo; CEIP Álamo), the rejection of gender stereotypes (CEIP Ciruelo), the selection of teaching materials that promote equality (CEIP Morera), as well as, amongst other aims, integrating the principle of equal opportunities between genders into teaching practice (CEIP Almendro).

With regard to *inclusion*, the starting point is once again an approach based on the assessment of situations involving migrants, curriculum gaps or adaptation, and support for pupils with special educational needs in accordance with established protocols or current legislation. From a critical perspective adopted in this analysis, this translates into inclusion being used to promote separate (segregating) spaces, described within a framework of accessibility to all spaces—a clearly contradictory proposition. *Inclusion* at CEIP Alcanforero is described as a benchmark due to the number of classrooms for pupils with autism spectrum disorder ( , ASD), currently perceived as a negative factor by the teachers themselves because it attracts families with children diagnosed with ASD and, on the other hand, due to the lack of specialised training in supporting this type of pupil.

As specific measures to build a “welcoming and inclusive environment” (CEIP Álamo), the application of the methodology based on universal design for learning (UDL) is emphasised in several schools. Furthermore, an anti-discrimination protocol, covering transgender pupils, is included in the coexistence plans, again in accordance with the provisions of current legislation (CEIP Morera). At the same time, there is also an intention to move from a clinical approach towards an ecological model of educational inclusion, which requires us to investigate how this translates into educational practices.

At CEIP Ciruelo, the emphasis is on social and family inclusion, focusing on the acceptance of ethical and democratic values, respect and non-aggression, measures to promote harmonious coexistence, and the peaceful resolution of conflicts; there is a strong focus on compliance with the rules of coexistence regarding ‘good behaviour’ and on corrective measures.

Based on the above, the ACD carried out reflects how the confusion between equity and equality/inclusion has two implications. Firstly, the way in which the power to control and manage schools is exercised and how this determines the relationships formed within these educational spaces; and secondly, how this power is derived from legislation to justify local practices or actions (Taboada, 2022; Van Dijk, 2017; Wodak, 2003).

### **Educational justice, Social justice, Inequality, Discrimination, Segregation, Respect**

The frequency tables above reveal that the concepts of *inequality*, *discrimination*, *exclusion* and *segregation* appear very rarely in the three documents analysed. *Educational justice* or *social justice* is absent from all documents across all schools; it appears only as part of the TRANSFORMA project, in its definition. For this reason, the systematic analysis of these concepts is examined collectively in this section. Above all, to highlight how the failure to address situations of oppression, discrimination and inequality in school contexts contributes to perpetuating and exacerbating these structural issues.

*Inequality* is primarily linked to changes in educational stages or to the treatment of early years pupils (CEIP Castaño), or else as a measure of bullying situations, a matter of some concern at Colegio Álamo. Similarly, in the PEC of CEIP Ciruelo, the concept of inequality appears to describe the majority of its pupils, in a clear reference to social inequality.

*Discrimination*, *exclusion* and *segregation*; although these are recorded differently in the documents, it is easy to extrapolate that the idea or meaning they express is the same in all cases, a correspondence which we at the ACD refer to as co-occurrences; that is, “lexical units within a text corpus that exhibit lexical proximity between the forms included” (Azqueta et al., 2023, p.292). *Discrimination* is presented as a situation to be avoided, and to prevent it, the focus is on rules of coexistence and sanctions for those who breach them, or on projects that each school refers to interchangeably, the common framework of which relates to co-education activities and workshops, raising awareness of stereotypes, and fostering emotional well-being through positive coexistence.

*Exclusion and segregation* are used to refer to the profile of families and the pupils themselves, as the discussion covers social and employment exclusion and absenteeism. Once again, the focus is on promoting tolerance towards pupils experiencing these conditions through affective education programmes.

Regarding *respect*, it is worth noting that this was not a concept that was *initially* part of the document analysis, as within the TRANSFORMA project and its intercultural approach, *respect* is conceived as a functional (Walsh, 2010) and compensatory (Aguado, 2023; Feito, 2009), as it appeals to a voluntary choice to tolerate what is different from the 'normal', which contradicts the recognition of diversity as an intrinsic characteristic of any human group (Juliano, 2003). Nevertheless, its assessment was included in the analysis due to the repeated presence of *respect* in all three documents. From this perspective, it is observed that this is a term appearing in school documents that categorise their educational community in terms of ethnicity, origin or gender (CEIP Castaño, CEIP Álamo, CEIP Olivo and CEIP Morera) to describe their context. In order to ensure attitudes of 'respect for others', reference is once again made to codes of conduct, coexistence committees or compliance with the organisational, operational and coexistence rules of each school, expressed and decided 'from the formation of "us" as a unit' (Martín Rojo, 1997, p.17), which in these cases is limited to the School Council or other groups reduced to more punitive strategies.

## **Participation**

*Participation, the act of participating, or being participatory* are concepts we analyse on the basis of the ACD criteria: discourse and cognition. Based on this observation, *participation* is semantically linked to *involvement*, as a sine qua non for community life at school (CEIP Castaño); the mere fact of 'being' at school already implies 'being part of' (CEIP Fresno). When discussing forms of participation, as a fundamental and cross-cutting aspect of everyday school life, participatory spaces are highlighted. As for who is involved, reference is frequently made to the responsibilities of class representatives and their presence in decision-making bodies such as school councils or year-level coordination meetings (Castaño Primary School, Olivo Primary School, Almendro Primary School), which is limited to two people from each year group, acting as representatives of their respective classes (Morera Primary School).

*Participation*, understood as a means of inclusion and conflict resolution, is organised through school-wide projects which, paradoxically, are not developed with the genuine and effective involvement of families and pupils, who are identified as active participants. The CEIP Olivo's Annual Educational Plan (PGA) includes a reading scheme as a means of bringing families closer to the school or, in the case of CEIP Álamo, of emphasising the importance of official bodies in school life. The findings of this ADC reveal a predominant lack of references to participating 'in' or 'with' – that is, actively within social spaces or neighbourhoods. One example is CEIP Morera's intention to encourage and increase pupils' participation and integration in the drafting of rules,

establishing a framework for participation. Pupils' explicit participation is limited to organising playgrounds, hall duties, carnival slogans, decisions regarding the school fund, or issues concerning difficulties in coexistence between groups. CEIP Alcanforero refers to two programmes in collaboration with other associations, but there is no systematic relationship with the neighbourhood, beyond the families who participate, without, once again, overlooking the requirement to participate in rules and values as a means of fostering coexistence (CEIP Ciruelo).

## **Democracy and transformation**

The aim and impact of the TRANSFORMA project in the eight schools where it is implemented is to “create a model for collaborative and intercultural **action**”, in relation to the development of democratic schools based on a commitment to accepting cultural diversity as the norm and a commitment to equity. From the rigorous ideological critique characteristic of the ACD, we delve into the meanings of *democracy* and *transformation*, positing that what the transformation of the school must pursue is, therefore, the deepening of democracy.

The incorporation of these two concepts into the three revised documents of each school can be directly linked to conflict resolution and prevention. Emphasis is placed on the importance of every school activity being carried out on the basis of the values of democratic citizenship. That is, tolerance, participation and freedom. The ‘democratic management’ of spaces, classrooms and the school is part of the regulatory framework governed by the coexistence plans, merely referring to textual quotations from the law; and if it appears in the coexistence plan, it refers to rules of coexistence and courtesy.

*Transformation* is given a more individual meaning for each pupil in their own learning, enabling them to be critical of what they learn and to transform their own ideas. On the other hand, classrooms are described as “learning environments that are transformed”. Above all, this refers to the decorative elements that reflect what is being learnt at that moment, which requires constant change (lists, calendars, timetables, murals, responsibilities, etc.)

## **Discussion and conclusions**

The results presented show that the schools' institutional documents largely reproduce a normative discourse that prioritises notions such as *diversity*, *participation* and *respect*, whilst more critical concepts such as *equity*, *social justice*, *exclusion* or *segregation* are presented only marginally or are entirely absent. From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in line with Martín Rojo's (1997) observations regarding the empirical revelation of how discourses reproduce or legitimise forms of domination, this asymmetry in the frequency of concepts cannot be considered neutral, as it reflects an ideological framework in which a language of coexistence is prioritised over categories that challenge structures of inequality.

In this regard, the frequent use of terms linked to coexistence is linked to a tendency to view diversity through a compensatory lens, associated with the management of differences based on national, cultural or special educational needs categories, but without questioning the structural frameworks that generate inequality. Ideological critique, as a criterion of rigour in ACD, allows us to identify how this ‘reassuring’ use of language shifts the focus from social and economic factors towards individual attitudes or abstract principles, obscuring the real tensions that permeate school contexts (Van Dijk, 2017).

Likewise, the discursive absences observed, particularly regarding social justice, exclusion and segregation, constitute what Van Dijk (2003) defines as “ideological silences”, that is, gaps that limit the documents’ capacity to become transformative tools. As Matarranz and Aguado Odina (2025) argue, the bureaucratic homogenisation of schools threatens the democratic ideals of equity and social justice, as it obscures the complexity of diversity and its structural implications. It is emphasised here that these omissions impose a limit on schools’ interpretative frameworks: fetishised values—presented as slogans drafted and proposed by the Administration—are addressed with greater ease, whilst the recognition of conflicts arising from power relations is sidestepped.

Furthermore, it is significant that participation is articulated mainly as formal attendance in hierarchical decision-making spaces or as compliance with regulations, rather than as the active involvement of families and pupils in the social life of the school. This finding ties in with the idea that power in schools is structured across different hierarchical levels—institutional, academic and experiential—which shape the forms of relationship and participation (Santos Guerra, 2020). Thus, what is presented as democratic participation tends, in practice, to be a form of institutional control over discourse, which reaffirms the need to open up spaces for the empowerment of educational stakeholders.

In short, the analysis of the documents highlights that, in everyday school practice, there is a constant tension between an institutional language that seeks to project values of inclusion and coexistence, and the absence of a critical commitment to transforming the inequalities that permeate the school. As Visotsky (2023) suggests, moving towards a deep understanding of oppression and discrimination requires going beyond inclusive rhetoric and challenging the structures that sustain inequality. We agree with Torres Santomé (2003) that building a democratic school requires a collective commitment that does not fragment struggles into isolated categories, but rather enables the articulation of common proposals in the face of discrimination and domination. In line with previous studies demonstrating this through both ACD (Tan-de Ramos, 2024) and other mixed-method analyses (Merma-Molina et al., 2019), institutional documents neither explore nor address essential aspects of school life, such as student participation or the development of values, nor do they address ‘how relationships are formed among peers or among members of the educational community; nor do they reflect the situation of coexistence within the environment in which they are situated’ (Merma-Molina et al.,

2019, p.576) From the critical perspective of ACD, these findings invite us to rethink school documents not only as frameworks for internal organisation, but as instruments capable of challenging hegemonic discourses and paving the way towards a truly intercultural, equitable and transformative education. All these issues lead us to rethink the proposals put forward by schools, as there is an intention that appears very difficult to put into practice. We must commit to educational communities where diversity is understood in depth, addressing all its facets, without trivialising the concept. Likewise, we must commit to increasing participation in schools, not merely as a matter of 'being part of' but of finding ways to participate actively within the spaces and life of schools.

The TRANSFORMA project aims to continue exploring the field of action research in order to further develop and improve these issues, both in the schools involved and in other schools.

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