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LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Luís Tinoca e Ana Paula Caetano
(coords.)

Amélia Marchão, Ana Paula Caetano, Ana Sofia Pinho,
Carolina Carvalho, Daniela Semião, João Piedade,
Lina Costa, Luís Tinoca, Márcia Kamp, Maria João Mogarro,
Maria José D. Martins, Otília Sousa, Sofia Freire, Sofia Santos,
Tânia Henriques, Teresa Oliveira (authors)

Wilfried Admiraal (foreword)

coleção
UIDEF

LC4Inclusion - The Journey of Schools as Learning Communities for Inclusion
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 FOREWORD TO LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION
Wilfried Admiraal

12 THE JOURNEY OF SCHOOLS AS LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR INCLUSION
Luís Tinoca, Ana Paula Caetano

25 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A LITERATURE REVIEW
Ana Paula Caetano, Ana Sofia Pinho

48 TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUSIVE CONCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY WITH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS
Sofia Santos, João Piedade, Luís Tinoca

84 INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN LEARNING COMMUNITIES: "WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE WANT TO GO"
Márcia Kamp, Carolina Carvalho, Ana Sofia Pinho, Daniela Semião, Ana Paula Caetano

117 LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND INCLUSION IN SCHOOLS: FOUR CASE STUDIES IN THE LISBON REGION
Ana Paula Caetano, Márcia Kamp, Maria João Mogarro, Lina Costa, Tânia Henriques

169 LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND INCLUSION IN SCHOOLS: FOUR CASE STUDIES IN ALENTEJO
Maria José D. Martins, Teresa Oliveira, Amélia Marchão

207 LEARNING COMMUNITIES AS A PATH TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: POTENTIAL, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS
Sofia Freire, Otília Sousa, Maria João Mogarro

223 EPILOGUE: BETWEEN HOPE AND COMMITMENT
Ana Paula Caetano, Luís Tinoca

226 TECHNICAL DATA

FOREWORD TO LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Wilfried Admiraal
Oslo Metropolitan University, Norway

Continuous professional development (CPD) for teachers is widely acknowledged as a basis for ensuring the quality of education in secondary schools. It refers not only to formal training opportunities, but also to the ongoing processes through which teachers acquire, refine, and expand their knowledge, skills, attitudes, and dispositions throughout their careers. The central aim of CPD is to enable teachers to respond effectively to the changing demands of curricula, pedagogical innovations, student diversity, and broader societal changes and education reforms (Borko, 2004; Timperley, 2011). Sustained investment in effective professional development of teachers is critical for improving and maintaining educational quality.

Research on high-quality professional development suggests that effective CPD is collaborative, practice-oriented, sustained over time, and closely connected to teachers' daily work with students (Opfer et al., 2011). Professional development that fosters active learning, such as lesson study, peer observation, or co-design of curricula, tends to be more impactful than one-off workshops or lectures (de Jong et al., 2022b). Furthermore, successful CPD often integrates external input with internal capacity building, enabling teachers to connect research-based insights with their classroom practice (Vescio et al., 2008). Professional learning opportunities should also promote teacher agency, reflection, and professional dialogue, allowing educators to adapt innovations to their specific contexts rather than simply implementing externally imposed reforms (de Jong et al., 2022a, Horn et al., 2017).

By contrast, forms of professional development that are fragmented, short-term, or detached from teachers' everyday realities have repeatedly been shown to be less effective. For example, traditional "cascade models" of training, where information is delivered top-down in isolated sessions, often fail to produce sustained changes in practice (Little, 2012; Timperley, 2011). Similarly, initiatives that focus narrowly on technical compliance or

standardized methods may neglect the complexity of teaching and undermine teachers' sense of professionalism.

So, effective professional learning activities recognize teachers as active participants in their professional development, value collaboration and shared expertise, and provide continuity and coherence over time. These conditions not only enhance teachers' instructional capacity but also contribute to the broader development of professional learning communities within schools.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES OF TEACHERS

Professional learning communities (PLCs) of teachers can be defined as groups of educators who engage in ongoing, structured collaboration with the aim of enhancing both their professional knowledge and student learning outcomes (Admiraal et al., 2012; Stoll et al., 2006). The defining characteristics of effective PLCs of teachers include shared values and vision, collective responsibility for student learning, reflective professional inquiry, collaboration that is focused on learning and teaching, and a culture of trust and mutual support (Admiraal et al., 2012; Lomos et al., 2011). Such communities differ from informal collegial exchanges in that they are intentionally designed, systematically organized, and oriented towards long-term improvement. They create spaces for teachers to challenge their assumptions, try out new pedagogical approaches, and use evidence of student learning to refine their practice.

The importance of PLCs lies in their potential to strengthen teachers' professional competences and to build collective capacity within schools. Research shows that participation in PLCs can enhance teachers' instructional repertoires, improve job satisfaction, and contribute to sustained school improvement (Lomos et al., 2011; Vescio et al., 2008). Moreover, PLCs situate professional learning in teachers' actual working contexts, making it more relevant and likely to impact classroom practice compared to one-off workshops or externally imposed programmes (Doğan & Adams, 2018).

However, evidence also indicates that not all PLCs are equally effective. Communities that prioritize administrative tasks, focus narrowly on technical skills, or lack a clear focus, tend to have little impact on professional growth (Lomos et al., 2011). Similarly, when collaboration becomes superficial, characterized by the exchange of materials without discussion of pedagogies connected to it, the potential benefits are diminished (Vangrieken et al., 2015). What works best, therefore, is structured collaboration that is sustained over time, grounded in trust, supported by school leadership, and focused on the core task of improving student learning (Lomos et al., 2011).

SCHOOLS AS LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The term PLC is often used to refer to *teacher* groups, potentially limiting the potential to influence organisation-wide changes. A broader conceptualisation of the PLC is the notion of the *school* as PLC, with individual, collaborative, and collective aspects of professional learning integrated across the whole organisation (Admiraal et al., 2021; Stoll & Kools, 2017). As mentioned above, PLCs of teachers center on teacher collaboration, including shared inquiry, reflective dialogue, and data-informed practice aimed at enhancing instructional quality. When the entire school, including students, parents, teachers, school leaders and administrative staff, becomes an integrated learning community, the potential impact extends well beyond instructional refinement. Schools that function as PLCs create safe and trusted learning environments, which enable teachers to critically examine their teaching practices and develop the ability to challenge themselves and their colleagues to break existing routines and ways of thinking and working. Research on TALIS 2018 data (Admiraal & Kittelsen Røberg, 2023; Admiraal et al., 2023) shows that a safe and participatory school culture for learning and innovation is a strong predictor of teachers' self-efficacy, well-being, and job satisfaction.

Stoll and Kools (Kools & Stoll, 2016; Stoll & Kools, 2017) distinguish between seven elements of becoming a school as a professional learning community:

1. developing and sharing a vision centred on the learning of all students;
2. creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff;
3. promoting team learning and collaboration among staff;
4. establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation and exploration;
5. embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning;
6. learning with and from the external environment, and
7. modelling and growing learning leadership.

The development of a shared vision (element 1) is the outcome of a process involving all staff and teaching and learning practices are oriented towards realising the vision. Moreover, students, parents, the external community and other partners are invited to contribute to the schools' vision. Creating and supporting continuous learning opportunities for all staff (element 2) means that the schools provide time and other resources to support learning, all new staff receive induction and mentoring support, and professional learning of all staff is promoted. Element 3, promoting team learning and collaboration among staff, refers to collaborative work and all types of non-intentional learning at the workplace, such as collaboration, team learning, peer consultation and advice, reflections, and school conditions to allocate

time and other resources for collaboration and collective learning. Element 4, establishing a culture of inquiry, innovation, and exploration, requires staff experimenting and innovating their practice, using inquiry for improving teaching practice and showing an open mind towards doing things differently. Embedding systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning (element 5) means that examples of practices are made available to all staff, structures for regular dialogue and knowledge exchange are in place, and schools evaluate the impact of professional learning. Element 6, learning with and from the external environment, includes all relationships with the outside world, such as collaboration with parents/guardians and the community as partners in the educational process, collaboration and partnerships with other schools and other educational institutions, and welcoming approaches from external experts. Finally, modelling and growing learning leadership (element 7) implies that school leaders model learning leadership, distribute leadership, and help other leaders and teachers to grow, and should ensure the establishment of the other six elements of a school as PLC.

THIS BOOK: LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The book 'Learning Communities for Inclusive Education' includes contributions based on the project LC4Inclusion – The Journey of Schools as Learning Communities for Inclusion with both conceptions of PLCs presented above. The book explores how schools can become PLCs to promote inclusive education, teacher professional development, and student well-being. The contributions cover theoretical perspectives on PLCs and a review of international literature, a longitudinal study of Portuguese schools implementing PLCs, especially in disadvantaged areas, teacher and student perceptions of inclusion, highlighting both progress and challenges, case studies from Lisbon and Alentejo regions, showing how schools adapt and implement Successful Educational Actions (i.e., interactive groups, dialogic readings, family participation, dialogic teacher education, and participatory decision-making), and obstacles such as lack of resources, resistance to change, limited family participation, and structural constraints. The general findings from these contributions are that some schools show progress towards inclusive education through an PLC, and PLC characteristics fostering collaboration, reflection, and professional growth among teachers, while enhancing inclusion and student participation. Challenges refer to the inclusion of students from all backgrounds and convincing all teachers

to participate. Moreover, a successful, sustainable implementation requires supportive leadership, resources, and long-term commitment.

SUPPORTIVE LEADERSHIP

Supportive leadership is central to the creation and maintenance of PLCs. Leaders set the vision, create trust, and establish the structural and cultural conditions necessary for collaboration (Admiraal et al., 2021; de Jong et al., 2025; Louis et al., 1996). Effective leaders promote distributed leadership, encouraging teachers to take ownership of collective goals and decisions. They also act as mediators between external accountability demands and internal improvement processes, ensuring that professional learning remains focused on student learning. Supportive leadership can include scheduling regular, structured team meetings where the agenda is co-created by teachers and focused on student learning data, providing leadership roles to teachers (e.g., subject coordinators and peer mentors) to distribute responsibility, and explicitly modelling vulnerability and reflection by sharing leaders' own learning goals.

RESOURCES

Time is frequently identified as the most critical resource for PLCs: without dedicated and protected time for joint planning, interaction, reflection, and inquiry, teacher collaboration can become superficial (de Jong et al., 2022b; Vescio et al., 2008). Financial resources enable access to professional development, research, and technological infrastructure to support communication and knowledge sharing. Equally important are social and emotional resources, such as trust and psychological safety, which allow teachers to share vulnerabilities and engage in critical dialogue (de Jong et al., 2022a, 2022b). School leaders can provide resources for supporting PLCs by protecting time in the weekly timetable for collaborative work, providing access to online platforms or databases where teachers can share lesson plans and reflect on outcomes, or allocating funds for joint professional development activities, such as study groups, action research projects, or peer visits to other schools.

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Long-term commitment is needed at all levels to ensure continuity across leadership changes, policy shifts, and staff turnover (Admiraal et al., 2021; Stoll & Kools, 2017). This involves embedding PLC structures, such as peer observation, school visits, and inquiry cycles, into the daily routines and improvement strategies of the school. Commitment is also reflected in

persistence during challenges, ensuring that professional learning is not abandoned when immediate results are not evident. School leaders can integrate PLC activities into formal school development plans, teacher assessment processes, and induction programmes for new staff, so that collaborative learning becomes part of the school's identity, and provide mentoring systems to ensure knowledge transfer when staff leave.

This e-Book *Learning Communities for Inclusive Education* presents all these benefits and challenges of PLCs, based on literature reviews and empirical work in Portuguese schools. It is not only a joy to read, it also provides an important contribution to the body of knowledge about schools as learning communities and learning communities in school.

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CHAPTER 1

THE JOURNEY OF SCHOOLS AS LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR INCLUSION

Luís Tinoca
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Ana Paula Caetano
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

THE JOURNEY OF SCHOOLS AS LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR INCLUSION

Luís Tinoca
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Ana Paula Caetano
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, an international movement has been consolidating that recognises inclusive education as an essential condition for guaranteeing the universal right to quality education (UNESCO, 2020) and for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda. In Portugal, this commitment takes on normative expression in Decree-Laws 54/2018 and 55/2018, as well as in ministerial initiatives that encourage the transformation of schools into Learning Communities (LC), strengthening the participation, success and well-being of all students.

Educational inclusion is now widely recognised as one of the most effective ways of ensuring the universal right to a quality and equitable education. More than just a strategy, it is an ethical and political imperative at the centre of the 2030 Agenda (UNESCO, 2016, 2020). By valuing diversity, learning rhythms and styles, interests, motivations, cultures, languages and socio-economic conditions, inclusion pushes schools to rethink organisational structures, curricula and teaching-learning processes (Ainscow, 2020).

Despite the progress made, inequalities in resources and opportunities persist in the Portuguese education system (Ainscow, 2020; UNESCO, 2020). International surveys (TALIS) and national studies show that many teachers feel ill-prepared to work in culturally and linguistically diverse contexts, seeing heterogeneity as a difficult challenge to overcome (Alves et al., 2020; Caetano et al, in press; OECD, 2018). The main obstacles include beliefs and attitudes that are less favourable to inclusion, negative experiences of contact with student diversity and insufficient initial and ongoing teacher education opportunities (Kaldi et al., 2018; Tinoca et al., 2015). This reality highlights the need for devices that not only transform school practices, but also boost teacher professional development based on the collective construction of new pedagogical knowledge.

It is in this context that LCs come to the fore: systemic approaches that mobilise teachers, students, families and other agents in collaborative processes of school transformation (Admiraal et al., 2019; Flecha, 2015). LCs encourage action-research, critical reflection and the shared production of knowledge, creating contexts where teachers learn from each other, experiment with evidence-based strategies and thus continuously improve their practice (DuFour et al., 2016; García-Carrión et al., 2020). In order for these dynamics to be consolidated, it is necessary to establish effective participation structures, meeting times, interdisciplinary teams and pedagogical support networks, in which teachers play a central role, both as learners and as leaders of change (Admiraal et al., 2019; García-Carrión et al., 2017; Korthagen, 2017; Pinho, 2011). In these structures, building knowledge about LCs becomes a driver of professional development, as it stimulates meta-reflection, co-planning and the dissemination of successful practices.

Despite their transformative potential, there are still research gaps regarding the contribution of LCs to vulnerable contexts marked by multiple forms of exclusion (Acquah et al., 2016; Anderson & Shattuck, 2012).

The project LC4Inclusion - The Journey of Schools as Learning Communities for Inclusion (PTDC/CED-EDG/4650/2021)[1] sought precisely to contribute to filling this gap.

This project, funded by the *Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia* (Foundation for Science and Technology) and coordinated by the Instituto de Educação of the Universidade de Lisboa, in partnership with the Direção-Geral da Educação (DGE) and the Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre (IPP), brought together a multidisciplinary team of researchers who, over the course of three years, analysed how Portuguese schools - mostly located in Educational Priority Intervention Territories (TEIP) - appropriate, adapt and expand the Successful Educational Actions advocated by the national "*Comunidades de Aprendizagem*" (Learning Communities) programme (INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2012).

THE INCLUD-ED COMMUNITIES MODEL

The LC model proposed by the INCLUD-ED project - Strategies for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe from Education (2006-2011)[2], funded by the European Commission's 6th Framework Programme and coordinated by the University of Barcelona, is the main theoretical and practical matrix that

1 https://www.ie.ulisboa.pt/projetos/lc4inclusion

2 https://portalrecerca.uab.cat/en/projects/includ-ed-strategies-for-inclusion-and-social-cohesion-in-europe--5

underpins the Portuguese "Comunidades de Aprendizagem" programme (INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2012). The central aim of this collaborative research project, involving 14 European countries, was to understand how schools can reduce educational inequalities and promote social cohesion through interventions based on scientific evidence and broad participatory processes (Flecha, 2015).

Unlike traditional models centred on the exclusive action of teachers or specialists, the INCLUD-ED model advocates transforming the school as a collective enterprise, where the whole community - pupils, teachers, families, local agents and researchers - contributes to building a fairer and more inclusive educational culture. This approach values diversity as a resource, recognising that improving learning and promoting equity are only sustainable when they result from collaborative processes based on dialogue and effective participation.

It is important to stress that the INCLUD-ED model is distinguished by its systemic transformation structure, based on four phases: awareness-raising, decision-making, selection of actions and consolidation, which guide the school from the intention to change to the institutionalisation of new forms of organisation and pedagogy. This process requires distributed leadership, ethical commitment and a culture of openness to criticism and innovation. It is precisely in this articulation between science, participation and transformative action that the model's originality and potential for promoting sustainable inclusive practices and teachers' professional growth lie.

In this sense, the INCLUD-ED model should not only be understood as a methodological proposal for inclusion, but as an epistemological framework for the shared construction of pedagogical knowledge. By making visible the knowledge emerging from collaborative practice and legitimising the experience of all the educational actors, the model is positioned as a powerful tool for rethinking the aims of school and for renewing teacher training within a horizon of social justice and educational equity.

The realisation of the principles of dialogic learning in everyday school life takes shape through a set of Successful Educational Actions (SEAs), identified and validated within the INCLUD-ED project on the basis of scientific evidence of their positive effects on learning and inclusion. These actions, which can be adapted to different contexts, share common characteristics: they are participatory, dialogue-based, intentionally inclusive and aimed at improving learning. Five of the main SEAs, recognised for their impact on students' development and teachers' professional growth, are discussed below (Flecha, 2015).

The first action to highlight is the Interactive Groups. This practice reorganises the classroom into small heterogeneous groups, each with the presence of an adult facilitator (teacher, family member, community volunteer,

among others). Under the coordination of the head teacher, the students collaborate on academic tasks with a high degree of cognitive demand, promoting interaction in solidarity, mutual support and respect for the diversity of rhythms and knowledge. For teachers, the Interactive Groups represent an opportunity for continuous observation, pedagogical differentiation in context and co-teaching with other adults, enriching their teaching strategies and their ability to respond to heterogeneity.

The second action are the Dialogic Readings, practices centred on the collective reading and debate of classic works of literature, science or philosophy. All participants, regardless of age, origin or academic status, share interpretations based on their personal experience, in a space for the collective construction of meaning. This approach fosters language skills, critical thinking, empathy and social cohesion. By dynamising Readings, teachers deepen their active listening, reconfigure their role as mediators of knowledge and build new forms of pedagogical relationships that transcend transmissive teaching.

The third action refers to the educational participation of families and the community. In this logic, adults from the community are not mere spectators of school life, but co-participants in defining objectives, stimulating activities and supporting learning. The regular presence of family members and volunteers in classrooms, libraries or themed workshops strengthens the bridges between the school and its surroundings, breaking cycles of mistrust and exclusion. For teachers, this openness requires new communication skills, intercultural sensitivity and the ability to network, all of which are central to their professional development.

The fourth action is dialogic teacher education, understood as a continuous process of updating and reflecting on practice, carried out collectively and based on relevant scientific readings. This in-service education takes place in the school context itself and is organised around seminars, pedagogical meetings or study groups, where teachers analyse practices, confront perspectives and co-construct knowledge. It is a model that values the knowledge of experience, dialogue between peers and the articulation between theory and practice, enhancing professional agency and pedagogical innovation.

The fifth action consists of inclusive and participatory decision-making, which concerns the way in which the school's management bodies and processes are structured. In this model, planning, evaluation and prioritisation are carried out with the effective involvement of students, families, teachers and community representatives, promoting co-responsibility and a sense of belonging. By taking on shared leadership roles and listening to traditionally marginalised voices, teachers develop mediation, negotiation and democratic management skills that enrich their professional repertoire.

In short, the SEAs are not a prescriptive catalogue of practices, but a dynamic set of strategies rooted in dialogical principles and a transformative vision of the school. Their implementation requires commitment, openness to change and an investigative attitude on the part of teachers. By operating simultaneously on students' learning processes and teachers' professional growth trajectories, these actions prove to be central elements in building more inclusive, fair and epistemically rich schools.

Within the framework of the INCLUD-ED model (Flecha, 2015), the transformation of a school into a LC does not take place linearly or immediately. It is a continuous, collective and dialogical process, guided by the logic of an upward spiral of change, where each stage drives the next, allowing for successive revisions and deepening.

The model defined by the INCLUD-ED Consortium (2012) identifies six structuring phases that shape this transformation path: raising awareness, dreams, prioritisation, planning, implementation and evaluation. These phases are interlinked and promote a type of shared leadership, based on scientific evidence and supported by decisions made in dialogue with the entire educational community (Admiraal et al., 2019).

The raising awareness phase marks the beginning and aims to involve all school actors in a shared understanding of the principles of dialogic learning and in recognising the transformative role of collective participation. The dreaming phase invites the community to aspirationally imagine the ideal school, activating teachers' ethical commitment to educational change. In the prioritisation phase, dreams are converted into achievable goals, defined in dialogue, promoting shared planning and the integration of the community voice in pedagogical decisions. The planning phase outlines the school's action plan, defining the SEAs to be implemented, the necessary resources and forms of follow-up, in a collaborative exercise that strengthens co-responsibility. Implementation integrates the SEAs into everyday school life, tackling challenges and promoting meaningful learning through joint reflection and contextualised practice. Finally, evaluation analyses the impact on the various dimensions of school life, allowing strategies to be readjusted and the cycle to be restarted with greater intentionality, constituting a moment of action research and professional development for teachers (Flecha, 2015).

Since 2018, the Portuguese Ministry of Education has been promoting the adoption of the *Learning Communities* programme in Portuguese public schools, with a special focus on the Educational Territories of Priority Intervention (TEIP). Portuguese schools, while respecting the principles of the INCLUD-ED model, have been developing variations adapted to their socio-cultural realities - such as dialogic readings with works of Lusophone literature or interactive groups with intercultural mediation - demonstrating

the flexibility and local relevance of SEAs. This contextual appropriation shows that the model is not a closed formula, but a structure that is open to dialogue with the school cultures and territories in which it operates.

FROM THE LC4INCLUSION PROJECT TO THE EBOOK 'LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION'

Combining an extensive nationwide study with longitudinal case studies, the LC4Inclusion project sought to analyse challenges faced by schools, strategies mobilised to combat inequality and, above all, the effects of LCs on participation, student learning and the professional growth of teachers.

The research design followed a mixed methodology (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017) and comprised a longitudinal study at national level, focusing on all 57 schools associated with the *Learning Communities* programme, an initiative of the Portuguese Direção-Geral da Educação (DGE), and an in-depth study in the form of 8 school clusters. For data collection, three questionnaires were used as research tools in the extensive study, applied at national level to all the schools identified as participating in the project, at three different times in consecutive years. In the in-depth study, individual and group interviews were carried out, as well as direct observations and documentary analyses. In all of the following the chapters, the processing, systematisation and presentation of data complied with all ethical issues laid down in the General Data Protection Regulation and had the favourable opinions of the Ethics Committee of the Instituto de Educação of the Universidade de Lisboa (issued on March, 5th 2021) and the Direção-Geral da Educação (DGE) (enquiry no. 0197700048) were obtained beforehand.

The eBook presented here is the result of the collaborative work carried out within the framework of LC4Inclusion and provides, in an open and accessible format, theoretical and empirical knowledge about LCs as collaborative environments that generate shared pedagogical knowledge, encourage critical teacher reflection and strengthen the participation, learning and well-being of all students.

It is based on the conviction that deepening the construction of knowledge around Learning Communities (LCs) is decisive for leveraging inclusive education and, at the same time, the professional development of teachers.

Aiming to inspire professional practice, it provides concrete examples of Successful Educational Actions, built in a dialogical way, such as interactive groups, dialogical tertulias or in-context training, which generate significant training experiences for teachers, promoting their continuous development and the reformulation of practices based on evidence. It also includes

testimonies from teachers, students, families and other educational actors involved in the case studies, showing how the processes of implementing learning communities boost peer learning dynamics, collaborative mentoring practices and pedagogical innovation, contributing to the enrichment of teachers' professional development. With the aim of informing public policies and teacher training programmes, this eBook also clarifies concepts, intervention models and success indicators and summarises facilitating factors, barriers and recommendations for the sustainable implementation of learning communities.

The study of Successful Educational Actions and the phases of the transformation process reveals promising dynamics, but also points to persistent challenges: what effective conditions support the meaningful participation of all school actors? To what extent do these communities actually manage to involve the diversity of their members in transformative learning experiences, active participation and the building of meaningful relationships? What obstacles remain in transposing a theoretically robust model into school realities marked by inequality, fragmentation and institutional constraints? And what scope is there for LCs to make sustained changes to professional practices and cultures within schools?

We invite you to discover the answers to these questions by reading this book.

The eBook is aimed at a wide audience: researchers in Education Sciences, teachers at all levels of education, school leadership teams, specialised technicians, trainers, higher education students and policy makers, inviting them to (re)imagine the school as a living community of professional learning and social inclusion, underpinned by rigorous knowledge and collective commitment.

THE ORGANISATION OF THE EBOOK

This eBook contains 9 texts. Apart from this Introduction, a foreword and a brief Epilogue, it consists of six main chapters.

Chapter 2, entitled *Professional learning communities: Theoretical perspectives and recommendations from a literature review*, by *Ana Paula Caetano and Ana Sofia Pinho,* analyses 183 empirical articles from the time period 2016-2023, obtained as part of a broader systematic literature review, to answer two central questions: i) what are the theoretical frameworks that underpin the studies analysed, highlighting seminal authors, theories and conceptual axes; ii) which recommendations do the studies propose, both for the creation and development of these communities and for research.

Chapter 3, entitled *Teacher professional development, conceptions and inclusive practices: A longitudinal study with primary and secondary school teachers and students*, by *Sofia Santos, João Piedade and Luís Tinoca,*

analyses the relationship between teacher professional development and inclusive conceptions and practices in Portuguese schools, centered on the perspectives of primary and secondary school teachers and students, based on the answers to closed questions at three different moments of application. Using validated instruments, the data reveals generally positive perceptions of inclusive education and the school environment, as well as the contribution of learning communities to teacher training. The importance of collaboration, distributed leadership and school culture in transforming pedagogical practices is emphasised, although challenges persist, such as the limited participation of families, resistance to change or time and resource constraints. Perceptions tend to be less positive in secondary education and among students with a history of retention. The conclusion highlights that, despite limitations and tensions, learning communities have the potential to foster an inclusive culture and promote significant changes in teaching.

Chapter 4, entitled *Inclusive education in learning communities: "where are we and where we want to go"*, by *Márcia Kamp, Carolina Carvalho, Ana Sofia Pinho, Daniela Semião and Ana Paula Caetano,* presents a study focused on analysing the content of teachers' and students' responses in relation to inclusive education and diversity, namely on positive aspects and changes to be implemented for the development of inclusive education. The questionnaires obtained 154 responses from teachers and 627 responses from pupils in school groups involved in the INCLUD-ED Portuguese Network of Learning Communities. Other publications have analysed the answers to the closed questions (Caetano et al., *in press;* Kamp et al., *in press*). We found that both teachers and students predominantly express positive perceptions of aspects of school inclusion, although they point to the need for further research. Some differences were identified between teachers and students. Teachers highlight the need for changes in the pedagogical organisation of classes and timetables, while students mention challenges related to safety, combating *bullying* and food quality.

Chapter 5, entitled *Learning communities and inclusion in schools. Four case studies in the Lisbon region*, by *Ana Paula Caetano, Márcia Kamp, Maria João Mogarro, Lina Costa and Tânia Henriques*, focuses on four case studies of school clusters involved in creating learning communities in the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region, in order to understand if and how this programme is favouring inclusion and the development of communities, observing educational practices, analysing the attitudes and perceptions of the various stakeholders and discussing the scope, involvement, barriers and student learning. These school groups are on the way to becoming learning communities and there are many positive indicators about the development of educational inclusion. The students' statements, however, denounce situations of exclusion, pointing to a tension between inclusive

discourses and practices. Teachers also reveal concerns about the lack of suitable conditions, resistance to building more horizontal relationships with students and collaborative relationships with colleagues and other partners, as well as difficulties in including students with more severe disabilities. This is a process that involves persistence, continuity and commitment, which is renewed and expanded every day and cannot be taken for granted.

Chapter 6, entitled *Learning communities and inclusion in schools: Four case studies in the Alentejo*, by *Maria José D. Martins, Teresa Oliveira and Amélia Marchão,* presents the results of four case studies carried out in school clusters in the Alentejo region. Using a qualitative methodology, which included interviews, focus groups, observations and document analysis, the data shows that although all the school clusters joined the project, the implementation of the SEAs was uneven, with the dialogical readings being the most widespread action. The participants - teachers, students, family members and volunteers - recognised positive impacts on academic learning, socio-emotional skills, school climate and family involvement, although they pointed out obstacles such as the lack of human and material resources, and the difficulty in generalising the transformation of schools into learning communities. The students' reports reveal enthusiasm for participatory practices, but also a critical awareness of situations of exclusion, especially among minority groups. The conclusion is that the transition to a truly inclusive and dialogic school is underway, but requires greater structural and cultural investment.

Chapter 7, entitled *Learning Communities as a Path to Inclusive Education: Potential, Challenges and Recommendations*, by *Sofia Freire, Otília Sousa and Maria João Mogarro,* takes an integrated look at educational inclusion, analysing the main systemic challenges that limit its implementation and identifying promising strategies for promoting it. To this end, the chapter begins with a summary presentation of the project and the objectives of the various studies it involved, as well as the number of participants involved in the various studies. It then presents some of the central characteristics of Learning Communities, highlighting two elements that emerge as central to the construction and maintenance of LCs and the benefits associated with them: participation by the educational community in the process of transforming the school and SEAs as spaces for dialogic learning. The studies carried out as part of the LC4Inclusion project are discussed in the light of these aspects. The chapter ends with a set of recommendations to support the development of Learning Communities.

Finally, a brief *Epilogue, Between Hope and Commitment*, written by *Ana Paula Caetano* and *Luís Tinoca,* proposes an open and inspiring reading of the path to educational inclusion, highlighting the LCs as spaces where people learn from the world and from others. Refusing a closed or conclusive vision, it invites us to continue on the collective path, recognising

both the structural challenges and the transformations already underway. It values the territory as an extension of the school, the need for a long term perspective as a condition for change and hope as a political choice supported by concrete practices. Far from closing the book, the epilogue invites us to reimagine it as a starting point for new educational possibilities.

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CHAPTER 2

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM A LITERATURE REVIEW

Ana Paula Caetano
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Ana Sofia Pinho
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

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Ana Paula Caetano
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Ana Sofia Pinho
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

INTRODUCTION

Professional learning communities (PLCs) are presented as a favourable context for school-centred, collaborative and dialogical processes of teacher professional development (Day, 1999; Vangrieken et al., 2015). Most of the research carried out has focused on analysing the processes of building PLCs and the contributions of these contexts to teacher professional learning and school organisation. Against this backdrop, it is particularly important to systematise the theoretical perspectives adopted in studies on PLCs, as well as the recommendations that emerge on this subject (Vangrieken et al., 2017).

In this chapter, we try to address these two aspects, based on an exploratory analysis of a *corpus* of 183 empirical articles, published from 2016 to 2023, obtained as part of a broader systematic literature review associated with the LC4Inclusion project.

The chapter is structured firstly around a description of the methodological procedures relating to this systematic literature review study. This is followed by a presentation of the results of this study, organised according to the two foci of analysis: (i) the theoretical references that underpin the studies analysed and (ii) the recommendations arising from these studies, both for the creation and development of PLCs and for research into them. The aim of this research is to contribute to the construction of knowledge on PLCs.

METHODOLOGICAL PROCEDURES

The results presented in this chapter stem from a systematic review of the wider literature on teacher professional learning communities and teacher professional development. The methodological procedures were based on Newman and Gough (2020) and the *Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Literature Reviews and Meta-Analysis* (PRISMA) protocol (Page et al., 2021). The literature search was carried out using the *Scopus* and *ISI Web of Science* databases, and the following keywords and Boolean operators were defined (Table 1):

TABLE 1. KEYWORDS AND BOOLEAN OPERATORS USED IN EACH DATABASE

Scopus	**ISI Web of Science**
Field: Article title, Abstract, Keywords	**Field: Topic**
{professional learning communit*} AND {teacher communit*} OR {professional development} AND {learning communit*}	"professional learning communit*" AND "teacher communit*" OR "professional development" AND "learning communit*"

Several inclusion and exclusion criteria were followed:

- inclusion criteria: (i) time frame: 2016 to 2023. To define the time frame, we used as a reference the literature review developed by Vangrieken et al. (2017), which focused on research carried out on professional learning communities in the period from 1990 to 2014; (ii) type of document: articles; (iii) access: open access articles, through the ULisboa VPN; (iv) language(s): articles written in Spanish, French, English and Portuguese;
- phase 2 (inclusion and exclusion criteria): after removing the duplicates, the following inclusion criteria were applied when reading the abstracts of the publications (in a first stage) and all the publications (in a second stage): (i) articles based on empirical studies whose research had been carried out in a school context, in primary and secondary education, or in the context of in-service teacher education, and (ii) studies whose object of study and research problem centred on the construction of PLCs and their relationship with teacher professional development. We therefore excluded (i) publications based on literature reviews and theoretical articles, (ii) studies carried out in pre-school, initial teacher education, or higher education contexts, and (iii) studies in which PLCs appeared as a research context, but not as an object of analysis.

In this way, 183 articles were identified, which made up the *corpus* for the systematic literature review. Content analysis techniques were applied to the *corpus*. Each publication was analysed on the basis of an organised reading form with the following fields: object of study, research questions

and/or objectives; theoretical perspectives; methodology (nature of the research, data collection techniques; data analysis techniques); context and participants; results; recommendations; limitations. Each of these fields was coded and categorised, mostly using an open procedure applied to the fields, although closed procedures were also used, with a previous categorical system applied to the specific field of methodology (nature of the research, data collection techniques, data analysis techniques). Descriptive statistics procedures were also applied, based on frequency counts (number of occurrences of the recording units) (Amado et al., 2017).

In this chapter, the reading forms of the 183 articles are subjected to an exploratory analysis of two of the fields: theoretical perspectives and recommendations. The aim is to answer the following questions:

- What theoretical perspectives are mobilised to investigate PLCs?
- What recommendations emerge from PLC-centred research?

RESULTS

Briefly, we can see that the 183 articles as a whole focus mainly on the construction of PLC, namely its development processes and factors, but also its potential for teacher learning. Qualitative approaches predominate, with the use of interviews and observations as the main data collection techniques and privileged recourse to content analyses, although mixed and quantitative studies also feature, with the use of statistical analyses. The results of the studies analysed highlight the role of actors and constraints on the development of PLCs, as well as characteristics that are relevant to their effectiveness, such as a collaborative culture and shared values, vision and missions. They also reveal important contributions of PLCs to the professional and personal development of teachers, and there are analyses that highlight contributions to the development of students and the school, albeit to a lesser extent.

In the following sections, we highlight the analyses centred on the theoretical references that underpin the *corpus* analysed and the systematisation of the recommendations arising from the studies, both for the creation and development of PLCs and for research into them.

THEORETICAL REFERENCES AND FOUNDATIONS UNDERPINNING THE STUDIES ANALYSED

Based on the analysis of the "theoretical perspectives" field, a first aspect to highlight is the diversity of terms that the authors of the studies use to refer to and theorise about professional learning communities. On the one hand, there are studies that use the term 'professional learning communities', theoretically basing their work on authors who use this name (e.g. Admiraal et al., 2019; Hord, 2004, Sigurõardóttir, 2010; Stoll et al., 2006); on the other hand, there are studies that use other terms, such as teacher communities (Hou et al., 2010, and Levine & Marcus, 2010, referred to in Tsiotakis & Jimoyannis, 2016; Vangrieken et al., 2017), research learning communities (Mintz et al., 2021), communities of practice (Wenger, 1998; Lave & Wenger, 1991, referred to in e.g. Geletu & Mihiretie, 2023; Yoo et al., 2017), professional communities (Lima, 2012; Little, 2012; Lieberman & Miller, 2008, referred to by Tannehill & MacPhail, 2017), networks of learning communities (Earl & Katz, 2006, referred to by Mintz et al., 2021).

To explain these results, we cross-reference them with those of the systematic literature review carried out by Vangrieken et al. (2017), in which the authors compare the concepts of professional learning communities and communities of practice (CoP). According to the authors, these concepts originate from different theoretical currents: PLCs from learning organisation theories and CoPs from social or situated learning theories. As they make clear, although both PLCs and CoPs focus on the professional learning of their members through interactive processes, and although there are differences of a theoretical nature and in the application of the concept within each frame of reference, the authors consider that there is a greater role for external leaders in the case of PLCs and that they are centred on the social, professional and personal needs of teachers and are therefore located in school contexts. The same understanding extends to all the studies that make up our *corpus*, although the circumscription to teachers is not the common understanding of many of the authors of the studies we analysed. In fact, Vangrieken et al. (2017) state that PLCs include other "individuals with an interest in schools" (p. 49). To summarise,

> PLCs and CoPs usually have the same aims, strategies, and concepts with respect to professional learning. Hence, both terms are often used interchangeably. In practice both frameworks show many similarities as well, and it is not always possible to clearly delineate one from the other. As such, CoPs' [communities of practice] participants learn together by focusing on problems directly related to their profession, often by sharing stories about their daily practice. Similarly, PLCs' [professional learning communities] intent is to promote teachers' professional development in non-traditional ways, address social, professional, and personal needs of their members, and focus on collaboration. As PLCs and CoPs frequently use the

> same strategies in order to achieve similar goals in practice, there is a lot of conceptual confusion in the field, leaving the boundaries between both frameworks blurred. (Vangrieken et al., 2017, p. 50)

In light of the above, many of the studies we analysed refer to a more comprehensive set of theoretical frameworks, as we will see below.

In the theoretical frameworks presented by the authors of our literature review, we can see which seminal works stand out, as well as the themes that are emphasised to support empirical research. The seminal works and literature reviews that support the clarification of the concept of professional learning communities and identify their main characteristics and facilitating factors are very recurrent. The most frequently cited authors and their respective works include, in alphabetical order: Admiraal et al., 2012; Avallos, 2011; Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Dufour & Dufour, 2004; Dufour & Eaker, 1998, 2002; Hord, 1997, 2004; Little, 2010; Louis & St Marks, 1998; Louis et al., 1996; McLauglin & Talbert, 2006; Kennedy, 2016; Roy & Hord, 2016; Stoll et al., 2006; Stoll & Kools, 2017; Vangrieken et al., 2017; Vescio et al., 2008; Walton et al., 2022; Wenger, 1998, referred to in studies by Johannesson, 2020; Neve & Devos, 2017; Wang et al., 2017; Zheng et al., 2016, among others. Still, with regard to the origin of the concept, Vangrieken et al. (2017) refer to Dufour and Eaker (1988), considering that these authors translated the concept of PLCs from the context of learning organisations introduced by Senger (1990) to school contexts.

In an attempt to delimit the concept and explain the characteristics of effective PLCs, definitions such as those of Hord (1997) and DuFour (2004), cited in the studies under analysis, stand out:

> · The core characteristics of PLCs include shared values and vision, collective learning and application, shared personal practice, shared and supportive leadership, and supportive conditions in terms of organisational structure and social relationships (Hord, 1997). (Zhang & Yuan, 2020, p. 230)

> · DuFour (2004) expanded on these dimensions by introducing six traits of successful professional learning communities: (1) a shared focus on learning; (2) collaborative relationships that are centred on common beliefs, values and vision, and engender mutual trust and respect; (3) mutual inquiry into effective practice; (4) translating knowledge into practice; (5) maintaining a continuous cycle of improvement and development; and (6) tangible impacts on practice (Yoo et al., 2017, pp. 383-384).

> · Olivier and Huffman (2016) proposed a conceptual model for PLC comprising five dimensions: shared and supportive leadership, shared values and vision, collaborative learning and application, shared personal practice, and supportive conditions (Mahdi et al., 2023, p. 471).

In summary, the analysis of definitions of PLCS identifies six characteristics, which are constellations of processes: shared values, mission and visions;

a focus on the individual and collective learning of professionals and students, including changing practices; collaboration, reflective dialogue and shared practices; a school culture and climate of trust, balancing security and challenge; favourable conditions of support from organisational structures and leadership; a continuous cycle of development; the creation of networks and partnerships with the outside world, including communities and political leaders. These characteristics must be combined to create a PLC, without there being a single path, and it is not expected that they all have to be present, although preferably they are all important for its development and sustainability.

With regard to the theories that are named as core to the basis of the studies, the authors refer to a very varied set of theories, of different scope, most of which are in the sphere of theories of change and learning, the most frequent being theories relating to learning organisations, theories of situated social learning and social, sociocultural and socioconstructionist theories (e.g. Lave & Wenger, 1991; Putnam & Borko, 2000; Wenger, 1998; Wenger et al, 2002, referred to, for example, by Karemee et al., 2019; Qvortrup, 2019; Trilaksono et al., 2019; Woodland & Mazur, 2018). Some authors draw inspiration from multifaceted, multireferential and multidimensional theories (e.g. Antinluoma et al., 2022; Prabjandee, 2019). Systemic and ecological theories, such as social systems and complex systems theories, as well as activity systems theories, including action theories, are often referenced (e.g. Mintrop & Charles, 2017; Qvortrup, 2019; Wang, 2016; Yan & Yang, 2019). Other specific theories of learning and change are mentioned, such as theories of collaborative learning (e.g. Ismail et al., 2019; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017), transformative learning (e.g. Garcia-Carrion et al, 2017), networked professional learning (e.g. Mintz et al., 2021) and ecological learning (e.g.Tsiotakis & Jimoyiannis, 2016). More recently, there have been references to decolonial theories (e.g. Saito et al, 2018), andragogical theories (e.g. Irby et al., 2022), social network theories (e.g. Woodland & Mazur, 2018), among others.

Another observation is that the scope of the communities considered by the authors of the articles varies greatly, from authors who situate the PLCs in a broad way, covering a group of schools or the entire school as a community (e.g., Admiraal et al., 2019), to those who discuss the classroom as a learning community (e.g., Tan & Hairon, 2016), 2019), to those who discuss the classroom as a learning community (e.g. Tan & Hairon, 2016), with the majority placing themselves somewhere in between these two poles, such as communities formed by teachers from different departments or from the same department in the school (e.g. Doğan & Yurtseven, 2018), while some go beyond this concept by analysing networks of communities that collaborate with each other (e.g. Gómez-Martinez & Romero-Rodríguez, 2022) or virtual communities that are not limited to a single school (e.g. Tsiotakis & Jimoyiannis, 2016).

Still on the subject of the general characterisation of learning communities, in addition to the characteristics and factors that facilitate their development, there are some texts that refer to authors who delve deeper into the subject of the development of these communities, talking about stages of development and levels of maturity. For example, IsaBelle and Martineau Vachon (2017) refer to 5 stages of development, taking inspiration from the 3 stages outlined by Huffman and Hiip (2003): "l'initiation, l'implantation et l'institutionnalisation où, à chaque étape, la direction d'école joue un rôle essentiel." (IsaBelle & Vachon, 2017, p. 91). Other authors propose a conceptualisation of maturity levels, such as Owen (2016) or Huppert and Johnson (2010), referenced in the studies by Ovenden-Hope et al. (2018) and Owen (2016), for example. Here they highlight aspects relating to the deprivatisation of practices, collegial processes and well-being as central elements in mature PLCs:

> · At the core of PLCs operating at the "mature" level is the notion of transforming the concept of teaching as privatised practice. This shift in concept is focused on deprivatisation of classrooms and working with colleagues. Teaching within this conceptual model emphasises genuine collaboration, joint problem-solving, debate, constructive observation and feedback and support for collegial learning. Changes in classroom practice occur over an extended timeframe. Furthermore, through the supportive work with other colleagues, issues of teacher isolation and burnout due to lack of autonomy and support, and also boredom, are potentially addressed (Chemiss 1995). (cited by Owen, 2016, p. 406)

> · Teacher wellbeing seems to be central to the notion of mature and effective PLCs, with wellbeing defined as "the combination of feeling good and functioning well" (Huppert and Johnson 2010). (cited by Owen, 2016, p. 404)

With regard to the challenges and barriers to community development, there are several studies referenced by the authors, including Admiraal et al. (2019), Kalkan (2016), Schaap and Bruijn (2018), Somprach et al. (2017) and Zhang et al. (2017). In a brief summary, we highlight aspects such as unfavourable organisational structure, traditional school culture and incompetent school leadership and external accountability factors, which are some of the obstacles mentioned by Zhang et al. (2017), based on authors such as DuFour (1999), Fernandez (2002), Giles and Hargreaves (2006), Hairon and Dimmock (2012), Harris, (2013), Hord and Sommers (2008), Kilbane (2010), Louis (2006), McLaughlin and Talbert (2007), Nehring and Fitzsimons (2011), Talbert (2010), Wells and Feun (2007) and Wood (2007). More specifically, there are also issues of inadequate time management and accountability and work overload, as well as a lack of collaborative culture, misunderstanding of the meaning of a PLC and teacher passivity, among others:

> · Some studies discussed the challenges faced by the school members to empower PLC. Insufficient scheduling, unsupportive leadership from administrators, an unfavourable accountability system, and a lack of teacher collaboration in culture were cited by instructors as impediments to PLC implementation (Zhang et al., 2017). Other difficulties include teachers' verburdened workloads and a lack of a full understanding of the concept and practise of PLC (Hairon & Tan, 2017). Furthermore, the administrators presented inadequate financial power, passive teachers, an unattractive accountability framework, and an external resource crisis as barriers to PLC success. These aspects are related to the concept of school climate (Jafar et al., 2022, p. 308).

In the general characterisation of learning communities and ofthe facilitating factors and the barriers to their development, emphasis is given in the theoretical foundations to some more specific themes, identifying and presenting the thinking of authors who support the empirical studies under analysis. These themes are grouped around three main axes:

1. the teacher and their training - where references appear to the themes of professional development, learning, change, knowledge and the teacher's professional identity, here integrating references to concepts of collaborative professionalism, professional capital, recognition and empowerment (eg. Darling-Hammond, 1990; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012; Hipp & Weber, 2008; Hirsh & Hord, 2008; Miller, 2012), as well as professional development models such as the enquiry, reflective and collaborative model (e.g. Darling-Hammond & Richardson, 2009; Talbert, 2010). These references appear in various studies researched, such as Gómez del Castillo and Aguilera (2018), Gonçalves et al. (2020), Joo (2020), Lee and Lee (2018), Shdaifat and Al-Huson (2020), Strand and Emstad (2020) and Wright et al. (2019);
2. collaborative learning - with an unfolding of concepts related to dialogical, collective and ecological learning (e.g. Day & Sammons, 2013; Freire, 2002, 2005; Habermas, 1987; Leithwood et al, 1998; Weathers, 2011), mentioned in several of the studies we analysed (e.g. Garcia-Carrion et al., 2017; Gómez del Castillo & Aguilera, 2018; Valckx et al., 2020; Wennergren, 2016; Zubiri-Esnaola et al., 2020);
3. Leadership - in addition to authors who propose typologies of leadership styles, such as Davies (2009, cited by Somprach et al., 2017), who mentions nine leadership styles: strategic style (Davies & Davies 2009; Quong & Walker 2010), transformational (Leithwood, 1992; Northhouse, 2001), by invitation (Lynch, 2012; Purkey & Novak , 2008; Purkey & Siegel, 2003), ethical (Brown & Trevino, 2006; Starratt, 2004), learning (Kohlreiser, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2016), political (Greenstein, 2004; King, 2002; Nye, 2008; Pfeffer, 1992), entrepreneurial (Covin & Slevin, 1991; Webber & Scott, 2008), collaborative (Chiangkul, 2010; Rubin, 2002; Saratna,

2014; Stamapoulos, 2012), sustainable (Hargreaves & Fink, 2003); there is a predominance of references to transformative, distributed/shared and collaborative leadership (eg. Garcia-Carrion et al, 2017; Gómez del Castillo & Aguilera, 2018; Karemee et al., 2019; Qvortrup, 2019; Schaap & Bruijn, 2018; Trilaksono et al., 2019; Wennergren, 2016).

There are also specific aspects relating to induction, educational inclusion and participation, among others.

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE STUDIES

Based on the limitations identified in the studies by their authors, they propose recommendations for further research into PLC. The recommendations identified in our literature review point to a set of measures to be considered for the construction, development and sustainability of CAPs, as well as the research that needs to continue to be carried out in this field.

Recommendations for the creation and development of professional learning communities

Table 2 summarises the main ideas that emerged in relation to recommendations to be taken into account when creating and developing PLCs.

The most frequent are the precautions to be taken to develop a collaborative culture and creative collective learning, namely through recognition policies, structured structures, rules and opportunities, democratic, dialogical and collaborative processes which favour a positive climate and a stable sense of belonging.

There are also many references in the studies analysed to the challenges of exercising visionary, concerted and shared leadership to support these communities, creating policies, structural conditions and dynamics for democratic and collaborative participation, involving not only teachers, but also pupils, staff and families, while also alluding to alignment with district/regional initiatives.

A third large group of recommendations concerns the creation of conditions that favour the professional development of teachers and other professionals, either through informal processes or through structured training that favours processes of enquiry, reflection and evaluation/monitoring.

Drawing on teachers' experience and research into their practice could be a means of empowering these professionals, while at the same time supporting the organisation, implementation and monitoring of communities rooted in the problems and ambitions of their members.

TABLE 2. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PLCS

Dimensions	Indicators	Total studies
Collaborative culture and creative collective learning	Facilitate feelings of belonging over time	45
	Adapting models to specific contexts	
	Positive and supportive climate	
	Includes structured rules and opportunities	
	Importance of communication between everyone	
	Dialogic PLC	
	Facilitating reflective dialogues	
	Develop changes in culture, times, structures, relationships	
	Informal organisation	
	Culture of democratisation	
	Developing recognition	
	Active and collaborative involvement of teachers	
	Technological modalities for sharing acquired knowledge	
	Designing activities as friends who help each other with instructional design	
	Providing structural support to explore learning and creative writing by teachers	
Shared and supportive leadership	Role of leadership in creating conditions and structures that facilitate meetings/collaborative work	37
	Formulating school policies, by administrators	
	Challenging, visionary, concerted leadership	
	Bottom-up approaches - School participation	
	Leadership training	
	Leadership styles	
	Relationship with macro and meso levels	
Focus on the professional development of teachers / other professionals	Development at general and specific levels	25
	Through training, for example	
	Meaningful professional learning	
	Consider learning dynamics	
Professional development through research and evaluation	Carry out a study prior to implementing PLC, on processes for organising PLC	23
	Guiding teachers to conduct research	
	Use of social network analysis by teachers	
	Study with documentation by teachers	
	Evaluate changes: in school culture, students, teachers, learning	
	Empowering teachers to investigate their practice	
	Bottom-up approach focussed on experience	
	Taking care of design	

Dimensions	Indicators	Total studies
Focus on student learning and the classroom	Teachers' collective responsibility for curriculum development and learning	19
	Clear objective for student learning	
	Prior diagnosis	
	Planning activities	
	Creating opportunities for student learning	
	Assessing learning	
	Levels of student motivation and engagement	
	Good classroom/behaviour management	
Shared values, vision and mission	Everyone's commitment to the school's objectives / school's educational project	15
	Culture and values of harmony, social justice and inclusion	
	Commitment to more inclusive teaching / inclusive education	
	Alignment of vision with integrated curriculum	
	Development of teachers' cultural awareness through training	
Regulatory process by the system	Agency supervision	11
	Accountability at political level: · Regulation by the Ministry of Education / politicians · Regulation and supervision by local agencies / local authorities · Identify tools for system regulation · Assessment practices with tests	
Networks and partnerships with the outside world / Openness to partnerships	Including: · PLC networks at district level · Partnerships with higher education researchers and experts to deepen work in the field · Networks with parents and local communities · Social networks	9

Still relevant, but with less presence in all the articles analysed, we find recommendations for communities to focus on student learning, which will involve managing curricula, classroom environments and assessment in a way that favours it, taking care of diagnostic processes, planning and the participatory and motivated involvement of students.

It is also proposed that special attention be paid, when building the vision and mission of these PLCs, to sharing and integrating common values and goals that focus on aspects such as social justice, social harmony and inclusion, aligned with the culture, organisation of schools and the pedagogical *habitus* of teachers.

The political accountability of national and local authorities, as well as school managers, is also emphasised, in order to favour regulation of the system.

Finally, there are several references to the creation of networks and partnerships with the outside world, namely networks between communities, at

district level, partnerships with experts and researchers in higher education, as well as networks involving families and local communities.

Recommendations for research

With regard to the main themes identified as focuses for further research into PLC, a number of issues stand out, not surprisingly most of which centre on factors and barriers to the development of these communities, as well as teacher development/learning/change/knowledge.

Among the *factors and barriers*, there are some suggestions of issues to be futher explored, which we have summarised:

- What barriers hinder the development of PLCs?
- How are PLCsimplemented by political leaders and decision-makers?
- What is the role of families and their participation in PLCs?
- How can emerging technologies support nationally dispersed teachers?

Still associated with factors and barriers, more specific focuses stand out, such as:

- What factors favour collaboration and the engagement of participants?
- What characteristics of group dynamics favour effective teamwork?
- How does reflective dialogue take place?
- How do social relationships develop within PLCs, particularly between teachers and students, between teachers and other players?

With regard to the *specificities of* PLC*contexts*, examples are given of some questions to be explored further, which point to the study of how PLC contexts are characterised in terms of organisational variables in relation to individual ones, structural characteristics of the school, cultural issues and teachers' working conditions.

With regard to *teachers*, there are many suggestions of issues to be explored in greater depth, in particular the causes and processes of professional development and the impact of PLCson teachers' knowledge, identity and practices. For example:

- What elements of the contexts and PLCshave the most impact on teachers' professional development?
- How is professional knowledge developed at a collective level in the PLCs?
- How does collaborative learning between teachers develop?

· What impact does action research have on teacher learning and change?

· What impact do PLCshave on developing a sense of self-efficacy?

· How can practices be deprivatised in PLCs?

· What effective and efficient classroom practices are observed in PLCs?

· How effective are PLCsin developing teachers' knowledge and teaching practices in the long term?

· How do teachers take into account the characteristics of their students when building their professional identity?

· What support do teachers need to make PLCsproductive?

Also associated with the research on teachers, there are suggestions regarding their individual characterisation, considered to be little explored in the studies, such as:

how do the teachers involved in the PLCscharacterise themselves in terms of:

· perceptions of the PLCs?

· self-esteem?

· empathy?

· well-being?

· satisfaction with the profession?

· sense of self-efficacy?

Leadership should also be studied further, with emphasis on questions about its characterisation and its role in the development of PLCs. More specifically:

· How is the work of leaders characterised, in terms of dimensions such as time management, leadership style, motivation, ability to achieve results?

· What is the relationship between leadership practices and PLCs?

· What impact do leadership styles have on the development of these communities?

· How can leadership in PLCspromote collective responsibility, collaboration, student performance, reflective dialogue and a deprivatised practice?

· How do headmasters position themselves in school networks and how does this positionality relate to the success of collaborative networks?

· What are the needs of critical friends at different PLC stages?

Also relevant, although not as frequent, are questions about *student learning and networks*, which can be summarised as follows:

- What impact do PLCs have on student learning and collaborative learning between students?
- What links teacher development and student learning?
- How are networks established and developed, particularly in industry-university-school partnerships?

Finally, there are recommendations for further study into the factors that favour the sustainability of PLCs, as this is a weak point of many PLCs pointed out by the studies.

Taking into account the identification of limitations in the studies carried out, the authors of our literature review also point out recommendations for *methodological aspects of the research*, which are summarised in Table 3 below.

TABLE 3. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RESEARCH METHODOLOGICAL PROCESSES

Research design	**Total number of studies**
In-depth study	20
Quantitative experiment	5
Comparative study	7
Applied and participatory methodology	5
Multiple methods and approaches	4
Extent and representativeness	
Generalisation caution	14
More PLCs and more members in different schools	11
Having a conceptual model to root research in	3
Involvement of researchers and research participants	5
Data collection process	
Direct observation	8
Interviews	5
Multiple data collection processes	2
Audio and video recordings	2
Questionnaires	1
Process of analysing and interpreting data	
Modelling and pattern analysis processes	7
Separate analysis of schools and kindergartens	1
Process of validating results	
Returning analyses - Questioning participants about the data, given the involvement of the researcher-teacher-designer	1
Validation with student results	1
Results dissemination process	
Balancing between reporting rigorous statistics and capturing qualitative nuances	1

With regard to research methods and approaches, the first observation is that there is a great deal of methodological diversity. However, the vast majority of recommendations found in the studies in our literature review point to qualitative, in-depth studies, highlighting longitudinaldesigns and multiple approaches, possibly with applied, participatory or comparative strategies. However, the studies also point to the need for caution in the generalisation that this type of approach requires and the importance of replication in other school systems and countries. There are also recommendations to carry out research focussed on more representative samples and with broader PLCs, with more members and integrating different schools. As far as data collection processes are concerned, direct observation by participant and external researchers, as well as interviews are among the

most frequently mentioned techniques, which can be combined with each other, as well as audio and video recordings. In data analysis, suggestions for the development of modelling and pattern analysis practices predominate. The validation of the results, with the analyses being returned to the participants, including teachers and students, and the dissemination of the results are also worth mentioning, although only to a limited extent in all the studies analysed.

FINAL REFLECTION

The purpose of this study was to present an exploratory analysis of theoretical perspectives and recommendations arising from a *corpus* of 183 articles, from which a systematic review of the literature has been carried out. The results presented show that teacher professional learning communities are a complex construct, based on diverse and multidimensional theories, which underlines the complexity of the conceptual delimitation processes of this construct. This complexity is also reinforced by the recommendations for the research agenda emerging from the studies that make up the *corpus*, which emphasise the importance of continuing to investigate the processes linked to the construction and development of professional learning communities, as well as (re)thinking the methodological designs adopted. These conclusions allow us to point out the educational and research potential attributed to teacher professional learning communities in the field of teacher education and professional development in the school context.

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CHAPTER 3

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, INCLUSIVE CONCEPTIONS AND PRACTICES: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY WITH PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS AND STUDENTS

Sofia Santos
Faculdade de Motricidade Humana, Universidade de Lisboa
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

João Piedade
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Luís Tinoca
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

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Sofia Santos
Faculdade de Motricidade Humana, Universidade de Lisboa
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

João Piedade
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Luís Tinoca
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to analyse teachers' and students' perceptions of inclusive education and the practices implemented in their school contexts, as well as to understand the extent to which these practices are related to teacher professional development. By analysing data collected over three different periods, the aim is to identify how participation in inclusive learning communities influences teachers' conceptions of inclusion, their teaching practices and their training path. By articulating the voices of different school actors, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the factors that promote or hinder the construction of truly inclusive educational environments.

Inclusive education requires a school-curricular transformation in terms of conceptions, practices and attitudes, with the most recent national educational reform reinforcing the need for adjusted responses to each case and for all students, in regular classroom contexts, considering diversity as an asset and an opportunity for change (Decree-Law 54/2018).

Schools must foster stimulating learning environments at all levels of education, capable of managing knowledge systems and analysing the values and assumptions underlying institutional practices (Senge, 1998). Personal and interpersonal learning, along with the way the school learns as an organisation, are collectively understood as the key to change and success (Admiraal et al., 2021). In this process, teachers play a fundamental role,

not only by delivering curriculum content, but also by shaping classroom culture, influencing opportunities, academic experiences and student engagement, and driving innovation within the education system (Christensen & Jerrim, 2025). A structured and inclusive school provides its professionals with the opportunity to learn and grow.

Teachers' professional development is influenced by a variety of factors (Carroll et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022; McCallum, 2020) including: structural-political, intrinsic and personal (e.g., motivation, personal autonomy), school-related components (e.g., interpersonal relationships, school policies, quality of the learning environment, support services, teaching materials and workload); and systemic (e.g., bureaucracy, increasing accountability, external supervision, changing student and parent behaviour, professional development opportunities, and school climate). These factors shape what is often considered the most critical: understanding how teachers think, plan their daily lessons, and make decisions regarding their students' teaching--learning process.

Teachers should have professional knowledge, skills and positive attitudes towards diversity, continuously updated through processes of ongoing learning and the transformation of practices. This goes beyond formal training times and takes in consideration the dynamic interaction between elements (Enthoven et al., 2023). This informal learning should create conditions for emotional-intellectual learning and recognise the contribution teachers make to their own professional growth (Day, 2017; Ogbuanya & Shodipe, 2021).

One of the most current approaches to professional development involves continuous training and the establishment of professional learning communities. Through ongoing and active professional updating, collaboration among teachers, and the development of interdependent and trusting relationships, these communities seeks to improve and innovate teaching practices for educational success (Admiraal et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024; Senge, 1998).

Despite the diversity of definitions, the consensus is established: these communities emphasise a shared vision – comprising common values and norms, alongside collective participation and problem-solving through reflection and collaboration among educational agents, in direct relation with the broader community (Christensen & Jerrin, 2025; DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Stoll et al., 2006; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017).

Collaboration stands as a cornerstone of professional development as it enables teachers, as a team, to collectively identify the school's needs for improvement, and adapt practices accordingly (Meyer et al., 2022). Exploration, reflection and discussion within the school context arise from the real-world environments in which teachers operate and are characterised by being constructive rather than prescriptive, supported by ongoing

follow-up processes (Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2017). This approach highlights the reciprocal relationship between students' knowledge and behaviour and the development of teachers' professional skills (Vangrieken et al., 2015; Woodcok & Anderson, 2025). Theoretical and methodological discussion of teaching-learning processes – particularly through informal and practice-embedded approaches (e.g. classroom monitoring and teacher study groups - Woodcock & Hardy, 2017), will lead to conceptual, practical and attitudinal changes, that will contribute to meaningful and sustained transformation in educational practice (Christensen & Jerrin, 2025).

The literature has shown that teachers participating in learning communities tend to improve their teaching-learning strategies and their ability to recognise and respond to students' needs (Meyer et al., 2022; Vangrieken et al., 2015), often engaging in discussions around innovative approaches (Admiraal et al., 2021). The main interventions implemented in schools aim to promote teachers' professional development and encourage collaborative work and learning (e.g. sharing knowledge and experiences between colleagues, peer observation, and mentoring/tutoring), while also focusing on aligning with the school's vision, school reorganisation and leadership training (Admiraal et al., 2021). However, the authors note that participation in research projects is not considered to be a measure of success. In fact, low engagement and dropout rates are observed, often due to the lack of interest – an issue also reported at national level (Tinoca et al., in press).

In the context of ongoing professional learning, several studies highlight the added value of interdisciplinary and collaborative work in planning lessons and discussing assessment processes. Teachers view these practices as highly beneficial for their professional growth, and advocate for a stronger focus on developing classroom-based competences and activities (Tinoca et al., in press). The use of digital tools, formative assessment strategies and collaborative learning, more feedback and session planning are some of the practices highlighted by teachers who participate in professional learning communities (Yoo & Jang, 2022). Other studies emphasize the positive impact of collaboration on improving instructional practices, critically reflecting on classroom dynamics (Christensen & Jerrin, 2025), and reformulating educational actions (Tinoca et al., in press).

In turn, research analysing the impact of people-centred leadership and school culture on professional development suggests that these factors are closely linked to the active involvement of students in pedagogical and adaptive change within the classroom and broader school contexts (Tinoca et al., in press). Effective leadership focuses on building and sustaining inclusive school cultures, fostering support and collaboration, and promoting the well-being of both teachers and students (Admiral et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020), and fostering teachers' continuous learning for students' educational success (Holmgren & Sjöberg, 2022; Lee et al.,

2022). Professional learning communities are formed through the dynamic interplay between individuals, teaching communities and specific educational contexts. This leads to shifts in teaching behaviours, where learning becomes a shared, ongoing responsibility, rather than an individual task. Tinoca et al. (in press) report increased involvement from school governing bodies, teachers and students, but less engagement from families and other professional staff, highlighting the need for strategies to strenghten inclusive participation. The same study also notes that teachers express a sense of belonging and an inspiration to elevate quality standards of practice through active listening to all educational stakeholders (Tinoca et al., in press). While some research identifies a generally positive attitude among teachers toward inclusion, other studies highlight concerns regarding the effective implementation of inclusive practices, often stemming from teachers' lack of confidence in their own abilities (Lindner et al., 2023; Woodcock & Anderson, 2025). Teachers who embrace inclusive education as a contextualised, student-centred approach tend to adopt flexible and dynamic practices, that go beying academic achievement (Nordengren, 2019). These practices promote participation and empower students to engage in informed decision-making (Alves et al., 2020), contributing to the creation of inclusive and healthy school climates (Costa et al., 2022; Quaglia et al., 2020). Furthermore, educators who hold more collaborative and informed conceptions of inclusion are more likely to implement inclusive practices in their classrooms (Ferreira et al., 2024).

Research has shown that students, another key subgroup within the education system, generally hold positive perceptions of inclusive education and the ways in which they are acknowledged and supported at school. This contributes to greater cohesion among classmates and reflects students' awareness of teachers' efforts to individualise instruction and diversify tasks and resources (Kamp et al., in press).

According to several authors, higher levels of teacher professional development are associated with improved academic and behavioural outcomes for students, as well as more positive outcomes for the teachers themselves: greater job satisfaction, shared professional vision, increased self-efficacy, more robust pedagogical practices and enhanced well-being (Liang et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2020). Participation in both short- and long-term formal training programmes is regarded as a meaningful way for teachers to enhance their skills and improve the quality of their professional practices. Importantly, these efforts are often driven not only by institucional demands or school policies, but also by teacher's own desire to meet the everyday challhenges they face in classroom (Tinoca et al., in press). The authors further highlight that the perceived impact on students' development, a strong sense of ethical responsibility, and the pursuit of professional coherence are among the key motivators that lead teachers to deepen their

knowledge. Studies also suggest that special education teachers tend to adopt more inclusive perspectives and practices, while primary school teachers report feeling better prepared than their secondary school counterparts to address student diversity (Woodcok & Hardy, 2017).

The outcomes of professional development for teachers vary significantly across contexts (Reeves et al., 2017), and are influeneed by sociodemographic characteristics (e.g. age, gender, years of professional experience) all of which affect engagement in professional development actions (Liang et al., 2022; Valckx et al., 2020). Despite some inconclusive results on the impact of the gender variable (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017), some studies indicate that female teachers are more likely to engage in reflective dialogue (Christensen & Jerrin, 2025; Valckx et al., 2020). The effectiveness of learning communities also depends on the workplace environment and prevailing contextual values (Christensen & Jerrin, 2025), with noticeable variations in outcomes across different countries and cultures (Reeves et al., 2017).

From the students' perspective, some studies suggest that perceptions of inclusive education are generally positive, with no significant differences based on gender or whether students receive learning support. However, students who do receive support measures tend to express slightly more favourable views (Kamp et al., in press). Those who have not experienced grade retention report more positive perceptions of inclusion compared to peers who have been retained, a difference that is statistically significant. According to the same authors, secondary school students tend to have less positive views of inclusive education, potentially due to the increased complexity of curricular content and time constraints, which may heighten their need for support . Moreover, inclusive practices appear to decline as students advance through school levels (Kamp et al., in press).

Even though professional development is widely recognised as a key factor in fostering educational success and meeting the demands of today's education systems (Muijs et al., 2014), various studies point to a lack of evidence in this area. There remains a gap between research and practice, with findings often limited to specific contexts and countries and still largely inconclusive (Florian & Camedda, 2019; Zhang et al., 2020). This justifies the relevance of further exploring the relationship between professional development and inclusive conceptions and practices, particularly from the perspective of two key groups in the educational journey: teachers and students.

METHOD

This research adopted a longitudinal, descriptive-comparative quantitative design, in order to monitor changes in perceptions over a three-years period.

INSTRUMENT

Data was collected through the administration of two instruments to primary and secondary school students and teachers.

The *Inclusive Education Questionnaire* was based on the principles of the *Index for Inclusion* (Booth & Ainscow, 2002), which conceptualises school inclusion across three interrelated domains: cultures, policies and practices. The multi-perceptive approach included the voices of primary and secondary school teachers and students, in order to capture the complexity of inclusive educational contexts. Two parallel versions of the questionnaire were developed: one for *teachers* comprising 66 items distributed across three dimensions - perceptions of diversity and inclusion, inclusive practices and inclusive cultures (Appendix 1), of which 49 were closed-ended, 2 were open-ended and 15 related to personal and professional background; and one for *students* consisting of 38 items organised into 24 closed-ended itens,with an unidimensional structure (Appendix 2), 2 open-ended and 12 socio-demographic items (Semião et al., 2024). All closed-ended items were rated on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly disagree) to 5 (Strongly agree). Validation of the instrument included independent convenience samples (Semião et al., 2024): teachers (n=305) and students (n=82) from public and private schools, rural and urban, from the 2nd and 3rd cycles of basic education, and secondary education. All items were evaluated by 10 experts in inclusive education regarding their relevance, clarity and simplicity, with content validity indices (CVI) above .90, with an average scale CVI exceeding .98, confirming the semantic and conceptual adequacy of the questionnaire. Reliability was confirmed by overall internal consistency (αteachers =.83, teachers; αstudents=.95) and between dimensions ($\alpha \geq .80$), and temporal stability, via test-retest technique, with scores of r=.92 and r=.80, respectively. Exploratory factor analysis using the *principal axis factoring* method with promax rotation, yielded a three-factor solution for the teacher version, with factor loadings ranging from .42 to .78 and communalities above .30, explaining 41.88% and 48% of the total variance, respectively.

The *Questionnaire on Teacher Professional Development in Learning Communities* (QTPDLC) comprises five sections (Appendix 3), with the first four adapted from Flores (2005): Continuing Education, Nature of Teaching Work, Perceptions of Leadership and School Culture, and Professional Learning Opportunities in the Work Context. The fifth section collects

perceptions about the context of Learning Communities (LC), and was inspired by Gomes et al. (2022). The QTPDLC includes 63 closed-response items using Likert-type scales—measuring levels of agreement, importance, and frequency—alongside 12 items concerning personal and professional background and 3 open-ended items for additional comments. Internal consistency was excellent (α=.96), with dimension-specific reliability ranging from .74 (Nature of Teaching Work) to .94 (Leadership and School Culture) between dimensions (Tinoca et al, in press). Exploratory factor analysis revealed a four-factor solution, explaining 46% of the total variance, confirming the underlying theoretical structure of the questionnaire and the relevance of the dimension relating specifically to LC.

PROCEDURES

Once all necessary authorisations had been obtained from the Ethics Committee and the Direção-Geral da Educação (DGE), 57 school clusters were contacted and sent the questionnaires in *Google Forms* format, with the first page of serving as the informed consent form. Both questionnaires were self-administered and took an average of 10 minutes to complete.

PARTICIPANTS

The participants in this study were students, educators and teachers from primary and secondary schools who agreed to complete the questionnaires at three different times (2023, 2024, 2025). Regarding to students sample, 638 participated in the first stage, with approximately 50% females and an average age of 12. The majority were attending primary school. In the second stage 63 students took part, again with a balanced gender distribution (around 50% female), and an average age of 13. This phase included a wider distribution across different educational levels, with a predominance of secondary school students. In the third stage, 65 students participated maintaining gender balance (50% females), with secondary school students again representing the majority.

As for the teachers, 154 participated in the first round, mostly female (83.8%), with an average age of 51.5 and an average length of service of 26 years. In the second round, 57 teachers took part, also predominantly female (82.4%), with an average age of 53.19 and an average of 25 years of service. The third round included 38 teachers, mostly female (86.8%), with an average age of 51.66 and 25 years of teaching experience.

The sample that answered the questionnaire on professional development at the first stage comprised 102 teachers, mostly female (77.5%), with an average age of 50.8 and 26 years of service. At the second stage, 84 teachers responded, mostly female (84.5%), with an average age of 52.8

and 25 years of service. In the third stage, 41 teachers responded, mostly female (75.6%), with an average age of 51.7 and 23 years of service.

Although the number of participants varied across the three stages, their overall characteristics remained consistent throughout the study.

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The implementation of inclusive education requires a conceptual shift, that goes beyond regulatory frameworks (Decree-Law 54/2018), which is intended to be mirrored in everyday practice (Senge, 1998). However, the evaluation of this implementation still lacks evidence regarding whether such change is truly occurring, the quality of that change, and the extent to which it is influenced by conceptions – particularly, those related to teachers' professional development (Muijs et al., 2014). In this context, both teachers and students play a fundamental role in shaping an inclusive school culture and enabling educational innovation (Christensen & Jerrim, 2025; Kamp et al., in press). As educational success for all has become the central goal, it is essential to examine how schools themselves learn (Admiraal et al., 2021). For this reason, we chose to analyse both teachers' and students' perceptions of inclusive education and practices within the school environment, as well as teachers' perceptions of the contribution of inclusive learning communities to their professional development. This analysis includes data collected at the three stages mentioned above.

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Students' perception of inclusive education are presented in table 1, with items grouped into three categories: 1) overall analysis, 2) inclusive practices implemented by teachers, and 3) school environment. Overall, students tend to express positive perceptions across all three categories, with both mean and median scores around 4 points (out of a maximum of 5), consistent with Kamp et al. (in press) findings. The slight decrease in average scores at the second stage is not considered significant. As illustrated in the density plots (figure 1), the majority of the participants' responses are concentrated between 3.5 and 4.5, indicating a generally positive perception of inclusive education among the participants.

TABLE 1. STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

				95% Confidence Interval			
Category	**Data Collection**	**N**	**Average**	**Lower Limit**	**Upper Limit**	**Median**	**Standard Deviation**
Students' overall perception of inclusive education	Time 1	638	3.93	3.87	3.99	4.00	0.74
	Time 2	63	3.78	3.54	4.02	4.00	0.95
	Time 3	65	3.93	3.76	4.09	4.00	0.67
Students' perception of inclusive practices developed by teachers	Time 1	638	3.98	3.91	4.04	4.08	0.83
	Time 2	63	3.86	3.61	4.11	4.00	0.98
	Time 3	65	4.00	3.82	4.19	4.00	0.75
Students' perception of the school environment at with regard to inclusive practices	Time 1	638	3.86	3.80	3.92	4.00	0.73
	Time 2	63	3.67	3.43	3.91	4.00	0.95
	Time 3	65	3.83	3.65	4.00	3.90	0.82

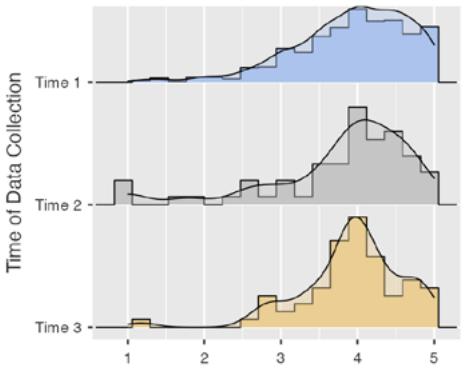
The comparative analysis of means across the three time points, using the ANOVA test, revealed no statistically significant differences (*p>.05)*, i.e. students' perceptions of teachers' inclusive practices and the school environment remained stable over the three measurements, although with a slight decrease at stage 2. However, due to the substantial reduction in sample size between stage 1 and stages 2 and 3, the results should be interpreted taking this limitation into account. When considering all students, regardless of individual characteristics, the overall positive perception appears to indicate a gradual shift toward more inclusive practices and a more inclusive school environment, aligning with the goals of current educational policies (Decree-Law 54/2018). Notably, social cohesion and the diversification of teaching strategies to support individualised learning emerge as strengths, corroborating the findings of Kamp et al. (in press).

Given that previous research has identified the potential influence of other variables on students' perceptions, we sought to analyse the effects of gender, school level, receipt of support measures, and history of grade retention. to this end, we applied parametric t_student (dichotomous variables) and ANOVA (polytomous variables) tests.

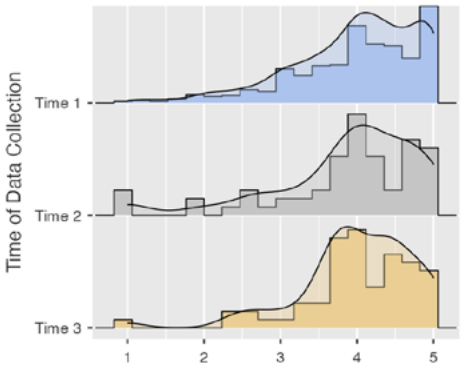
When analysing the gender variable, students demonstrated positive perceptions across all three categories, with no significant differences ($p>.05$) between boys (N=382) and girls (N=384), consistent with the findings of Kamp et al. (in press). Similarly, no significant differences were found between students who received support services (i.e. special education, therapies, maths/portuguese support, among others) and those who did not (*p>.05* in all three categories). Students who were not retained (N=726) reported significantly higher mean scores in their perception of inclusive education compared to those who had been retained (N=40). These differences were significant across all three categories ($p=.001$; $p=.007$; $p<.001$, respectively).

The magnitude of these differences, as measured by Cohen's d, indicate a moderate effect size, ranging from .44 and .56 across categories.

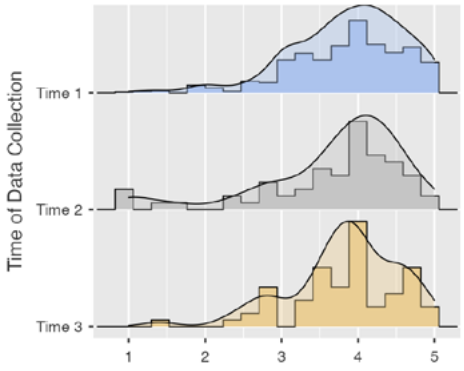
FIGURE 1. DENSITY PLOTS WITH DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



Students' overall perception of inclusive education



Students' perception of inclusive practices developed by teachers



Students' perception of the school environment with regard to inclusive practices

Finally, students' perceptions of inclusive education in general, as well as of teachers' inclusive practices, tended to decrease as students progressed through the different school levels. The comparative analysis of means using the ANOVA test shows that the differences are statistically significant ($p<.001$ across three categories) and educational stages, confirming a downward trend. These findings corroborate Kamp et al. (in press). However, the this trend may be influenced by several contextual factors, such as the increasing complexity of the curriculum, the limited time available during the school years, and themore formal and high-stakes nature of assessment processes in secondary school – both annual and end-of-cycle evaluations), which are closely linked to students' future pathways, whether further studies or entry into the labour market. These elements likely shape students' perceptions along their educational journey.

TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Teachers' perceptions of inclusive education were also assessed at three different time points and across the four categories of the questionnaire: overall perception of inclusive education, perception of diversity and inclusion, perception of their inclusive practices and perception of the inclusive environment and culture in the school context. The descriptive analysis of the mean scores at each of the three data collection stages is presented in Table 2.

TABLE 2. TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

				95% Confidence Interval			
Category	**Data Collection**	**N**	**Average**	**Lower Limit**	**Upper Limit**	**Median**	**Standard Deviation**
Teachers' overall perception of inclusive education	Time 1	154	3.87	3.80	3.94	3.84	0.45
	Time 2	57	3.84	3.71	3.98	3.82	0.52
	Time 3	38	3.90	3.76	4.03	3.82	0.40
Teachers' perception of diversity and inclusion	Time 1	154	3.65	3.55	3.74	3.65	0.59
	Time 2	57	3.72	3.57	3.86	3.71	0.55
	Time 3	38	3.79	3.62	3.95	3.76	0.50
Teachers' perceptions of their inclusive practices	Time 1	154	4.08	4.00	4.16	4.05	0.49
	Time 2	57	4.02	3.87	4.17	3.95	0.57
	Time 3	38	4.10	3.96	4.23	4.05	0.41
Teachers' perception of the school's inclusive environment and culture	Time 1	154	3.85	3.75	3.94	3.83	0.59
	Time 2	57	3.73	3.55	3.90	3.75	0.67
	Time 3	38	3.71	3.52	3.90	3.75	0.59

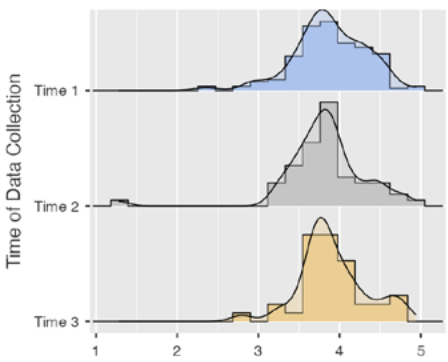
In general, teachers tend to report positive perceptions of inclusive education, their own inclusive practices, the inclusive environment and culture experienced in their contexts. The calculated mean and median scores

across the assessed dimensions were consistently above 3.7 points. The category relating to perceptions of their own practices recorded the highest mean scores (>4), suggesting that teachers hold a strong sense of efficacy and confidence in their strategies and actions related to inclusive education. This may reflect their direct engagement with, and awareness of, the methods they employ in their daily teaching.

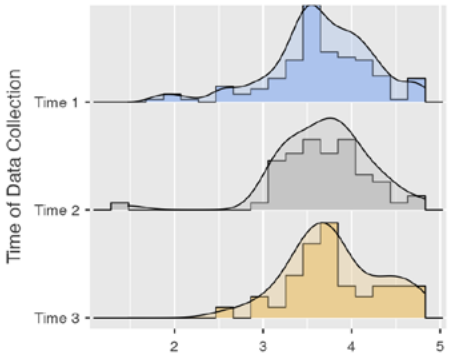
The adaptation of pedagogical practices through collaborative and constructive dialogue throughout the academic year (Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2017; Enthoven et al., 2023; Meyer et al., 2022), particularly when supported by professional learning communities (Meyer et al., 2022; Vangrieken et al., 2015), points to a shift in teacher behaviour. This shift is often drived by both obligation and motivation to innovate in their instructionalapproaches and assessment procedures, aiming for the overall success of all students (Admiraal et al., 2021; Vangrieken et al., 2015; Woodcok & Anderson, 2025), while also enhancing theor own professional practice. Daily exchanges among teachers, grounded in relationships of trust and contextual understandings, offer meaningful opportunities for joint reflection for pedagogical transformation at both the classroom (Christensen & Jerrin, 2025) and the broader school level (Admiraal et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2025), 2021; Lee et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024; Senge, 1998). These processes are embedded within a shared collective vision (DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Stoll et al., 2006; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017), contributing to broader educational reform efforts (Tinoca et al., in press). Such factors may help explain the overall positive results obtained, given the involvement of these teachers in learning communities.

The density plots in Figure 2 show that the bulk of the participants' responses felt between 3.5 and 4.25 across the different categories and at all three data collection points, further supporting the general trend of positive perceptions towards inclusive education.

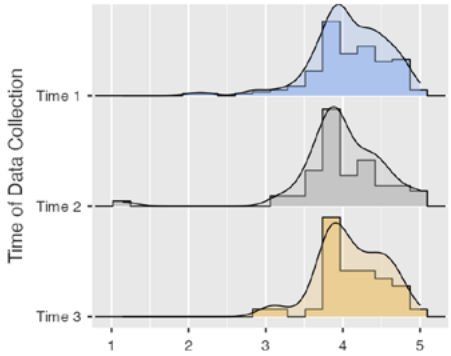
FIGURE 2. DENSITY PLOTS WITH THE DISTRIBUTION OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION



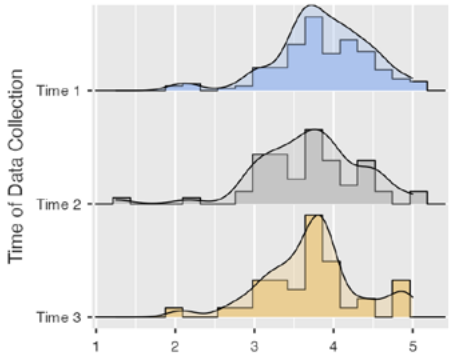
Teachers' overall perception of inclusive education



Teachers' perception of diversity and inclusion



Teachers' perceptions of their inclusive practices



Teachers' perception of the school's inclusive environment and culture

As with the student data, the comparative analysis across the three times, using the ANOVA test, revealed no statistically significant ($p>.05$), i.e. teachers' perceptions of diversity, inclusive practices and cultures remained consistently positive throughout the study. Educational reform has increasingly demanded that teachers engage in continuous updating and innovation, through collaborative and shared practices aimed at improving pedagogical teaching practices in response to the growing diversity within schools (Tinoca et al., in press). This has included the integration of digital tools,

diversification of assessment types and timelines, among other strategies (Yoo & Jang, 2022).

Considering the potential influence of personal (Liang et al., 2022; Valckx et al., 2020) and professional variables on teachers' attitudes towards inclusion (Carroll et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022; McCallum, 2020), further comparative analyses were conducted. These analyses found no statistically significant differences in perceptions across the four categories, when considering teachers' gender, academic qualifications, contractual status, length of service and length of time at the school ($p>.05$ in the 4 categories). In contrast, other variables – namely the educational level at which teachers work, the frequency of professional training, and their knowledge and experience in working with students who benefit from measures to support learning and inclusion, were found to have a significant positive influence on field of inclusive education ($p<.05$).

Although the literature presents inconclusive findings regarding the influence of gender on teacher's perceptions and practices (Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017), with some studes suggesting that female teachers are more likely to engage in reflective dialogue (Christensen & Jerrin, 2025; Valckx et al., 2020), our data suggests that educational investment is not significantly influenced by gender or by traditional gender roles. The tendency for teachers - especially those with experience working students in need of support measures to have a positive attitude - particularly those with experience working with students who benefit from support measures, to demonstrate a positive attitude towards inclusive education (Woodcok & Hardy, 2017), appears to reflect both alignment with educational goals outlined in Decree-Law 54/2018 and a commitment to the inclusive values upheld by the school communities in which they operate. This orientation is further supported by the need to strengthen teachers' sense of self-efficacy (Liang et al., 2022; Lindner et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2020) and promote the adoption of more inclusive practices (Ferreira et al., 2024). These teachers tend to prioritise the individual needs of students over strict adherence to curriculum content (Nordengren, 2019) or a narrow focus on academic performance (Alves et al., 2020).

It is interesting to note that, as with students - whose perceptions of inclusive education tend to decline as they progress through school system - teachers working in the 1st cycle exhibit more favourable perceptions compared to their counterparts in later cycles (Woodcok & Hardy, 2017). This may be attributed to greater autonomy in classroom decision-making (Tinoca et al., in press) and increased availability of time, which allow these teachers to foster a safe and inclusive classroom climate (Costa et al., 2022; Quaglia et al., 2020). These findings highlight the need for future research to consider the influence of socio-cultural and contextual specifities (Reeves et al., 2017), that characterise the diversity of the national educational landscape.

In order to analyse the influence of training in inclusive education on teachers' perceptions and attitudes,participants were grouped according to their participation in formal training activities. A comparative analysis using the parametric *Student's t-test* revealed statistically significant differences across all four categories analysed ($p<.05$) at each of the three data collection times. These results reinforce the notion that participation in formal training plays a key role in developing inclusive knowledge, practices and school cultures (Enthoven et al., 2023; Tinoca et al., in press), and suggest that teachers seek it out such training as a result of intrinsic motivation.

TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND INCLUSIVE LEARNING COMMUNITY

Involvement in learning communities and continuous training processes are recognised as key factors that enhance teachers' professional development (Admiraal et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024; Senge, 1998; Yoo & Jang, 2022), particularly in the context of inclusive education. In this sense, teachers were invited to reflect on the importance of their participation in training initiatives for their professional growth. The proportion of teachers who reported having participated in training remained relatively stabel across the three data collection time ponts (Time 1: 86.27%; Time 2: 86.9%; Time 3: 80.48%), revealing a consistent concern woth acquiring new and more knowledge and approaches (DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2024; Woodcok & Anderson, 2025).

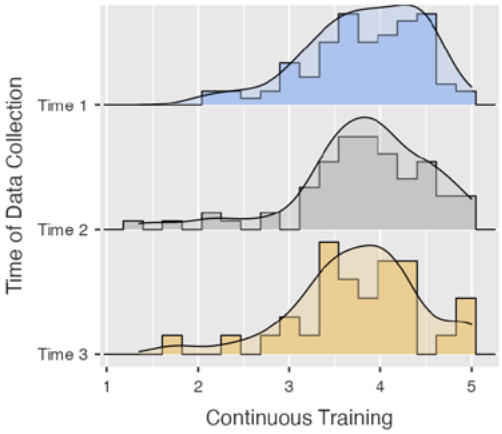
Overall, participating teachers considered their involvement in continuing training initiatives to be important for their professional development, with mean scores above 3.75 (Table 3) on a 1 to 5 scale of importance. Although a slight decline in the mean score at time 3, comparative analysis using the ANOVA test, showed no statistically significant differences across the three times ($p>.05$). In addition, the density plot in figure 3 illustrates a consistent distribution of responses, predominantly between scores of 3 and 4.

TABLE 3. LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE OF TRAINING IN PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROCESSES

				95% Confidence Interval			
Category	**Data Collection**	**N**	**Average**	**Lower Limit**	**Upper Limit**	**Median**	**Standard Deviation**
Continuing Education	Time 1	88	3.83	3.70	3.97	3.90	0.64
	Time 2	73	3.83	3.66	4.00	3.90	0.74
	Time 3	33	3.76	3.52	4.01	3.80	0.70
Practical Motivations	Time 1	88	4.29	4.14	4.44	4.50	0.75
	Time 2	73	4.30	4.11	4.49	4.50	0.82
	Time 3	33	4.34	4.04	4.63	4.50	0.86
Emancipatory Motivations	Time 1	88	4.21	4.08	4.33	4.40	0.62
	Time 2	73	4.23	4.07	4.39	4.40	0.71
	Time 3	33	4.27	4.06	4.47	4.40	0.60
Instrumental Motivations	Time 1	88	3.88	3.70	4.05	4.00	0.87
	Time 2	73	3.92	3.72	4.12	4.00	0.90
	Time 3	33	3.96	3.70	4.21	4.00	0.78
Pedagogical Motivations	Time 1	88	3.48	3.28	3.69	3.50	0.99
	Time 2	73	3.58	3.36	3.79	3.50	0.96
	Time 3	33	3.53	3.20	3.85	3.50	0.98
Collaborative Motivations	Time 1	88	3.46	3.28	3.65	3.67	0.92
	Time 2	73	3.53	3.29	3.77	3.67	1.06
	Time 3	33	3.37	3.04	3.70	3.33	0.99
Political Motivations	Time 1	88	2.85	2.61	3.08	3.00	1.15
	Time 2	73	2.83	2.55	3.11	3.00	1.23
		33	2.62	2.18	3.06	3.00	1.33

Considering the organisation proposed by Silva (2011), teachers tend to prioritise practical, emancipatory, instrumental, pedagogical, collaborative and, lastly, political motivations when engaging in training initiatives, in descending order of importance. These responses are consistent with existing evidence that highlights the prominence of practice-oriented and personally meaningful drivers in professional development (Admiraal et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022; Liang et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2020).

FIGURE 3. DENSITY PLOT WITH DISTRIBUTION OF THE LEVEL OF IMPORTANCE ATTRIBUTED TO INVOLVEMENT IN CONTINUING TRAINING INITIATIVES

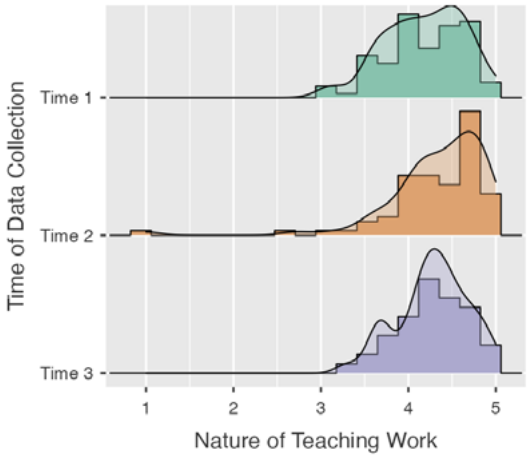


With regard to the nature of teaching, the teachers reported a high level of awareness regarding the diversity, complexity and demands of their work. The average score was consistently above 4 across all three data collection points (Table 4), with a slight increase at the second point, tough without statistically significant differences ($p>0.05$). The distribution of the participants' answers was mostly concentrated between 4 and 4.5 points (Figure 4), which confirms the participants' high rates of agreement.

TABLE 4. TEACHERS' LEVELS OF AGREEMENT ON QUESTIONS RELATED TO THE NATURE OF TEACHING WORK

				95% Confidence Interval			
Category	**Data Collection**	**N**	**Average**	**Lower Limit**	**Upper Limit**	**Median**	**Standard Deviation**
Nature of teaching work	Time 1	102	4.18	4.09	4.27	4.20	0.45
	Time 2	84	4.34	4.21	4.46	4.50	0.59
	Time 3	41	4.28	4.15	4.40	4.30	0.40

FIGURE 4. DENSITY PLOT WITH DISTRIBUTION OF TEACHERS' LEVEL OF AGREEMENT RELATED TO THE NATURE OF TEACHING WORK



The literature points to teachers' perceptions of leadership and school culture as key factors in professional development processes within the workplace (Admiral et al., 2019; Tinoca et al., in press; Zhang et al., 2020). Accordingly, these dimensions were analysed separately (Table 5). Participants tend to have positive perceptions of the importance of leadership(s) and school culture in their professional development. They recognise the importance of working in contexts that promote collaboration among teachers and support a shared vision for the success of all students (Holmgren & Sjöberg, 2022; Lee et al., 2022), which contributes to collective well-being (Admiral et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). The mean scores in both categories, remained stable across the three data collection, are similar, with no statistically significant differences ($p<.05$).

Teachers acknowledge the value of effective leadership in facilitating professional development processes and initiatives (DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Nguyen et al., 2024; Tinoca et al., in press; Woodcok & Anderson, 2025), as well as promoting student engagement in school life (Alves et al., 2020; Kamp et al., in press). They reported feeling supported by both the school leadership and middle management, noting the presence of values-oriented, effective and people-centred leadership practices within their schools.

According to the literature, this articulated action and shared responsibility fosters an inclusive and collaborative climate, where everyone has an active voice for learning (Day, 2017; Ogbuanya & Shodipe, 2021), leading to practices that are more adjusted to the needs of the students (Ferreira et al., 2024).

However, teachers tend to express lower levels of agreement regarding the participation of parents in school's activities - corroborating the trend found by Tinoca et al. (in press), as well as regarding the existence of incentives

to assume leadership roles. These are areas that merit greater attention within the school context.

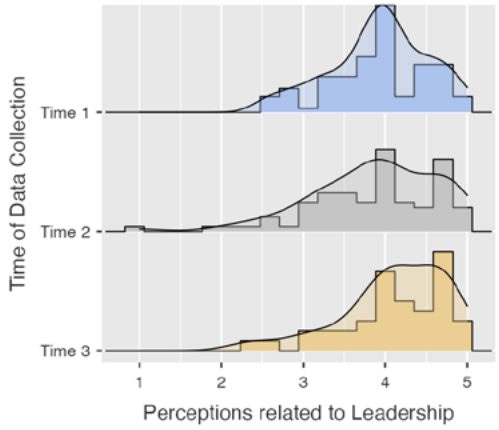
The results of the category related to School Culture, also suggest that interdisciplinary and collaborative work - in planning teaching activities, discussing assessment practices and other professional matters, contributes to fostering an inclusive culture (Admiraal et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024; Senge, 1998). This approach has implications for both identifying individual and collective needs, as well as for discussing alternative strategies and paths for adjusting measures (Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2017; Meyer et al., 2022).

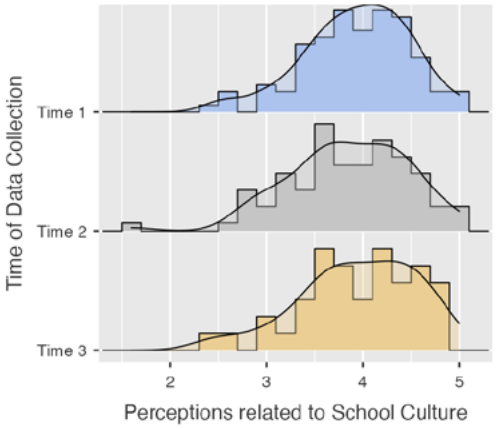
The density graphs presented in figure 5 show a similar distribution of responses at the three data collection points, reinforcing the consistency of these perceptions over time.

TABLE 5. TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF ISSUES RELATED TO SCHOOL LEADERSHIP AND CULTURE

				95% Confidence Interval			
Category	**Data Collection**	**N**	**Average**	**Lower Limit**	**Upper Limit**	**Median**	**Standard Deviation**
Perceptions of School Leadership(s)	Time 1	102	3.92	3.81	4.04	4.00	0.60
	Time 2	84	3.87	3.70	3.70	3.91	0.77
	Time 3	41	4.12	3.91	4.32	4.32	0.64
Perceptions of School Culture(s)	Time 1	102	3.93	3.82	4.04	4.00	0.55
	Time 2	84	3.85	3.71	3.98	3.87	0.62
	Time 3	41	3.95	3.76	4.14	4.00	0.60

FIGURE 5. DENSITY PLOTS WITH DISTRIBUTION OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS RELATED TO LEADERSHIP AND SCHOOL CULTURE





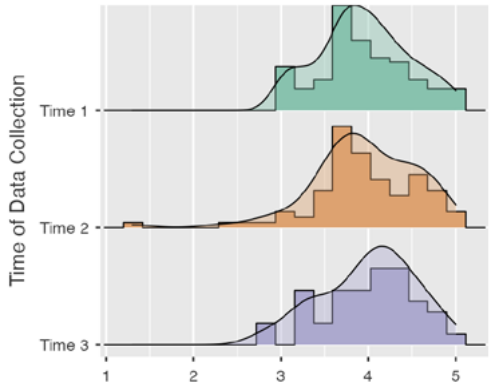
With regard to opportunities for learning and professional development in the workplace, teachers expressed positive perceptions, both at individual level (concerning their own growth) and and at a collective level (as shared responsibility of the group/schools or educational community). These findings corroborate previous studies that highlight the multiple factors that influence the quality of teaching (Carroll et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022; McCallum, 2020) and the relevance that opportunities for formal and informal learning play in self-efficacy, an essential component linked to students' academic success (Admiral et al., 2021; Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2017; Christensen & Jerrin, 2025; DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Enthoven et al., 2023; Stoll et al., 2006; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017; Woodcock & Hardy, 2017).

Table 6 shows that the average value of teachers' perceptions remains similar across all three points in time, with no significant differences ($p>.05$). The distribution of responses was predominantly concentrated between 3.8 and 4.20 approximately, reinforcing the consistent and positive view of professional development opportunities.

TABLE 6. TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

				95% Confidence Interval			
Category	**Data Collection**	**N**	**Average**	**Lower Limit**	**Upper Limit**	**Median**	**Standard Deviation**
Learning and Professional Development Opportunities	Time 1	102	3.94	3.84	4.04	3.90	0.51
	Time 2	84	3.94	3.81	4.08	3.90	0.62
	Time 3	41	4.00	3.83	4.17	4.10	0.54

FIGURE 6. DENSITY PLOT WITH DISTRIBUTION OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS RELATED TO LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Learning Opportunities and Professional Development

In a final focus of analysis, participants were asked to reflect on their participation in the INCLUD-ED CA, specificallt regarding participation, sense of belonging and practice - dimensions considered essential for the full involvement of all members. The teachers in the INCLUD-ED community, across the three data collection times, reported consistently positive perceptions (Table 7), in line with Tinoca et al. (in press). In the dimension of participation, respondents agree that the community fosters openness to new members, values diverse perspectives, and ensures that every voice is heard. These characteristics represent core strengths of learning communities: collective learning grounded in trust, inclusiveness, and a shared commitment to the common good (Admiraal et al., 2021; Lee et al., 2022; Meyer et al., 2022; Nguyen et al., 2024; Senge, 1998; Yoo & Jang, 2022). The importance of joint reflective practice emerged strongly in the teachers' responses, as they recognise its influence on collaborative processes, professional knowledge, and their ownpedagogical beliefs. Such reflection was seen as instrumental in reshaping their actions both within the learning community and in broader educational contexts,. These findings are in line with international research conducted in diverse educational and cultural settings (Christensen & Jerrin, 2025; DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Stoll et al., 2006; Voelkel & Chrispeels, 2017).

TABLE 7. TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF ISSUES RELATED TO PARTICIPATION IN THE INCLUD-ED COMMUNITY

				95% Confidence Interval			
Category	**Data Collection**	**N**	**Average**	**Lower Limit**	**Upper Limit**	**Median**	**Standard Deviation**
Participation in the Learning Community	Time 1	47	3.95	3.75	4.15	4.00	0.68
	Time 2	41	3.80	3.50	4.09	4.00	0.95
	Time 3	25	3.93	3.63	4.22	4.20	0.72
Sense of Belonging to the Learning Community	Time 1	47	4.02	3.80	4.23	4.00	0.71
	Time 2	41	3.95	3.65	4.25	4.00	0.93
	Time 3	25	3.93	3.69	4.28	4.00	0.69
Reflective Practice	Time 1	47	4.09	3.91	4.28	4.00	0.64
	Time 2	41	4.06	3.75	4.37	4.00	0.98
	Time 3	25	3.88	3.54	4.21	4.00	0.77

The comparative analysis of the mean scores on the professional development in the work context, including its four dimensions, based on personal and professional variables, revelead no statistically significant differences according to age, length of service, years in the same school or group, academic qualifications, level of teaching and professional situation. The only statistically significant differences identified were associated with participants' gender and their involvement in educational projects. Female teachers had higher mean values across the various dimensions, with significant differences in the dimensions of Continuing Education and Learning Opportunities and Professional Development dimensions ($p<.05$), in line with the greater inclination among womem toward reflective dialogues compared to their male peers (Christensen & Jerrin, 2025; Valckx et al., 2020).

Likewise, the results show that participation in projects has a significant impact on participants' scores, with those actively involved in projects reporting higher average values across all dimensions when compared to those with limited or no involvement. It's interesting to note that these findings diverge from the findings of Tinoca et al. (in press), which point to limited teacher engagement in projects due to heavy teaching loads and the breadth of responsibilities typically assigned (Carroll et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022; McCallum, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

The data collected across the three research periods reveal predominantly positive perceptions of inclusive education among both students and teachers, and underscore the pivotal role of collaborative professional development in consolidating these perceptions. Students consistently rated their teachers' inclusive practices and the overall school climate higly, emphasising the value of diversity of teaching strategies and the sense of belonging fostered by learning communities. Similarly, teachers expressed strong agreement with their own inclusive practices, the school culture and people-centred leadership, identifying ongoing professional training and networking as the main drivers of change. The longitudinal comparison showed a slight decline in positive perceptions as students progressed through the educational cycles, especially in secondary education, and confirmed that teachers with collaborative experience and targeted training display more favourable attitudes towards inclusion. Overall, the empirical findings suggested that sustained, practice-based, team.oriented professional developmentcontributes significantly to the creaton of more inclusive and effective school cultures.

These results align with existing literature that highights the mutually reinforcing relationship between professional learning communities, teacher self-efficacy and inclusive school culture. Previous research has shown that learning communities foster joint reflection, shared standards and a culture of continuous improvement (Admiraal et al., 2021; Stoll et al., 2006). The increase in self-efficacy among teachers more actively engaged in collaborative training corroborates evidence that professional confidence mediates the relationship between collaboration and pedagogical innovation (Liang et al., 2022). Furthermore, the recognition of professional development as a collective endeavour reinforces the notion that inclusive schools are built upon participatory, distributive, and values-driven organisational cultures (Holmgren & Sjöberg, 2022).

The originality of this study lies in its longitudinal, multi-perspective approach that incorporates the voices of both student and teacher. This provided a comprehensive picture of the impact of professional learning communities in Portuguese educational contexts and addresses a gap in the literature identified in recent international reviews (Nguyen et al., 2024).

From an educational policy perspective, three priority guidelines emerge. Firstly, it is recommended that in-service teacher training programmes be designed as action-research cycles conducted in the workplace, aligned with locally identified needs and accessible to all teachers. This approach would help ensure both sustainability and equity. Secondly, school leadership teams should adopt distributed, people-centred models, that guarantee protected time, adequate resources and peer monitoring mechanisms.

These conditions are essential for fostering teacher collaboration and encouraging meaningful student participation in school decision-making processes (DuFour & Reeves, 2016). Finally, there is an urgent need to consolidate inclusive practices through school plans that incorporate systematic data monitoring, co-teaching, family engagement, and tailored responses to the specific challenges of secondary education. When implemented in an integrated and coordinated manner, these policy directions have the potential to enhance the quality of teaching, promote the well-being and autonomy of all educational stakeholders, and transform Portuguese schools into dynamic laboratories of sustainable inclusion.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1:
DIMENSIONS OF THE *INCLUSIVE EDUCATION* QUESTIONNAIRE *(TEACHER VERSION)*

Diversity and Inclusion
Items
The diversity of students makes it difficult to fulfil the curriculum.
The diversity of students hinders the teaching-learning process.
Student diversity requires time-consuming lesson preparation.
The diversity of the students creates opportunities for them to learn from each other.
The diversity of students makes me try to integrate new pedagogical elements (e.g. strategies, methodologies, tools) into the way I teach.
The diversity of the students creates opportunities for the teaching-learning process that I hadn't realised until now.
Diversity in the classroom enriches the learning environment.
It is possible to plan/organise lessons adapted to the characteristics and needs of all students.
It is necessary to categorise students according to gender, ethnicity, disability, language or socio-economic status in order to meet their specific needs.
The legislation on inclusive education represents a negative change in the education system.
It is necessary to remove some students from the classroom in order to provide them with a quality education.
Any student can learn in mainstream school if the curriculum is adapted to meet their needs and characteristics.
It is essential to adapt the curriculum to meet the needs and characteristics of all students.
Inclusive education makes it easier to understand the differences between students.
Interacting with peers with different needs and characteristics provides positive experiences for all students.
Working in collaboration with students' families is fundamental to the success of inclusion.
Responding differently to students' needs and characteristics can reinforce existing inequalities.

Classroom Practices
Items
I diversify teaching strategies, techniques or resources (e.g. oral presentation, debate, reading, writing, drawing, use of audiovisual media, etc.) to respond to the different needs and characteristics of students.
I inform others (e.g. colleagues, parents, students) about laws and policies related to inclusive education.
I organise the distribution of the classroom (e.g. arrangement of tables, chairs, etc.), according to the type of activity, to meet the needs and characteristics of all students.
When I implement a new classroom strategy/practice, I evaluate its effectiveness in terms of the results expected and obtained by the students.
I get the students to comply with the classroom rules.
I change my teaching strategy during the lesson when I realise that the students.
In my classes, students feel comfortable working with colleagues they may consider different.
I find it difficult to accommodate all the students' differences in a classroom.
I can differentiate the curriculum to meet the needs and characteristics of all students.
Differentiating classroom practices, resources and assessment takes up too much of my time.
I use different ways of organising work in the class (in groups, pairs, individually) to respond to the different needs and characteristics of the students.
I encourage students to express points of view that differ from my own.
When a student has difficulties, I provide specific support during or after lessons.
During lessons, I encourage students to give and/or receive help and share knowledge with each other.
I consult with students on ways to improve the classroom environment (the dynamics and relationships established between everyone).
I diversify assessment strategies (e.g. portfolios, adapted tests, performance-based assessment, etc.) to meet the needs and characteristics of all students.
I encourage students to use their knowledge, interests and life experiences in class.
I prepare differentiated resources and activities for students who have more difficulties or find it easier to progress in their learning.
I assess students not only on the basis of their final grade, but also on the basis of their progress.
I differentiate my practices in order to respond effectively to the needs and characteristics of all students (e.g. interests, motivations, socio-demographic aspects, learning styles, etc.).

Inclusive Cultures and Policies
Items
There is a good atmosphere of coexistence in the school between all students (respect for different cultures, customs, abilities).
There are specialised technicians outside the school who support me in meeting the needs of all my students.
In my school, all students receive education and support appropriate to their characteristics and needs.
My school has the conditions to develop the differentiated practices that inclusive education requires.
My school (e.g. management, EMAEI) supports the development of inclusive practices.
My school offers activities that include students with different characteristics.
My school has resources that support me in responding to the needs and characteristics of all students.
The school provides me with enough information about my students to enable me to guide everyone, taking into account their needs and characteristics.
In this school, teachers collaborate to solve problems related to teaching and student learning.
In my school, families are encouraged to collaborate in school/classroom activities.
My school manages to make parents/carers feel comfortable when they come to school.
Families hinder the implementation of inclusive education.

ANNEX 2:
QUESTIONNAIRE ON *INCLUSIVE EDUCATION (STUDENT VERSION)*

Items
I feel I can be myself in this school.
I feel like I belong in my class.
My classmates are interested in hearing my ideas.
In class, I feel comfortable expressing different points of view from the teachers.
I feel comfortable making suggestions to teachers to improve lessons.
I try to include colleagues when I realise that they are in a situation of exclusion.
I'd like to know more about how I can help to include a colleague who is in a situation of exclusion.
At school, there are activities that interest and include students with different characteristics.
I feel comfortable working with colleagues who are different.
Students help each other at this school.
There is a good atmosphere of coexistence at school between all the students (respect for different cultures, customs, abilities).
In class, I feel comfortable expressing different points of view from my classmates.
When I have difficulties, the teachers help me during or after lessons.
I feel that the support I receive at school helps to minimise my difficulties.
I feel that teachers value our ideas, knowledge, interests and life experiences.
Teachers diversify the ways in which they teach (e.g. oral presentation, debate, reading, writing, drawing, use of audiovisual media, etc.).
Teachers show an interest in listening to the ideas of all students.
Teachers try to respond to our interests and motivations.
Teachers provide specific support for students with the greatest difficulties.
During lessons, teachers encourage us to give and/or receive help and share knowledge with each other.
Teachers diversify assessment strategies (e.g. portfolio, differentiated tests, performance-based assessment, etc.).
Teachers consult us on ways to improve the classroom environment (the dynamics and relationships established between everyone).
Teachers promote differentiated activities according to our abilities and working rhythms.
Teachers use different ways of organising work in the class (in groups, pairs, individually).
I abide by classroom/school rules.
My family participates in school activities.

ANNEX 3:
DIMENSIONS OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE ON *TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN LEARNING COMMUNITIES*

Motivations for involvement in training initiatives

Items
Career advancement.
Pleasure associated with study.
To increase/improve professional opportunities.
To promote my personal development.
Develop new ideas for teaching.
Increase my self-esteem.
To respond to the new demands associated with my work.
Consolidate my pedagogical perspectives.
To change the way I organise the teaching and learning process.
To make my teaching more effective.
To develop my professional skills.
To develop or deepen my knowledge of work related to Learning Communities and Successful Educational Actions.
To fulfil specific roles in the school.
Share ideas and experiences with colleagues.
Implementing central administration policies/measures.
Implement Local Management policies/measures.
Developing school projects in collaboration with colleagues.
Develop a research project in collaboration with colleagues.
Building teaching resources with colleagues.
Respond to requests from the school management.

Nature of teaching work
Items
My work requires complex skills.
My work gives me the opportunity to take initiative and make decisions.
I have information/data about my effectiveness or the quality of my teaching work.
I can complete a task that I have started myself.
In general, my work has no particular/peculiar meaning or importance.
My work is generally repetitive.
My work forms a meaningful whole.
The results of my work have significant effects/repercussions on the lives and development of other people.
My work implies an ethical responsibility specific to teaching.
My work must be concerned with the good of others.

Leadership and School Culture
Items
I am encouraged to fulfil leadership roles (in terms of positions, coordinating projects, etc.) in my school/group.
My school/group has effective leadership.
Effective leadership is important for promoting teachers' professional development.
The management is encouraging and stimulating.
The management communicates openly about all school/group issues.
I feel supported by the teachers, coordinators and school management in my teaching activity.
In my school/group, parents/guardians are actively involved in the school's activities.
I feel that my points of view are taken into account in various parts of the school.
My school/group has values-orientated and values-focused leadership.
My school/group has people-centred leadership.
Students are called upon to participate in the life of the school.

Learning and Professional Development Opportunities
Items
In my school/group, there are opportunities to develop creative work.
I have opportunities to improve my training.
I need to update myself regularly because my work is often changing.
In my school/group, teachers are concerned about their training in order to respond to changes in school life.
In my school/group, there is a global policy in terms of continuous training.
In-service training should focus on developing skills and activities centred on the classroom.
Ongoing training should take into account a school development perspective.
Ongoing training should respond to short-term needs.
I feel encouraged to take part in ongoing training activities.
Ongoing training should respond to long-term needs.

Participation in the Learning Community
Items
In the LC I have the opportunity to be heard.
In the LC my views/contributions are valued.
In the LC when I have a question I feel comfortable putting it to the group.
In the LC I am open to welcoming new members.
At LC I experience decisions that hinder the progress of my work.

Sense of Belonging to the Learning Community
Items
At the LC we welcome new members so that they develop a sense of belonging.
In the LC we share a common vision and values.
In the LC we foster relationships of trust.
At LC we negotiate our collective action openly.
At LC we value individual and collective professional learning equally.
At LC we reflect on the community's progress through investigative processes.
In LC our action includes liaising with other networks and partnerships.

Reflective Practice
Items
Reflective practice in LC helps me to become aware of my representations/beliefs about teaching.
The reflective practice developed in the LC broadens my professional knowledge.
The reflective practice developed in LC broadens my orientation towards collaboration.
Reflective practice gives me the opportunity to rethink my actions outside of the LC.
Reflective practice allows me to reorient my actions in the LC.

CHAPTER 4

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN LEARNING COMMUNITIES: "WHERE WE ARE AND WHERE WE WANT TO GO"

Márcia Kamp
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Carolina Carvalho
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Ana Sofia Pinho
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Daniela Semião
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Ana Paula Caetano
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

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Márcia Kamp
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Carolina Carvalho
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Ana Sofia Pinho
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Daniela Semião
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Ana Paula Caetano
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

INTRODUCTION

The goal of building an inclusive school and education that values diversity in its various manifestations and ensures quality learning for all is one of the greatest concerns in most education systems nowadays (Ainscow, 2020; Messiou, 2019; OECD, 2023). In Portugal, this is reflected in the current education policy, which assumes inclusive education as a structuring pillar of thinking and acting at school (Alves et al., 2020; Portugal, 2018a, 2018b), with several policy measures and initiatives putted into practice. The Portuguese Network of Learning Communities INCLUD-ED, promoted by the Direção-Geral da Educação (DGE) in 2019 with the support of CREA (Community of Research on Excellence for All) and the University of Barcelona, is one of these measures, aimed at fighting inequalities and promoting inclusion and success, in the context of the Educational Territories of Priority Intervention (TEIP).

The fulfillment of inclusive education presents opportunities and challenges in various areas, such as school culture, pedagogy and curriculum, as well as school-family-community relations. In this context, research has shown

that it is essential to understand how different players, including teachers and students, understand and experience inclusive education (Conner et al., 2022; Guillemot et al., 2022; Mitra, 2018; Quaglia et al., 2020; Semião et al., 2023; Yada et al., 2022).

This chapter focuses specifically on the perspectives of teachers and students regarding inclusive education, based on a category-based content analysis of open-ended responses collected during the initial implementation of a questionnaire in school clusters of the INCLUD-ED Learning Communities Network. The analysis of the closed answers from the application of these questionnaires is presented in this eBook, in the previous chapter - "Teacher Professional Development, Inclusive Conceptions and Practices: A longitudinal study with primary and secondary school teachers and students", by Sofia Santos, João Piedade and Luís Tinoca.

The following research questions are explored:

1) What positive aspects do teachers and students identify regarding inclusive education in their school clusters?

2) What changes do teachers and students propose to foster inclusive education?

The chapter is structured firstly around a brief theoretical framework on inclusive education, as well as the challenges and implications of INCLUD-ED learning communities as highlighted in the research on the topic. This is followed by a description of the study and the methodological procedures. Subsequently, the data are presented and, finally, the results are discussed, and concluding remarks are provided.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK – INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN INCLUD-ED LEARNING COMMUNITIES

INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The contemporary concept of inclusive education, as consolidated by international organisations (European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education [EASNIE], 2022; UNESCO, 2017, 2020) and authors such as Ainscow (2024), Florian (2014, 2019) and Walton (2018), is based on three fundamental pillars: (i) the presence, participation and learning of all students; (ii) the transformation of school cultures, policies and practices; and (iii) the appreciation of diversity as an educational resource.

The first pillar refers to ensuring access, meaningful participation and educational success for all, principles that are established in national and international policies (Alves et al., 2020; UNESCO, 2017). Booth and Ainscow (2011), in the *Inclusion Index*, propose guidelines for eliminating barriers to learning and participation, reinforcing the school as a democratic space. This vision is expanded by Florian (2014), who advocates a pedagogy centered on planning for all, and Slee (2011), who warns about the need for systems capable of responding to the diversity of ways of learning. Inclusion, from this perspective, is based on human rights and equal opportunities, supported by legal frameworks such as the *Salamanca Declaration* (UNESCO, 1994) and the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action on Education - Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all* (UNESCO, 2016), among others.

The second pillar emphasises that building inclusive education systems requires profound and articulated changes in cultural, political and practical dimensions (Booth & Ainscow, 2011; UNESCO, 2017). Authors such as Apple (2017), Freire (2019) Hernández-Torrano et al., (2020) and Santos (2020) underline education as a liberating practice that promotes social justice. For this to be accomplished, there is a need for (i) collaborative practices between professionals (Ainscow et al., 2006; Booth & Ainscow, 2011), (ii) family involvement (Flecha, 2015; Quaglia et al., 2020), (iii) curricular flexibilisation (Florian, 2014: UNESCO, 2017), (iv) continuous training (Spratt & Florian, 2015), (v) use of self-assessment tools (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) and (vi) evidence-based pedagogical decisions (Alves et al., 2020; European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education [EASNIE], 2022).

The third pillar concerns the beliefs, values and attitudes that shape school culture. Ainscow (2020), Ainscow et al. (2019) and the European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education (EASNIE, 2022), argue that diversity should be seen as a resource and not an obstacle. Florian (2019) and Walton (2018) maintain that it enriches the educational environment, provided it is integrated into pedagogical planning from the outset. Inclusion therefore requires not just technical changes, but an ethical and political commitment to social justice (UNESCO, 2017).

In this sense, actively listening to all members of the school community - especially students - becomes essential. Quaglia et al. (2020), Flecha (2015), Messiou (2016, 2019) and Cook-Sather (2002) argue that valuing voice fosters belonging, trust and continuous improvement. Voice is more than an individual expression: it is a structuring element of dialogic and democratic school cultures. In Portugal, the *Voz dos Alunos [Student's Voice]* initiative, promoted by the Direção-Geral da Educação (2023b), is an example of public policy that recognises the importance of listening to students on relevant issues in school life, contributing to more participatory and inclusive practices.

Although progress has been made in terms of inclusion in schools, significant challenges remain. Ainscow (2020) points to the persistence of exclusionary practices, while Florian and Spratt (2013) criticise the prevalence of the medical paradigm of disability. Walton (2018) warns of the risk of imposing culturally decontextualised inclusive models, and Booth and Ainscow (2016) question the stigmatising effects of categories such as "special needs". Furthermore, the gap between policies and practices is accentuated by insufficient initial training (Calegari-Falco et al., 2022) and the persistence of traditional methodologies (Brito & Orlando, 2014). Active and continuous listening, particularly to students in situations of exclusion, is central to advancing inclusion (Messiou, 2019; UNESCO, 2017). Involving students in identifying barriers and solutions contributes to more responsive and democratic practices, although these are still poorly implemented.

Although Portugal offers a robust and legally defined inclusive education model, in line with national and international commitments, it will be necessary to bridge the gap between policy and daily practice, which is highly dependent on developing teacher capacity, fostering collaborative cultures and providing effective and comprehensive resources and support systems, which are priority actions for the advancement of truly inclusive education.

In short, inclusive education, conceived as a commitment to equity and social justice, requires comprehensive structural and cultural transformations in schools, based on participation, listening and valuing diversity as fundamental pillars.

INCLUD-ED LEARNING COMMUNITIES: CHALLENGES AND IMPLICATIONS

The INCLUD-ED project - Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education (2006-2011) received funding from the European Commission and was coordinated by CREA - Community of Research in Excellence for All, at the University of Barcelona. Its main objective was to develop educational strategies that promote educational success and, at the same time, social cohesion. To achieve this goal, communities involved in learning projects that had achieved excellent academic and inclusion results were identified, with the focus on identifying Successful Educational Actions (SEA). These actions aim to improve students' academic success and contribute to social cohesion in all the contexts where they are implemented, "as opposed to good practices which, despite their potential to achieve excellent results, are limited to particular contexts" (Direção-Geral da Educação, 2023a).

In general terms, the INCLUD-ED project was able to identify actions that, regardless of the context, were considered "successful", opening the possibility of being transferable to any school or community (Direção-Geral

da Educação, 2023a). The focus has been placed on how "these actions affect the processes of inclusion and exclusion of five vulnerable groups: migrants, cultural minorities, women, young people and people with disabilities" (University of Barcelona, 2012, p. 5), although it has the ambition to reach all children and communities in Europe, regardless of their profile. Thus, INCLUD-ED goes beyond the limits of the initially defined project and is configured as a proposal for educational transformation that aims to improve learning and coexistence for all students, in order to build a quality school for all, from a perspective of equity, inclusion and in close liaison with the family and the community (Almeida, 2021, p. 48).

These learning communities are based on the seven principles of dialogic learning (egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, transformation, instrumental dimension, solidarity, meaning-making and equality of differences), implementing the SEAs that make the most sense for their context, from among the six: 1) interactive groups, 2) dialogic literary gatherings, 3) dialogic teacher training, 4) dialogic conflict prevention model, 5) community educational participation and 6) family training.

In Portugal, eleven school groups took part in the pilot project and, in 2019, the program was officially launched as a way to tackle school failure and dropout in the educational territories of priority intervention (TEIP). Currently, according to the data presented on the Learning Communities in Portugal website[1], there are fifty-one clusters/standalone schools that are part of the project and, regarding the monitoring and results of the work carried out by these learning communities, a limited body of evidence has been found, as we will see below.

In experiences reported by teachers involved in learning communities in Portugal, teachers say that the implemented SEAs, namely the dialogical gatherings and interactive groups, have contributed significantly to student motivation and the development of personal and social skills, as well as to "increasing vocabulary, improving oral expression and comprehension, and developing critical thinking and reasoning skills" (Almeida, 2021, p. 53), but were also seen as being beneficial to the development of students' reading skills (Nogueira & Miranda, 2021).

Research carried out internationally points in the same direction, both in terms of increasing student motivation (Amaro Agudo et al., 2020; Escuder et al., 2022; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022) and improving interpersonal relationships (Morlà-Folch et al., 2022; Ordóñez-Sierra et al., 2017; Roca et al., 2024; Roca-Campos et al., 2021), which is explained, among other factors, by the presence, participation and involvement of families at school (Escuder et al., 2022; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022).

1 https://comunidades-aprendizagem.dge.mec.pt/

This evidence suggests that those involved in learning communities consider that the application of SEAs has a positive impact on student learning. Nevertheless, not all studies have identified significant improvements in terms of students' pro-social behavior (Galindo-Domínguez et al., 2024), revealing the existence of implicit weaknesses in the application of SEAs.

Regarding teacher professional development, teachers are equally favourable and point to significant improvements, both in terms of their own learning, through changes in practices (García-Carrion et al., 2017), their involvement in collaborative processes, among peers and with other agents such as families (Galindo-Domínguez et al., 2024; García-Carrion et al., 2017; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022), as well as the reduction in workload due to the participation of volunteers (Amaro Agudo et al., 2020; Ordóñez-Sierra et al., 2017). On the other hand, and despite the positive attitudes expressed by the majority of participants in the studies analysed, the teachers involved in learning communities encounter challenges in this process, particularly with regard to the profile of the volunteers, which is not always suitable for the roles to be performed, or difficulties in managing class behavior due to the presence of volunteers (Amaro Agudo et al., 2020).

It has been found that, for both teachers and students, the systematic application of SEAs has a positive impact on students' learning and academic performance, their motivation and sense of belonging, and on improving interpersonal relationships (Amaro Agudo et al., 2020; Escuder et al., 2022; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022; Ordóñez-Sierra et al., 2017; Roca et al, 2024; Roca-Campos et al., 2021), although some challenges have been identified: on the one hand, the difficulty of working with volunteers and their presence in schools (Amaro Agudo et al., 2020) and, on the other hand, the lack of involvement of the families of the most vulnerable students, particularly those with a history of immigration (Roca et al., 2024).

To summarise, teachers and students involved in INCLUD-ED learning communities have positive attitudes towards the results of implementing SEAs, not only in terms of student inclusion, but also teacher learning and professional development. The challenges identified do not seem to have a significant impact on this process, so it can be concluded that the implications are, above all, favourable to the development of education. However, it should be emphasised that research on this subject is still not very comprehensive (Galindo-Domínguez et al., 2024), so this limitation should be taken into account when analysing the evidence.

METHODOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS

This study involved a sample of 154 teachers from primary and secondary education, aged between 37 and 58 (M=51.8; SD=6.59), with professional experience between 2 and 42 years (M=26.4; SD=8.51), who had been teaching in the same school for an average of over 13 years (M=13.4; SD=10.7), the majority belonging to the School Cluster (N=110; 71.4%), teaching mainly in the North (N=64; 41.56%) and Centre (N=57; 37.01%) regions and having a degree with a teaching qualification (N=99; 64.3%). The teachers are distributed across the different cycles of primary and secondary education, with a predominance for the 3rd Cycle (N=51; 33.1%) and 1st Cycle (N=41; 26.6%). Most of the participants reported having attended training in diversity and inclusion in education (N=98; 63.6%).

Regarding the pupils, the sample involved 638 students aged between 6 and 18 (M12±3.89), 320 (50.3%) of whom were female and 317 (49.7%) male. The distribution of participating pupils covers the various levels of education, from primary to secondary school. There was a higher concentration of respondents in the 4th year of the 1st cycle (N=138; 21.6%) and the 9th year of the 3rd cycle (N=130; 20.4%). The 3rd cycle represents the largest part of the sample, with 242 students (37.9%). As for the support received from teachers and psychologists, the distribution of responses shows a higher incidence in the 1st cycle (N=73; 35.6%), compared to the 2nd cycle (N=35, 29.4%), the 3rd cycle (N=72; 29.7%) and Secondary Education (N=20; 28.1%).

DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT AND PROCEDURES

The study sought to collect teachers' and students' perceptions of diversity, culture and inclusive practices (Semião et al., 2024). Considering the objectives and the research context, we opted for a data collection process using a questionnaire survey. Specifically, two *online* questionnaires were administered to teachers and students from 57 school groups involved in the Portuguese network of INCLUD-ED learning communities, with the following geographical distribution: Alentejo (5), Algarve (2), Centre (3), Lisbon and Tagus Valley (22) and North (19). These questionnaires were run between May and June 2023 in order to gather information to characterise teachers' perceptions of diversity and inclusive education. The teachers' questionnaire collected 154 responses and the students' questionnaire collected 638. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants and the schools were ensured, both in the data collection and analysis processes, and everyone gave written informed consent. In the case of the pupils, this consent was sought from their parents.

The instruments used were adapted from the study by Semião et al. (2024) and based on the *Index for Inclusion* by Tony Booth and Mel Ainscow (2002), both relating to perceptions and conceptions of diversity and inclusive education, one aimed at pupils and the other at teachers. Each questionnaire consists of a *Lickert* scale and two open questions, one centred on positive aspects of the development of inclusive education and the other on changes that could be implemented to promote it, namely: "Indicate up to 3 positive aspects that you identify in your school/cluster in relation to the development of inclusive education" and "Identify up to 3 changes that you would like to see implemented in your school/cluster in relation to the development of inclusive education".

DATA ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

The open-ended questions were analysed using a qualitative, interpretative approach, using the content analysis technique (Amado et al., 2014; Bogdan & Biklen, 1994), seeking to describe and understand the meanings attributed to inclusive education by teachers and students. The analysis process was organised on two matters - Inclusive school cultures and structures and Inclusion practices - which correspond to dimensions that also structure the questionnaires and the respective statistical analysis (Caetano et al., in press). Within the framework of these themes, the processes of coding the qualitative data led to the establishment of categories and indicators, as well as counting the number of recording units relating to these categories and indicators. In order to ensure the reliability of the analysis, the categories obtained were compared by the authors with a view to reaching consensus on the coding decisions.

It should also be emphasised that this study was carried out exclusively in clusters/schools identified as INCLUD-ED Learning Communities, which may explain the small sample size. Another limitation was the use of qualitative self-report measures/instruments which, despite proving suitable for analysing conceptions, attitudes and perceptions, could have been complemented with other types of instruments and informants.

Nevertheless, we believe that this research fills some gaps from an investigative point of view, both in terms of the scarcity of data on INCLUD-ED Learning Communities and the use of a validated instrument in the Portuguese context, which allows us to compare the perceptions of teachers and students on the same topics.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

The main contributions gathered from 154 teachers and 638 students are presented, focusing on the positive aspects identified and the changes to be implemented in the school or school cluster regarding the development of inclusive education.

ANALYSIS OF TEACHERS' ANSWERS TO OPEN QUESTIONS

Positive aspects regarding the development of inclusive education in schools

Table 1 systematises the aspects that teachers highlighted as positive in relation to the development of inclusive education in their work contexts. Of the 154 questionnaires, 142 participants answered this question, 9 did not answer and 3 said nothing or did not know.

Of a total of 382 Registration Units (RU), 276 fall under the heading of *School Culture and Structures* and 103 under the heading of *Inclusive Practices*.

TABLE 1. POSITIVE ASPECTS MENTIONED BY TEACHERS IN RELATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

School culture and structures

Categories	*Indicators*	*No. of recording units (RU)*	*number of RUs per category*
School ethos	· Positive attitudes towards diversity (in its multiple expressions) (appreciation, sensitivity, openness, respect, empathy (...))	32	61
	· Inclusion, integration, equity	15	
	· Safety and welcome	4	
	· Success for all	2	
	· Concern for students	6	
	· Confidence	2	
Existence of structures to support inclusion	· In general	13	56
	· EMAEI - Multidisciplinary Support Team for Inclusive Education	16	
	· SPO Psychology and Guidance Service	5	
	· Special Education Team	17	
	· GAAF - Student and Family Support Office	5	
Support, collaboration and communication	· In general	29	107
	· Management	15	
	· Teaching teams	21	
	· Specialised technicians	26	
	· Operational assistants	1	
	· External partnerships	2	
	· School-family-community relations	13	
Physical and material resources	· In general	6	21
	· Spaces (adapted classrooms, learning support centre, school library, access (...))	10	
	· Various support materials	1	
	· Equipment (particularly technological equipment)	4	
Educational organisation	· Class management (reduction, diversification)	7	16
	· Support/teaching/advisory services	8	
	· Time management (common time in the timetable)	1	
Professional development	· Teacher training	4	12
	· Team qualification	8	
Other	· Monitoring of processes (diversification of information-gathering procedures; surveys, debates (...))	2	3
	· Application of legislation	1	

Inclusive practices			
Categories	*Indicators*	*No. of recording units (RU)*	*number of RUs per category*
Curricular and pedagogical management	· Student participation in all school activities	12	103
	· Integration of students into the class	8	
	· Curricular adaptations and learning support measures	5	
	· PLNM classes - Portuguese as a non-native language	3	
	· Pedagogical differentiation	24	
	· Working methods (co-operative work, pairs, groups)	5	
	· Methodologies and activities (projects, interactive groups, school sport (...))	10	
	· Educational assessment	6	
	· Development of competences (social, socio-emotional, autonomy (...))	9	
	· Multi/intercultural education	8	
	· Specialised support (in and out of class)	11	
	· Mentoring	2	
Nothing to report/Don't know			
Don't know		1	3
Nothing to report		2	
No answer			
No answer		9	9

Regarding *School Cultures and Structures*, teachers emphasise, above all, processes linked to *Support, Collaboration and Communication* (107 RU) between different actors as the most positive aspects, followed by elements linked to the *School Ethos* (61 RU) and then the *Existence of Structures to Support Inclusion* (56 RU). This was followed by elements relating to *Physical and Material Resources* (21 RU), *Pedagogical Organisation* (16 RU) and *Professional Development* (12 RU).

About *Support, Collaboration and Communication* (107 RU), many teachers refer to it in general (29 RU), while those who detail these processes mention mostly support and collaboration from specialised technicians (26 RU) and within teaching teams (21 RU). Also noteworthy is the reference to support from the school board (15 RU) and interaction between school, family and community (13 RU). As an example, in the words of the teachers:

> "Good collaboration with the Inclusive Education team"; "Cooperation between Special Education teachers and Class Council members in operationalising strategies"; "The coordination that exists between Special Education teachers and head teachers/subjects"; "High level of collaboration between Class Council teachers"; "Sharing and coordination of strategies between colleagues"; "Collaboration with management in solving problems"; "Support from management bodies/class directors"; "Good communication

> between technicians and teachers"; "Collaboration between various educational actors; partnerships with other organisations"; "School-student relationship, school-parent relationship and relationship with the community"; "Openness to family participation"; "Working with the community"; "Parents' access to the school"; "School-family collaboration".

The importance given to the *school's ethos* (61 RU) is reflected in the teachers' reference to the existence of positive attitudes towards diversity in its multiple expressions (32 RU) and to values of inclusion, integration and equity as guiding principles in school life (15 RU). As they express:

> "Promoting inclusion and respect for diversity"; "Recognising the diversity of pupils"; "All pupils are treated with respect, with due attention regardless of their ethnicity, gender, religion, etc."; "All pupils with associated problems are integrated into the class/ school"; "Existence of a safe and welcoming environment".

With regard to the category *Existence of Structures to Support Inclusion* (56 RU) and *Physical and Material Resources* (21 RU), the existence of specific teams, such as special education teams (17 RU) and EMAEI (16 RU), and of various spaces to support inclusive education practices (10 RU), were highlighted as positive. Specifically,

> "The EMAEI team does an excellent job in terms of inclusion"; "Having a GAAF (psychologist, sociologist and conflict mediator)"; "Creating spaces to develop skills - e.g. sensory"; "Adapted rooms"; "Learning support room".

Positive factors related to *Pedagogical Organisation* (16 RU) and *Professional Development* (12 RU) were also mentioned. Regarding the first category, the existence of co-teaching, co-teaching and pedagogical consultancy practices (8 RU) and processes of reduction and diversification in class management (7 RU) were signaled as positive. The qualification of teams (8 RU), namely through training, stands out in terms of teacher professional development. For example,

> "Co-teaching in the classroom"; "Assistance in the classroom in Portuguese and Maths"; "Support teacher in the classroom"; "Smaller classes"; "Adequate training"; "Regular surveys and/or debates to find out about any problems".

The positive aspects of school contexts related to *Inclusive Practices* are essentially related to issues of *Curriculum and Pedagogical Management* (103 RU). In this sphere, teachers highlight practices of Pedagogical Differentiation (24 RU), measures that ensure the participation of all students in all school activities (12 RU), specialised support in class and outside (11 RU) and the use of varied methodologies and activities (10 RU). In the words of the teachers,

> "Possibility of diversifying strategies and implementing them"; "Pedagogical differentiation, differentiated support"; "Pedagogical differentiation according to the needs of each student"; "Differentiated pedagogical practices"; "All students are invited to take part in meaningful activities carried out at school"; "Inclusion of different students in all activities"; "Extracurricular support"; "Extra support given to students"; "Extracurricular activities".

The development of competences, mainly socio-emotional and autonomy (9 RU), the concern with the integration of all students in the class (8 RU) and activities within the framework of a multi/intercultRUal education (8 RU) follow as positive aspects related to inclusion practices. For example,

> "It brings [*sic*] benefits to all students, in addition to promoting emotional development and socialising, it favours the cognitive knowledge of students with disabilities"; "Inclusion of all students in the classroom, even those with multiple disabilities"; "Fostering respect for others through dialogue and activities aimed at cultural exchange"; "Events that include different cultures".

Also in this sphere, we find reference to the implementation of Pedagogical Assessment practices (6 RU), the use of different Work Modalities in class (5 RU), as well as the existence of Curricular Adaptations and measures to support learning (5 RU). There was less mention of Portuguese as a Non-Mother Tongue (PLNM) classes and mentoring, with 3 RU and 2 RU respectively. As they point out,

> "Diversification in assessment, existence of various projects"; "Implementation of pedagogical assessment"; "Differentiated resources and diversified assessment tools for the diversity of students"; "Based on the needs of each student, there is a search for solutions to provide the best teaching and learning experience with a view to success"; "Participation in large group activities"; "Projects adapted to the students"; "Classes with adapted curriculum"; "Creation of more practical curriculum areas adapted to the student profile, namely students covered by additional measures"; "PLNM classes; support for students"; "Mentoring project"; "Mentoring".

Changes to be implemented in the school/group in relation to the development of inclusive education

Table 2 provides a visualisation of the categories and indicators identified in the content analysis of the teachers' responses on the changes they consider relevant to implement in the school/cluster in relation to the development of inclusive education, which allows us to detect areas of dissatisfaction that need to be rethought. Of the 154 respondents to this questionnaire, 148 answered this open-ended question, 13 said there was nothing to change and 4 said they had no opinion.

TABLE 2. CHANGES TO BE IMPLEMENTED MENTIONED BY TEACHERS IN RELATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Categories	*Indicators*	*No. of recording units (RU)*	*number of RUs per category*
School culture and structures			
Support structures for inclusion	· Specific PLNM structures · "Preparation for life" subjects · Resource Centre for Inclusion	6 1 1	8
School ethos	· More/less flexibility Bureaucracy · Information / communication · Favourable attitudes of the school community (risk-taking, innovation, sensitivity, empathy)	10 2 9	21
Support, collaboration and communication	· In general · Between teachers - co-teaching · With families · With external partners/support · Specialised support	45 8 14 4 42	113
Human resources and professional development	· Stabilisation of the teaching staff · Training	1 10	11
Management of spaces and physical/material resources	· Adapted resources · Own spaces	15 10	25
Pedagogical management of times and classes	· Specific times and schedules allocated to teachers and students · Smaller classes · Homogeneous classes · Segregation	17 12 2 1	32
External - Guardianship	· Recognition	1	1
Total			211
Inclusion Practices			
	· In general · Assessment and diagnosis · Project work · Autonomisation practices · Tutoring and mentoring	9 1 1 1 4	16
Specialised support	· In the classroom · Outside the classroom	1 6	7
Discipline		2	2
Segregation practices		1	1
Interaction between classes and cycles		1	1
Total			27
No change			
Nothing to report/ change	Nothing to change Don't know/no opinion	16 4	20

From all the responses, elements relating to *School Culture and Structures* stand out (with a total of 257 RU), as might be expected given the content of the question focusing on changes in schools and clusters. Of these 257 RUs, there are 19 RUs that don't point to any changes to be made, either because teachers think there is nothing to change (16 RUs) or because they don't know how to come up with suggestions (4 RU). Some answers focused more specifically on the Educational practices dimension (27 RU).

The majority of responses on the subject of *School Culture and Structures* (211 RU), which point to the need to introduce changes, are concentrated in the categories *Support, Collaboration and Communication* (113 RU), *Pedagogical Organisation of Times and Classes* (32 RU), *Management of Spaces and Physical/Material Resources (25 RU), School Ethos* (21 RU) and *Human Resources and their professional development* (11 RU).

In the category of *Support, Collaboration and Communication Human Resources*, it is not always possible to find a specification regarding the participants in this collaboration (45 CUs), but those that are more specific refer to *specialised support* (42 CUs), namely special education teachers, among others.

> "A greater number of specialised technicians in certain areas, psychologists, speech therapists, social workers"; "More special education teachers, because the number of SEN pupils is very high compared to the number of teachers in the school"; "More specialised technicians to meet the needs of pupils and parents".

They also mention the relationship with families at school and at home (14 RU), collaboration between co-teachers (8) and with external partners (4).

> "Greater involvement of parents/guardians, as there are still many parents who are reluctant to co-operate with the school and teachers"; "Greater family support for pupils at home."

With regard to the categories *Management of Spaces and Resources* and *Organisation of Times and Classes*, there is a balanced distribution of indicators relating to own spaces (10 RU), adapted physical resources (15 RU), specific times and schedules allocated to teachers and students (17 RU) and classes (15 RU), the majority of which point to reducing their size (12 RU), although there are still ideas from some teachers pointing to greater homogenization in their composition and segregation. A few more examples:

> "Credit hours in the subject group to support these pupils; more credit hours for differentiated support for pupils with greater motor difficulties"; "Greater diversity of material resources and spaces for different activities, namely physical education"; "Pupils with additional measures having their own space where they could develop functional skills rather than being locked in a unit without adapted activities"; "Smaller classes to cater for diversity"; "Level classes"; "Classes suitable for this type of pupil".

The *ethos of the school* also deserves attention and needs improvement (21 RU), with emphasis on promoting favourable attitudes in the educational community, such as openness to innovation and empathy (9 RU), greater flexibility and less bureaucracy (8 RU). Teachers say:

> "Less resistance to change on the part of the teaching staff; more courage to take risks and innovate teaching strategies and methodologies"; "Greater awareness and empathy on the part of certain colleagues".

With regard to *Professional development* (11R), it is important to emphasise the importance of developing more training for teachers and also for staff (10 RU). For example:

> "The school's teachers should be trained in the merits of adopting inclusive education policies"; "The school's teachers and staff should be trained in actions to raise awareness of racism"; "Training for teachers in successful educational actions with help in practical application".

Regarding *Organisational and Curricular Structures* (8 RU), the need for changes in terms of coordination structures and spaces associated with learning Portuguese as a Non-Mother Tongue (PLNM) (6 RU) stands out.

> "There should be a period for students to adapt to the school and their knowledge of the Portuguese language before they join a class."

In summary, the conditions that favour this change include structural aspects such as the creation of support mechanisms, as well as the management of spaces, times, human and material resources and classes that facilitate closer, adapted and differentiated action.

In the responses relating to *Educational practices*, improvements were highlighted in differentiation processes (16 RU) and in practices with specialised support inside and outside the classroom (7 RU), including:

> "That all teachers diversify strategies and actions in the classroom so that all students learn"; "Diverse substitute activities"; "Frequently listening to/questioning students to identify their likes/dislikes/self-assessment"; "Attending all classes is not necessarily beneficial for students with diverse difficulties".

Some, very few, point to practices of homogenisation, segregation and disciplining. There were some interesting responses, although not many, which pointed to processes of interaction between classes and cycles of education and the extension to the whole school. In view of the open-ended responses about changes to be made, it seems to be mainly a question of acting in favour of the students, by the adults, with fewer records pointing to the active participation of the students in the development of this inclusion.

ANALYSING STUDENTS' ANSWERS TO OPEN QUESTIONS

Positive aspects regarding the development of inclusive education in schools

Table 3 systematises the aspects that students consider positive in the school environment, i.e. those that contribute to their well-being. Of the 638 valid responses, 596 were answered, while 19 students did not answer, 12 said they did not know how to answer and 10 said they had nothing to say.

After analysing the 1,336 Registration Units (RU), it was found that 978 focus on the theme of *School Culture and Structures*, while 358 are dedicated to the theme of *Inclusive Practices*.

TABLE 3. POSITIVE ASPECTS MENTIONED BY STUDENTS REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive school culture and structures

Categories	*Indicators*	*No. of recording units (RU)*	*number of RUs per category*
Interpersonal relationships	**Importance of the teacher**		**259**
	· Teachers	186	
	· Female Teacher	53	
	· Male Teacher	20	
	School as an important space for friendship and socialising		**308**
	· Colleague(s)	111	
	· Friend(s)	172	
	· Friendship	25	
	Importance of employee support		**58**
	· Staff	46	
	· Helpers	12	
School environment	**Physical space and material resources**		**80**
	· School	31	
	· Bar	14	
	· Field (football and basketball)	13	
	· Playground	12	
	· Library	10	
	Quality and diversity of the food offered by the school	10	**12**
	· Meals	2	
	· Food/Nutrition		
	Perceptions of school organisation and safety		**15**
	· Safety/Security	9	
	· Organisation	6	
	School climate		**51**
	· Environment (Good, pleasant)	51	
	Inclusive environment		**29**
	· Inclusion	17	
	· Reception	9	
	· Acceptance	2	
	· Integration	1	
	Collaborative environment		**119**
	· Help	84	
	· Support	30	
	· Collaboration	3	
	· Solidarity	2	
	Empathetic environment		**38**
	· Respect	26	
	· Understanding	12	
	Motivating environment		**9**
	· Incentive	5	
	· Motivation	3	
	· Valuing	1	

Categories	*Indicators*	*No. of recording units (RU)*	*number of RUs per category*
	Inclusive Practices		
Learning and teaching	**Active methodologies**		**255**
	· Activity(ies)	64	
	· Play	60	
	· Lesson(s)	56	
	· Games	29	
	· Group	26	
	· Teaching	11	
	· Study visits	9	
	Value of learning		**49**
	· learning	49	
Voice and participation	**Space for interaction**		**54**
	· Listening/hearing/heard	14	
	· Ideas	10	
	· Opinion	10	
	· Participate/Participation	9	
	· Express/Expressing	6	
	· Freedom/Free	5	
	Don't know/Nothing to report		
Don't know		12	**22**
Nothing to report		10	
	No answer		
No answer		19	**19**

Analysing the theme *School Cultures and Structures* (RU 978), students value *Interpersonal Relationships* above all (625 RU), with special emphasis on the relationships established with *Classmates* (308 RU), *Teachers* (259 RU) and *Staff* (58 RU). Here are some examples:

> "I like school because I can be with my friends"; "Some of the teachers are really cool"; "The staff are interested and welcoming".

The *School Environment* comes next (359 RU), with an emphasis on the *Collaborative Environment* (119 RU) followed by *Physical Space Conditions and Material Resources* (80 RU). In addition, students mentioned other aspects such as *School Climate* (51 RU), *Empathetic Environment* (38 RU), *Inclusive Environment* (29 RU), *Organisation and Safety* (15 RU), *Food* (12 RU) and *Motivating Environment* (9 RU). Below are some selected extracts from the interviews:

> "I can count on some friends"; "Teacher helps everyone"; "Whenever I have difficulty with something, there's someone by my side to help me"; "The school's large space because we can run around freely, outdoor space, places to socialise, the rooms being spacious and with good sound insulation"; "There's always a good atmosphere among everyone, always in good spirits"; "Feeling that the teachers

> understand my family situation"; "Being respected by everyone"; "They accept new students well, they don't exclude people too much"; "The school has a good dynamic"; "The organisation of the classroom"; "Good food"; "The school bars have some food at an acceptable price"; "When the teachers encourage us to do activities"; "That I always have colleagues motivating me".

Regarding the topic of *Inclusive Practices (358 RU)*, the students emphasised the positive aspects of school contexts, with a greater focus on *Learning and Teaching* issues (304 RU). In this context, *Active Methodologies* were the most valued point (255 RU), followed by *Value for Learning* (49 RU). With regard to *Voice and Participation*, *Space for Interaction* (54 RU) was the most relevant aspect. Check out some of the excerpts below:

> "Working in groups"; "Variety of activities"; "Study visits"; "Classes are fun and we get to learn"; "Learning new things"; "The outdoor space, there is plenty of room to walk around and be alone"; "The school's large space because we can run around freely, outdoor space, spaces to socialise, the rooms being spacious and with good sound insulation".

Changes to be implemented in the school/group in relation to the development of inclusive education

The answers to the question "Name 3 things you would like to see changed to make you feel more included in your school/classroom" are systematised in Table 4.

TABLE 4. CHANGES TO BE IMPLEMENTED MENTIONED BY STUDENTS IN RELATION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

Inclusive school culture and structures

Categories	*Indicators*	*No. of recording units (RU)*	*number of RUs per category*	*% (100% = 638)*
Interpersonal relationships	**Challenges in the relationship between students and teachers**		**106**	**16,6**
	· Teachers	86		
	· Female Teacher	12		
	· Male Teacher	8		
	Challenges in the student-student relationship		**68**	**10,6**
	· Colleagues	34		
	· Friends	26		
	· Friendship	8		
	Challenges in the relationship between students and assistants/staff		**18**	**2,8**
	· Staff	11		
	· Helpers	7		
School environment	**Physical space and material resources**		**126**	**19,7**
	· Hall	25		
	· Space	16		
	· Field (football)	12		
	· Internet	11		
	· Toilet(s)	11		
	· Chairs	9		
	· Grass	9		
	· Computer/Tablet	8		
	· Bar	6		
	· Air conditioning	6		
	· Toys	4		
	· Cafeteria	4		
	· Roof	3		
	· Heating	2		
	Quality and diversity of the food offered by the school		**33**	**5,1**
	· Food	27		
	· Meals	6		
	Challenges regarding school organisation and security		**78**	**12,2**
	· Playtime	26		
	· Recess	13		
	· Noise	10		
	· Socialising	8		
	· Organise/Organisation	6		
	· Safety/Security	5		
	· Timetable	5		
	· Interaction(s)	5		

	School climate		**19**	**2,9**
	· Class	11		
	· Environment	8		
	Need to build a more inclusive environment		**27**	**4,2**
	· Inclusion	17		
	· Acceptance	6		
	· Integration	4		
	Need to build a more attentive environment to combat bullying and exclusionary practices		**36**	**5,6**
	· *Bullying*	11		
	· Exclusion	7		
	· Lack of attention	7		
	· Mocking	6		
	· Discrimination	5		
	Need to build a more collaborative environment		**43**	**6,7**
	· Help	26		
	· Support	17		
	Need to build a more empathetic environment		**52**	**8,1**
	· Respect	38		
	· Understanding	14		
	Need to build a more motivating environment		**6**	**0,9**
	· Motivation, Incentives, Valorisation	6		
	Inclusive practices			
Categories	*Indicators*	*No. of recording units (RU)*	*number of RUs per category*	*%*
Learning and teaching	**Active methodologies**		**238**	**37,3**
	· Lesson(s)	81		
	· Activity(ies)	67		
	· Group	34		
	· Play	28		
	· Field trip	12		
	· Teaching	10		
	· Playing/Games	6		
	Challenges in relation to learning		**9**	**1,4**
	· Learn	6		
	· Learning	2		
	· Learnings	1		
	Evaluation		**8**	**1,2**
	· Different forms, fewer tests	8		
Voice and participation	**Need to build a space for interaction**		**22**	**3,4**
	· Listening/hearing/heard	13		
	· Opinion	9		
	Nothing to report/Don't know			
Don't know		55	**89**	**13,9**
Nothing to report		34		

	No answer		
No answer	27	**27**	**4,2**

Table 4 presents a detailed analysis of the students' responses on the changes they would like to see in order to promote greater inclusion at school. This content analysis reveals categories and indicators that highlight areas that students show they want to improve. Of the 638 valid responses, 521 students answered the question, while 27 chose not to answer. In addition, 34 students said there was nothing to report and 55 said they had no opinion.

After analysing the 889 Registration Units (RU), it was found that 612 (RU) refer to the theme of *School Culture and Structures*, while 277 (RU) focus on the theme of *Inclusive Practices*.

Analysing the theme of *School Cultures and Structures* (612 RU), we see that the students consider the *School Environment (RU 420), Physical Space Conditions and Material Resources* (RU 126) to be the most relevant aspects in terms of what could be changed at school to make them feel better. The students say:

> "The floor of the school is made of stones and when we fall it hurts more than if it were another type of floor, some lockers are broken and the internet fails a lot"; "More spaces in the school and a technology room"; "Heating for the winter"; "Better toys".

They then consider that *Interpersonal Relationships* also present challenges to be overcome, namely in the *Relationship between Students and Teachers* (106 RU), in the *Relationship between Students and Students* (68 RU) and in the *Relationship between Students and Staff* (18 RU). Extracts from some of the interviews:

> "The possibility of choosing the class based on friends"; "Aggressiveness of classmates"; "Sitting in the classroom next to the classmate I chose"; "I'd like to be able to share a snack, because at snack time I see friends who don't have one and I'd like to share mine, but we can't"; "I'd like my friends to include me more in football matches"; "I'd like my classmates to be more friendly with each other and there to be no divisions"; "The teacher being different in the way she talks and helps"; "I think I should be less embarrassed when it comes to talking to teachers"; "Some teachers showing interest in teaching"; "More fluid conversations during the lesson between the student and teacher"; "Understanding the student more often / refraining from offensive comments"; "I wish my school had more helpers to keep a better eye on the breaks"; "That the staff treated the children better, that they didn't shout or hit the children's hands"; "Helpers being quicker to answer and not chatting while someone is waiting".

They also mention the *Challenges in relation to School Organisation and Safety* (78 RU), the *Need to Build a More Empathetic Environment* (52 RU), to *Build a More Collaborative Environment* (43 RU), to *Build an Environment More Attentive to Combating Bullying Practices* (36 RU), *the Quality and Diversity of the Food Offered by the School* (33 RU), the *Need to Build a More Inclusive Environment* (27 RU), *the School Climate* (19 RU) and the *Need to Build a More Motivating Environment* (6 RU). To illustrate:

> "More organisation (...) less noise, more teachers"; "More security"; "More classes with fewer pupils"; "Better organisation of different activities"; "Not having so much need to judge, playing bad taste games and sometimes being disrespectful"; "The older pupils respecting the ethnicity and colour of the other children"; "The older ones have to learn to respect the younger ones"; "The teachers respecting the pupils and their differences more"; "Helping other types of people, helping those who need it most"; "Helping all kinds of pupils"; "Support groups"; "More interaction between colleagues"; "More teachers giving support to children with special needs"; "More support/help from teachers with any difficulties I have without having to seek help outside school"; "I would like all teachers and staff to pay more attention to all children who suffer from *bullying*"; "I would like not to be made fun of when I make a mistake in a wrong answer to a teacher"; "I wish my friend who is autistic wasn't made fun of"; "I wish there were more rules about *bullying* and aggression"; "Better cooking"; "Don't make us eat when we don't like it"; "Quality meals"; "Greater inclusion of different cultures, ideals and commitments"; "Accepting everyone's gender"; "I feel included, but I suggest that with some colleagues there should be more dialogue so that they understand that they are equal and worth as much as the others"; "To be more included in games"; "I wish my classmates were more open to meeting new people"; "Apathetic atmosphere since the pandemic, little connection between classes"; "Building a better classroom environment"; "Better school environment"; "The possibility of more study visits and plays that can encourage students about the subject or not"; "I wish they would sometimes give us more motivation to enjoy going to school and not be such a drag".

Regarding the *Inclusive Practices* theme (262 RU), in relation to the aspects that students believe could be improved at school so that they feel more included in the *Learning and Teaching* category (240 RU), *Active Methodologies* was the most valued point (238 RU), followed by *Learning Challenges* (9 RU) and *Assessment* (8 RU). In the *Voice and Participation* category, they emphasised the need to build a space for interaction (22 RU). Some passages from the interviews:

> "A more modern classroom"; "Outdoor classes"; "More fun classes, themed classrooms, more practical classes, classes outside the classroom more often"; "More group work, outings and perhaps debates"; "More fun learning"; "Making groups according to the pace of learning"; "Different types of assessment and for some teachers to have a different approach"; "Teachers not thinking they know everything, listening to them"; "More attention to students' opinions on the educational process": "Being listened to".

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS – CROSS-REFERENCING TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARDS INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

The results presented are in line with a positive view of inclusion in Portugal (OECD, 2023), illustrating the effort that has been made over the last 25 years to ensure that all children are in school and complete mandatory education. However, they reveal how some of the main protagonists of this effort still find room for transformation and change. In the responses to open questions from teachers, on the one hand, there is a higher incidence of positive responses than of suggestions for change in relation to support structures for inclusion and a positive ethos. This fact, reflected in the number of recording units, shows how crucial interpersonal relationships are for creating and maintaining inclusive relationships in the classroom and school.

However, there are no clear references to legislation or how many of the measures suggested therein are being implemented in the classroom and in schools, including their effects on students' learning. This absence may be due to the instrument used, but also to issues of visibility of these actions in everyday school life, which reinforces how the training of different professionals, and how this is reflected in professional development, is considered necessary for inclusive education.

On the other hand, collaboration between the school's different professionals is evaluated positively, but given the suggestions for changeit still seems to need to be deepened, including communication between the professionals themselves and the school leadership, as well as between the school, families and the community. These results seem to suggest that the school, in general, still finds it difficult to establish partnerships with the community, including families and *stakeholders*, in order to find joint solutions to the daily challenges it faces in including all pupils, challenges that translate into pupil participation in all school activities. There is also further evidence of the need for changes in the management of spaces and material resources, as well as in the pedagogical organisation of classes and schedules, which contrasts with the positive references to classroom practices, with many more units recorded.

In general, students expressed a positive view of the aspects that contribute to their well-being at school. Of the 638 participants, only 41 provided non-computable answers. However, when addressing areas for improvement to increase inclusion, 106 students did not provide analysable answers. This contrast suggests that students find it easier to identify positive points, possibly because they are close to their experiences at school or because they observe them with their peers, than to point out aspects that need to change in the context of inclusive education, since this identification forces

them into an exercise of reflection that is easier for them when involvement in participatory processes is part of their daily lives as students at school. However, it should be noted that this finding may be the result of the fact that we have a data collection instrument with a range of application that covers students from the 1st cycle to the 3rd cycle of schooling, and the open questions are the ones that students may find most difficult to answer.

In analysing the students' responses about inclusive school culture and structures, it becomes clear that interpersonal relationships are the cornerstone of a positive school environment. They value interactions with peers, teachers and staff, recognising the quality of these relationships as essential to well-being. A collaborative environment, with adequate spaces and resources, and a school climate characterised by empathy, inclusion and motivation are also considered crucial. However, when pointing out the challenges, the conditions of the physical space and material resources emerge as the main concern, revealing a contradiction with the initial valorisation of these aspects. Student-teacher relations are also identified as areas for improvement, as are organisation, safety, fighting *bullying* and the quality of food.

Finally, the results alert us to the study by Quaglia et al. (2020), which reveals how inclusive schools promote the voice of everyone - students, teachers, other professionals and families - as the basis for commitment to change. This voice cannot be understood as an individual expression, but as a collective voice that is the fruit of transformation and democratisation of the school space. The students in this study recognise active methodologies as fundamental to learning and well-being, but emphasise the need for spaces that promote interaction and active participation in order to have a voice in school decisions. Some of these spaces could be inspired by non-formal education strategies that promote a culture of citizenship, science, art, sport and technology that can involve the entire school community in collaborative work where different players participate together in collective projects that promote an inclusive school culture.

By cross-referencing the responses of teachers and students in our study who belong to TEIP schools, where over the last 25 years we have seen a clear concern for inclusion and the success of all students (Costa & Almeida, 2022), we can see that both teachers and students predominantly express positive perceptions about aspects of school inclusion. In fact, teachers highlight a favourable attitude towards inclusion and positively evaluate collaboration at school, although they point out the need for further development. For example, in the results there are a number of entries about networking as a strategy for improving school results.

The literature has shown how INCLUD-ED communities have developed successful educational actions where partnerships with the community have

a positive impact on student learning, motivation and improved interpersonal relationships (Amaro Agudo et al., 2020; Escuder et al., 2022; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022; Ordóñez-Sierra et al., 2017; Roca-Campos et al., 2021).

Also in Portugal, in experiences reported by teachers involved in learning communities, they report that the actions developed have contributed significantly to student motivation and the development of personal and social skills, to "increasing vocabulary, improving oral expression and comprehension and developing critical thinking and reasoning skills" (Almeida, 2021, p. 53), as well as to the level of development of reading skills (Nogueira & Miranda, 2021). In our study, teachers make more positive references to classroom practices than to aspects that need to be changed, which indicates confidence in the strategies applied, although they do not clearly identify which ones, as is the case in previous studies.

Finally, there are some differences between teachers and students. While the former highlight the need for changes in the pedagogical organisation of classes and timetables, the students mention challenges related to safety, combating *bullying* and the quality of food. These factors show that, in addition to infrastructure and material resources, inclusion also depends on a safe environment that promotes conditions of well-being for all.

These results underline the importance of a more in-depth dialogue between the two groups to align perceptions and strengthen more effective and participatory inclusion, and of greater participation by families and volunteers in the school, as provided for in the principles of INCLUD-ED Learning Communities (Almeida, 2021) which, as the literature shows (e.g.: Escuder et al., 2022; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022), entails significant positive changes for the development of inclusive education.

From an investigative point of view, it is necessary to cross-check the results with the analysis of the statistically treated closed questions in both questionnaires.

The teachers' answers to the closed questions seem to be consistent with the answers to the open questions in this same first application of the questionnaires, presented in other publications. We concluded that:

> the majority of the teachers who responded seem to be aware of the importance of educational inclusion and consider it to be a path under construction that needs to be sustained within the educational community and by the authorities. Teachers emphasise the importance of people and relationships in this process, in line with the approaches that underpin the INCLUD-ED project, of dialogical, integrated and ecological learning, where everyone, including teachers, specialised technicians and families, must actively participate, in a committed, collaborative way that is sensitive to the specificities of the students, flexible and open to innovation.

Diversity is seen as an opportunity by teachers, implying differentiated work with pupils and collaboration with families, and it may be necessary to remove some pupils from the classroom in order to guarantee them a quality education (...) But while they have generally positive attitudes towards the school, its structures and culture, teachers show some dissatisfaction and point to the need for improvements that favour work that takes account of diversity and the learning of all pupils (Caetano et al., in press).

The study of the students' answers to the closed questions concluded that:

> the results reveal an overall positive trend regarding TEIP students' perceptions of inclusive education and the inclusive practices and environments of their schools, which reinforces the continued political and practical commitment to the design and implementation of new methodologies, as well as the continued investment in evaluation processes, for decisions based on scientific evidence.

The results open up new perspectives for analysing the development of more equitable and inclusive educational practices in TEIP schools and ways of modifying environments that are intended to be even more inclusive. Investing in the initial and ongoing education of teachers and other professionals is another step to consider, in parallel with carrying out research in the area of inclusive education (Kamp et al, in press).

Also, in the study of the application of these questionnaires at three different times, presented in the previous chapter, the results point in the same direction. It will also be important to cross-check this data with the case studies carried out, especially to get a more in-depth understanding of inclusive education from the testimonies of the project coordinators, other teachers in each school and other participants (family members, technicians, community members).

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CHAPTER 5

LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND INCLUSION IN SCHOOLS: FOUR CASE STUDIES IN THE LISBON REGION

Ana Paula Caetano
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Márcia Kamp
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Maria João Mogarro
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Lina Costa
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Tânia Henriques
Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

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Ana Paula Caetano
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Márcia Kamp
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Maria João Mogarro
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Lina Costa
UIDEF, Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Tânia Henriques
Instituto de Educação, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

INTRODUCTION

This research followed the approach advocated by the CREA - Community of Research on Excellence for All (2020) research collective, led by Rámon Flecha (2015), from the University of Barcelona in Spain, with the participation of 14 countries, which proposes the INCLUD-ED model for transforming schools and their communities through the implementation of Successful Educational Actions (SEA), with the aim of promoting educational success for all children and young people.

Inclusion is understood here in the broad sense of access, participation and success for all students, taking into account their diversity and not limited to cases involving students in particularly vulnerable situations.

Within the LC4Inclusion project, focused on Learning Communities (LCs) that follow the INCLUD-ED model in Portugal, school clusters (SC) across the country were identified as having advanced in implementing the LC programme, based on questionnaire responses. These clusters were subsequently contacted to explore the possibility of conducting more in-depth case studies. After several attempts, some seemingly promising but

ultimately unfeasible due to lack of follow-up from the clusters, four school clusters in the Lisbon and Tagus Valley region agreed to host researchers for the case study development. These research teams included senior and junior researchers, among them three PhD candidates who incorporated the studies into their doctoral research. This chapter focuses specifically on these four case studies.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION – BRIEF FRAMEWORK

One of the most important aspects of Learning Communities (LCs) is the creation of a collaborative environment. This is achieved through the active participation of all members of the school community, including parents and other community members, which improves social cohesion, fosters inclusion and promotes emotional and social competences, as well as boosting students' academic success (Capllonch & Figueras, 2012).

Learning communities are also based on principles of continuous professional development for teachers, promoting pedagogical innovation and ongoing reflection on educational practices. By working together, teachers and other professionals develop new, evidence-based pedagogical strategies that improve teaching and learning for all students (Vescio et al., 2008). Its main characteristics, often referred to in the literature, include: "(a) collaboration, (b) clear and shared goals, (c) focus on learning, (d) school culture or climate, (e) deprivatised practice and (f) reflective dialogue" (Cabezas et al., 2021, p. 143).

In addition, learning community practices "create school communities that foster good relationships with the environment either internally or externally to solve teaching and learning problems while at the same time creating effective schools." (Ismail et al., 2019, p. 1853). These collaborative and inquiry processes, supported by democratic leadership and extended in partnerships and networks with the community, are fundamental for guaranteeing learning opportunities for all, for fostering the changes in school organisations and cultures that are supposed to characterise these communities, and for educators to adapt to new educational realities and challenges (Admiraal et al., 2019).

In the specific case of INCLUD-ED LCs, the model proposes several stages for their creation and development,

1. Sensibilisation: This is the time to think deeply about the educational methods that produce the best results.

2. Decision-making: This is the phase in which the final decision is made: the school will become a LC.
3. The dream: The time comes when the entire educational community (students, teachers, families, management and social agents) dreams of the school they want for the future. It's an exciting and creative process, which each school realises and represents in a different way.
4. Selecting priorities: This is the moment when decisions are made about the most urgent priorities and the most relevant dreams, shared by the whole community.
5. Planning: This is when the school designs the path it wants to follow to realise the community's dreams. (DGE, https://comunidades-aprendizagem.dge.mec.pt/pt/apresentacao/sobre-comunidades-de-aprendizagem)

These INCLUD-ED LCs are based on the principles of dialogic learning, according to which

> Dialogic learning is produced in egalitarian dialogues, in interactions in which the cultural intelligence of all people is recognised and which are aimed at transforming previous levels of knowledge and the socio-cultural context, so that progress can be made towards success for all. Dialogic learning is produced in interactions that enhance instrumental learning, favour the creation of personal and social meaning, are guided by principles of solidarity and in which equality and difference are compatible and mutually enriching values (Aubert et al., 2016, p. 137).

The implementation of learning communities in schools has shown positive results both in Portugal and in other countries. In some cases, the communities have focused explicitly on reducing inequalities and promoting educational equity through inclusive cultures and practices (e.g. Andrade, 2007; CREA, 2020; Escuder et al., 2022; Flecha, 2015; Flecha & Soler, 2013; Garcia-Carrion et al., 2017; Molina Roldán et al., 2021; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022; Walton et al, 2019). Specialisation focused on issues of inclusion is important as a source of knowledge for professional learning in communities and for ensuring that communities are indeed learning communities, with both the local knowledge of members and that of elements outside the community being valid and valued (e.g. Walton et al., 2019). But research into this specific relationship between learning communities and their role in the development of inclusive education remains scarce (Brennan & King, 2022). In Portugal, our teams from the LC4Inclusion project and CATIE (Transformative Learning Communities for Educational Inclusion, http://www.ie.ulisboa.pt/projetos/catie) have tried to contribute to this knowledge by focusing their research on the school clusters associated with INCLUD-ED, but not only (CATIE sought to set up a LC autonomous to this programme), either through case studies (e.g. Caetano, 2025, in press; Costa et al, 2024;

Kamp & Caetano, 2024; Martins et al., 2025a, 2025b; Silva et al., 2024), or through an extended study focused on the professional development of teachers and their attitudes and those of the students in the school clusters involved in these LCs (eg. Caetano et al., in press; Kamp et al., in press; Tinoca et al., in press).

For the development of inclusion, CREA's research has highlighted as particularly relevant some activities considered to be effective in promoting inclusion and overcoming social and educational inequalities, called successful educational actions (SEA). These have already been tested in more than 9,000 schools and have been partially or fully implemented in LCs in Portugal. Focused on the participation, collaboration and learning of students, teachers and family members, interactive groups, literary and artistic gatherings, dialogical teacher training and the involvement of family members and the community have stood out as the most frequently used and appreciated, not without their challenges and difficulties (e.g. Álvarez-Álvarez, 2017; DeLuis & Ocon, 2016; Lopez-Azuaga & Riveiro, 2020; Silva et al., 2024; Zubiri-Esnaola et al., 2020).

LCs can help strengthen not only the relationship between professionals working in schools and outside, but also the relationship between teachers and families, with an impact on students' motivation and academic success and their socio-emotional development, favouring the construction of a more inclusive and collaborative school culture. Joint work between teachers and parents can facilitate the development of strategies that promote equity, reducing barriers to learning, such as interactive groups (De Luis & Ocon, 2016; Lopez-Azuaga & Riveiro, 2020; Rodriguéz & Vallejo, 2016). However, this relationship is not easy and some studies point to limits in the degree of family participation (e.g. Geletu & Mihiretie, 2023).

Research on cultural diversity and inclusion highlight three essential dimensions for school inclusion: a culture of change, interprofessional collaboration and teacher professional development (eg Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Semião et al., 2023).

In relation to these dimensions, the results point to the role of learning communities, such as the collaborative approach, which, by promoting an environment where teachers share experiences, reflect on their practice and develop innovative strategies to respond to the diversity of students, allow for greater adaptation of teaching methodologies to the specific needs of students, encouraging the use of differentiated practices centred on the active involvement of students. Adequate school structural and cultural conditions are essential for this, and the role of leadership, inclusion support structures, specialised and trained human resources, facilitative management of spaces, physical/material resources, timetables and classes

in the development of these communities and pedagogical differentiation is particularly relevant (e.g. Kamp et al., in press; Neve & Devos, 2017).

This chapter focuses on four case studies relating to school clusters in educational territories of priority intervention - TEIP. All four cases are presented in order to analyse how this programme is fostering inclusion and the development of learning communities, framing them within school policies and projects, observing educational practices, analysing the attitudes and perceptions of the various stakeholders and discussing the scope, involvement, barriers and student learning.

METHODOLOGY, CHARACTERISATION OF THE GROUPS AND PARTICIPANTS

This research followed a qualitative approach, using a descriptive-interpretive case study (Amado & Freire, 2000 applied to four school clusters (AE) in the Lisbon region. Data collection included the analysis of documents (namely educational projects and official websites), interviews with 32 adults (including school heads, programme coordinators, teachers, and volunteers), 15 classroom and pedagogical activity observations recorded as field notes, and 22 focus groups with pupils.

The case studies development involved the creation of interview guides for SC teachers and coordinators, volunteers, and student focus groups, as well as an observation grid aimed at identifying the implementation of SEAs.

The interviews conducted with school leaders, coordinators, and teachers were designed to address three overarching aims: 1) To find out how the school has conceptualised and operationalised educational inclusion; 2) To find out how the interviewee perceives the process of creating and developing INCLUD-ED learning communities in the school; 3) To understand the contributions of the process to the development of educational inclusion in the school. The scripts were organised into five thematic blocks: legitimisation of the interview; characterisation of the interviewee; perception of the process of creating and developing INCLUD-ED learning communities in the school; understanding the contributions of the process to the development of educational inclusion in the school; and final considerations.

The semi-structured interviews with family members and/or volunteers were designed to address the following overarching objectives: 1) to understand how family members/volunteers interpret and experience the Successful Educational Actions developed in the Learning Communities; 2) to understand how family members/volunteers interpret and experience the concept of Inclusive Education; 3) to analyse and interpret inclusive practices and the way these are put into effect, developed and experienced by volunteers/

family members within a Learning Community; 4) to identify the impact of the Learning Community on the development of an Inclusive Education whose aim is to combat exclusion/inequality and promote participation and learning for all. The script drawn up and used by all the researchers in the various groups studied had six thematic blocks, namely: 1) legitimisation of the interview; 2) characterisation of the interviewee; 3) learning communities; 4) inclusive education; 5) transformative learning and 6) final considerations.

The *focus groups* had the following general objectives: 1) to understand how students interpret and experience the successful educational activities developed in Learning Communities; 2) to understand how students interpret and experience Inclusive Education; 3) to analyse and interpret inclusive practices and how they are implemented and developed and experienced by students within a Learning Community; 4) to identify the impact of the Learning Community on the development of Inclusive Education, the aim of which is to combat exclusion/inequality and promote participation and learning for all. The scripts were organised into five thematic blocks: 1) legitimisation of the interview; 2) characterisation of the interviewee; 3) learning communities and Successful Educational Actions; 4) inclusive education and transformative learning and 5) final considerations.

The *focus* groups with students worked with groups of 4-6 students from each class. As many groups were formed as the number of students whose parents authorised their participation in the research.

For the observation of inclusive practices, an observation grid was drawn up, a collection technique used as a way of gaining direct access (participant observation) to the teaching-learning process, seeking to validate situations in which inclusion methods and strategies are applied.

The interviews and *focus groups* were subject to content analysis procedures, which broadly followed Bardin's (2013) guidelines and was mostly inductive. This chapter discusses the data obtained from the most significant data from the individual interviews and focus groups and presents brief descriptions of some observations.

In order to characterise the perspective of the adults interviewed, the following categories of analysis were defined:

- Impacts on students' academic learning, with academic learning being understood as the knowledge acquired associated with the curricula and respective subject areas.
- Impacts on socio-emotional competences and relationships between pupils, here understood as the learning that develops in pupils' relationships with themselves and with others, covering aspects of self-awareness, self-regulation and interaction with colleagues.

- Impacts on family development here including different levels of participation in school activities and decisions, both inside and outside the classroom.
- Inclusion policies/cultures and practices, which implies the definition of common principles, values and goals, as well as the development of dynamics and practices geared towards the inclusion of all students, i.e. their access, participation and educational success, taking equitable account of their sociocultural, linguistic diversity, learning rhythms and styles, among others, with supplementary support whenever necessary, and with particular care for students who are in conditions of greater vulnerability.
- The school as a learning community or in the process of becoming one, which points to an analysis of the successes and difficulties with the creation and development of these learning communities, according to a holistic, systemic and ecological vision, which may involve all or part of the group or schools, in which several of the characteristics of the learning community are identified in the specialised literature (eg. shared vision and mission; collaborative culture and creative collective learning, namely through reflective, inquiry and dialogical processes; shared and supportive leadership; focus on the professional development of teachers and other professionals; focus on student learning and the classroom), as well as the successful educational activities defined by the Programme.

As for pupils' views on inclusive educational experiences, the SEAs they referred to, family involvement, and school inclusion were categorised, with each category divided into favourable/successful and unfavourable/difficult perspectives.

CHARACTERISATION OF THE GROUPS

Table 1 gives a description of the ES studied (referred to by the fictitious names CRUX - AECS, PHOENIX -AEF, ORION - AEO, PEGASUS - AEP), in terms of the number and type of educational establishments they comprise, their territorial spread and the human resources they have at their disposal.

TABLE 1. CHARACTERISATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS - NUMBER AND TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS AND HUMAN RESOURCES

	CRUX	PHOENIX	ORION	PEGASUS
Number of schools	4 schools	8 schools	4 schools	6 schools
Typology	In the city: · JI · EB1/JI · EB1/JI · EB2/3 (headquarters)	In the city: · ES (headquarters) · EB1/JI (2) · JI In a village: · EB2/3 · EB1/JI (2) Village: · EB1/JI	In one village: · EBI (headquarters) · EB1/JI · EB1 · JI	In the city: · EB2/3 e ES · EB1/JI (5)
Human resources	141 teachers 67 non-teaching staff (incl. senior technicians, social workers, operational assistants, technical assistants and operational managers)	304 teachers 119 non-teaching staff (including senior staff: psychologists, social workers and animators).	143 teaching staff 74 non-teaching staff (operational assistants, technical assistants and senior technicians).	188 teaching staff 56 non-teaching staff (47 operational assistants and 9 technical assistants) 3 senior technicians 3 others

Notes. JI – Kindergarten; EB1 – 1st Cycle of Basic Education; EB2 – 2nd Cycle of Basic Education; EB3 – 3rd Cycle of Basic Education; EBI – Integrated Basic School; ES – Secondary Education.

Table 2 shows the number of students in each LA, by school cycle, at the time of data collection (2022/2023 and 2023/2024).

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF STUDENTS BY SCHOOL CYCLE IN EACH OF THE LCS

	CRUX	PHOENIX	ORION	PEGASUS
Pre-school education	213	305	226	165
1st Cycle	625	887	524	481
2nd Cycle	305	490	243	198
3rd Cycle	468	620	375	320
ES	-	321	-	202
PIEF Courses	-	230*	-	-
After-school courses (EFA+ER+PLNM)	-	-	-	-
PCA	19	-	-	-
Total	1630	2853	1368	1366

Notes. PCA – Alternative Curriculum Programme; ES – Secondary Education (various scientific-humanistic and vocational courses); PIEF – Integrated Education Programme; EFA – Adult Education and Training; ER - Recurrent Education Capitalisable Modules; PLNM – Portuguese as a Non-Mother Tongue; * PIEF classes include students in the 2nd and 3rd Baccalaureate; * students in vocational courses.

Table 3 shows the diversity of nationalities in each LC and the proportion of foreign students in relation to the total number of students in each LC.

TABLE 3. NATIONALITIES OF FOREIGN STUDENTS

CRUX	PHOENIX	ORION	PEGASUS
15,6% 24 countries	24% 38 countries	(13%) 19 countries	(38,2%) 42 countries
Brazil, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Cape Verde, São Tomé and Príncipe, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal, Venezuela, Moldova, United Kingdom, Russia, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia, Argentina, Cuba, French Guiana, Guinea-Conakry, Italy, Jordan, Mozambique, Nigeria, Romania, Senegal	Afghanistan, Germany, Angola, Argentina, Bangladesh, Brazil, Cape Verde, China, Colombia, Spain, Ethiopia, USA, France, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, India, Indonesia, Iraq, Italy, Mozambique, Moldova, Nepal, Nigeria, Netherlands, Pakistan, Peru, United Kingdom, Dominican Republic, Romania, Russia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Syria, Switzerland, Togo, Ukraine, Venezuela	Brazil, Angola, India, Ukraine, Colombia, France, Mozambique, United Kingdom, Moldova, São Tomé and Príncipe, Switzerland, Russia, Guinea-Bissau, Bulgaria, Luxembourg, Spain, Cape Verde, United States of America	Afghanistan, Albania, Angola, Bangladesh, Belgium, Brazil, Cape Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Cuba, France, Georgia, Greece, Guatemala, Guinea-Bissau, India, Ireland, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Malaysia, Mozambique, Nepal, Nigeria, Norway, Pakistan, Peru, Romania, Russia, São Tomé and Príncipe, Senegal, Syria, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Turkey, Ukraine, Venezuela, Vietnam, United States of America

Table 4 lists some of the projects being implemented in the clusters.

TABLE 4. LIST OF SOME OF THE PROJECTS BEING IMPLEMENTED IN SCHOOLS IN THE 2023/2024 SCHOOL YEAR

CRUX	PHOENIX	ORION	PEGASUS
· INCLUD-ED · Eco-Schools · Hand in Hand Project · On Wheels Project (Bicycles) · WhyLab · Internet Security · Retotech Project (Endesa) · Robotics · DIGITALL Programme (Vodafone) · School Sports · School newspaper · Father and son programmes · Talent Club · Debating Club · ...	· INCLUD-ED · School sports · Eco-Schools · Grandparents and Grandchildren · Talent Club · Debate Club · Opera Prima · Giant Leap · CCVnE - Tecnoaplica DDJ · Fun Science · ClArHum · Arts and Humanities Club · Cl. Agir · Cl. Maths · Cl. Badminton · Cl. Civil Protection · Robotics and Programming Club · Cl. SERsim · Attitudes Newspaper · Maths laboratory · Theatre Group	· INCLUD-ED · School Sports · Generation Orchestra · Lab. Interactive Learning Lab (LAI) · MenSI · RESCUR · Qualcomm Smart Connected Classrooms · Rock'art · EPIS · Youth Parliament · Ubuntu · Ars Dance · ERASMUS+ · Edulabs · Eco-Schools · Live Science Club · ...	· INCLUD-ED · Laboratories for Learning and Inclusion · REEI - Intercultural Education Network · School Sports · Communities: Espaço i · Let's Learn portuguese · Teach for Portugal Mentoring programme · Portuguese as a non-native language · Mais Skillz G8 Choices Programme · Linguistic and Cultural Mediators

From the presented data, it emerges that the Cluster known as Phoenix is larger in terms of the number of establishments, levels of education, students, teaching and non-teaching staff, the diversity of training on offer and the projects underway, compared to the SCs Crux and Orion, which are similar to each other, especially in terms of levels of education and the number of students. SC PEGASUS is at an intermediate level in terms of the number of schools, levels of education and teaching staff, coming close to SC Orion and Crux in terms of the number of students and having a smaller number of non-teaching staff. The percentage of foreign students is variable in the four groupings, ranging from 13 per cent to 38.2 per cent, with a great diversity of origins (and consequently mother tongues), with SC PEGASUS and Phoenix showing the greatest diversity.

CHARACTERISATION OF PARTICIPANTS AND DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

At SC CRUX, 13 adults took part in the study – 8 teachers (7 female and 1 male) and 5 family members (5 mothers). Four individual interviews were carried out with teachers and eight *focus groups* (one with volunteers, one with a group of primary school teachers and six with pupils). Six *focus groups* were conducted with 28 children - 5 attending 1st or 2nd grade (1st CEB - 1st Cicle of Basic Education), 5 attending 3rd or 4th grade (1st CEB), 4 attending 5th grade (2nd CEB), 4 attending 6th grade (2nd CEB), 5 attending 7th grade (3rd CEB) and 5 attending 8th grade (3rd CEB). In Year 1 or 2, the *focus groups* were made up of three boys and two girls (Av. age = 7); in Year 3 or 4, two boys and three girls (Av. age = 9); in Year 5, two girls and two boys (Av. age = 10); in Year 6, two girls and two boys (Av. age = 11), in Year 7 three girls and two boys, and in Year 8 two girls and three boys (Av. age = 15). Three of the students were foreigners, but from Portuguese-speaking countries. In the first year, a lesson with interactive groups was observed with the collaboration of sixth graders. In the second year, two classes were observed with interactive groups in which sixth graders also collaborated, as well as a third class with interactive groups in which parent volunteers took part. In addition, in the second year, there was an artistic talk focussing on the work of Vincent van Gogh, specifically the 'Room in Arles'. Finally, in the fourth year there was a literary discussion on the tale 'The Golden Goose' by the Brothers Grimm.

At SC PHOENIX, seven adults took part in the study - six teachers and a psychologist/mediator (six female and one male), eight family members/mothers observing successful educational actions. In the first year of school, an artistic dialogue discussion focused on the work "A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte" by Georges Seurat. In two fourth grade classes, two lessons with interactive groups were observed, in which six mothers, a teacher and three operational assistants took part as volunteers. Two of the assistants were accompanying pupils with severe motor and cognitive limitations. In one of the fourth year classes, the educational action of successful dialogical musical gatherings was also observed, with the listening of the musical work "Bach".

At SC ORION, seven adults took part in the study - six teachers and one educator (six female and one male). Four focus groups were conducted with 11 children - 5 attending pre-school (2 children from EB1 and 3 children from JI), 4 attending the 1st cycle at EB1 (1 child from the 1st year, 1 child from the 2nd year, 1 child from the 3rd year and 1 child from the 4th year) and 2 attending the 2nd cycle (EBI). The pre-school focus groups consisted of 2 boys and 3 girls (age = 6); the primary focus groups consisted of 4 boys (age = 9); the secondary focus groups consisted of 2 boys (age = 12).

All the students were born in Portugal. Interactive groups" and "Dialogic Gatherings" activities were observed. With regard to Interactive Groups: 2 teaching times of interactive groups of 7th/8th graders (1st shift and 2nd shift) were observed in the subject of Maths, since the classes are grouped in this way (heterogeneous groups), in a 1st Phase, in which the theme was the "Study of functions". Also observed in the 2nd phase were 2 teaching times of interactive groups of 7th/8th graders (1st shift and 2nd shift) in Maths, where the topic was "Studying equations of the line". Also in the 2nd Phase, 2 teaching times were observed in interactive groups of 5th/6th graders (1st shift and 2nd shift) in the subject of Natural Sciences, where the topic was "Human Body Systems". With regard to dialogic literary gathering: 1 dialogic literary gathering was observed for 7th/8th graders (1st shift), the theme of which was "The importance of Radio in People's Lives: the value of Community Radios", in the 1st Phase. In the 2nd Phase, 2 dialogic literary gathering were observed: 1 dialogic literary gathering, for 7th/8th graders (2nd shift), the theme of which was "Laws and Freedom" and another one for 5th/6th graders (1st shift), the theme of which was "What if Portugal was at war?".

At SC PEGASUS, 5 adults took part in the study - 5 teachers (4 female and 1 male). Four focus groups were conducted with 20 children - 5 attending 1st grade, 5 attending 2nd grade, 5 attending 3rd grade and 5 attending 4th grade (1st CEB). In Year 1, the focus group consisted of 3 boys and 2 girls (Av. age = 7); in Year 2, 3 boys and 2 girls (Av. age = 8); in Year 3, 2 boys and 3 girls (Av. age = 9); and in Year 4, 3 boys and 2 girls (Av. age = 10). 12 of the students were foreigners, from six countries (Brazil, Bangladesh, Nepal, Angola, Dominican Republic and Ukraine).

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTIONS

In order to assess the implementation of the project in each of the LCs, a survey was carried out of the successful educational activities carried out, based on information obtained mainly through interviews with the Director and INCLUD-ED Coordinator of each of the LCs, but also statements from teachers and students.

Table 5 systematises the successful educational actions that have been implemented.

TABLE 5. SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTIONS PROMOTED IN EACH OF THE FOUR LCS AND THE SCHOOL LEVELS AT WHICH THEY WERE PROMOTED

	CRUX	PHOENIX	ORION	PEGASUS
Dialogues	1ST CEB 2ND CEB 3RD CEB	JI 1ST CEB 2ND CEB 3RD CEB Secondary (only 1 teacher)	JI EB1/JI EB1 EBI	JI 1ST CEB
Interactive groups	1ST CEB 2ND CEB 3RD CEB	1ST CEB 2ND CEB 3RD CEB Secondary	JI EB1/JI EB1 EBI	JI 1ST CEB
Community educational participation (family members and volunteers)	1ST CEB	1ST CEB 2ND CEB 3RD CEB Secondary	JI EB1	JI 1ST CEB
Extra time for those who need it / Tutored library	The tutored library was discontinued - space as an emergency classroom	Existing support did not start with the INCLUD-ED project	JI EB1	-
Family training	None	Not organised	JI EB1	-
Dialogic teacher training	There were 2 moments: first, organised by CREA trainers; then by the coordinator	There were 2 moments: first, organised by CREA trainers; then by the coordinator	JI EB1	-
Dialogic model for conflict prevention and resolution	1 CEB In some classes replaced by class assemblies and non-violence brigades	1 CEB (4 sessions)	JI EB1	-

Note. The term "coordinator" refers to the coordinator of the INCLUD-ED project who existed in all four LCs.

Analysing Table 5 reveals that the LCs were not all involved in the INCLUD-ED project in the same way. The most successful educational actions in all the LCs were pedagogical meetings and interactive groups. Also noteworthy is the educational participation of the community (family members and school volunteers), especially in the 1st cycle, although this is not common practice in all schools. This diversity in the choice of SEAs seems to depend on the decision of the management, the teachers and the number of teachers involved in the project.

ADULTS' PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND THE INCLUD-ED PROJECT (TEACHERS AND VOLUNTEERS / FAMILY MEMBERS AND OTHERS), BASED ON INTERVIEW DATA

This section presents the data collected from all four school clusters regarding the views of adult participants, teachers and volunteers/family members, about inclusive education and its impacts, as well as about the LC4Inclusion project. To facilitate reading, we created tables with registration units (RUs), grouped by subcategory. These RUs are examples of interviewees' most representative opinions. Each table is followed by short interpretative summaries highlighting findings from each cluster and a comparative analysis of similarities and differences among them.

TABLE 6. IMPACTS ON STUDENTS' ACADEMIC LEARNING (IN RELATION TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION)

CRUX Total adults interviewed – 13
The logic is so simple: to have one person in each group who can make that content more absorbing. (DCSX1)
The great advantage of interactive groups in terms of work is that it also frees up the teacher to go and support those who really need it most. (DCSX2)
I have three children. In the first, the interactive groups didn't exist with parents, they only existed among the school community. The second time, yes, with parents, and I notice a difference even in my relationship with the children. For the time being, some learning has been consolidated. And also learning that doesn't take place in the classroom. And it's very funny. (FCSX3)
(...) this curriculum, to this extent, doesn't work. If it doesn't work for the rest of us, it won't work for them either. Now, what we're required or asked to do is teach the same content so that, for example, in Year 9 they're subject to the Year 9 final exam in Portuguese and maths. (DCSX8)
I also feel it, even here at school, my daughter is in the 2nd cycle, and there are very different teachers, (some) very dynamic (...) and others not. For them, (...) the children are robots, where they have to sit still, almost without speaking, without moving, just listening, (...) (FCSX6)
PHOENIX Total adults interviewed – 7
Students learn more and better and, in addition to instrumental learning, educational contexts in this dialogical interaction that is promoted by interactive groups or gatherings also promote other competences that are essential and that are inscribed in the student's profile on leaving compulsory schooling (...) (DFX2)
(...) if this is applied on a regular basis, I believe that it does, that it develops the power of argumentation, learning, that we learn from everyone, that the other person teaches us things here that are not in the formal way that we are all used to. (DFX3)
(...) it's more of a dynamic, more of a way of working on orality, for example in the gatherings. (DFX4)
I don't know if in terms of them learning much, it's like this, as I work a lot like this on a daily basis, I don't feel that it's there that they're going to learn much more, you know? (DFX6)
(...) I notice much greater development in the students, and I also notice that learning is more facilitative in this sense, so one thing leads to another. (DFX7)

ORION Total adults interviewed – 7

I once had a very successful case, a student who didn't take part, she was very embarrassed, she didn't feel comfortable taking part (...). During a discussion (...) she became so comfortable that my mouth dropped open, because she had a very well-developed speech, a very well-formed opinion. (DOX3)

Interactive groups promote collaborative work between students and the sharing of knowledge. (DOX4)

If dialogic literary gatherings are held regularly, students acquire study habits. (DOX2)

(...) students learn from each other. (DOX3)

When they work in interactive groups, the students enjoy it and help each other. (DOX6)

PEGASUS Total adults interviewed - 5

This year we've already had a number of non-Portuguese students being the best students in their year at school. This means that the process, at least for some of them, is already quite successful, for others it's ongoing and their success is growing. (DPY1)

All the Portuguese and non-maternal language students at the different proficiency levels have classes at that time [lunch] and have Portuguese and non-maternal language classes (...) This allows the kids to succeed and, without significantly changing the timetable, to progress. They jump from one level to the next without too much difficulty. (DPY1)

The meetings are a great cognitive exercise, in my opinion, because they have to think about the subjects, don't they? A text, and what the colleague said, knowing how to listen, I think it's a good mental exercise, which later on, when they have to interpret a text in Portuguese, they refer to what the author is thinking. (DPX2)

We have theatres, we have exhibitions (...) it's that openness to the community, we have partnerships. And they know how to comment on this work, and they already have this training, and it shows (...) This knowing how to be, deep down (...) (DPX2)

(...) from the moment we started talking at the gatherings, they seemed to blossom and always had a lot to say. (DPX1)

Most of the interviewees are unanimous about the positive impact that Successful Educational Actions, namely the dialogic literary gatherings and interactive groups, have on the students' academic lives and on the school community. They emphasise the development of essential competences in the student's profile on leaving compulsory school, through learning that is more facilitative and respectful of each student's learning pace.

The practice of interactive groups and community involvement in the school emerge as important strategies for promoting the learning of all students. The logic of this approach is simple but very effective: by integrating a person into each group who can facilitate understanding of the content, a more accessible and collaborative environment is created. For teachers, this methodology also represents a practical gain - by decentralising the mediation of learning, it opens up space for more targeted support for students who face greater difficulties.

Interactive groups play a central role in promoting collaborative learning - by working in heterogeneous teams, students not only consolidate curricular content through interaction with peers but also develop social and emotional skills such as mutual help, respect for diversity and shared responsibility. The reference to the sharing of knowledge and the enjoyment shown by students when working together reinforces the idea that active involvement in the construction of knowledge is facilitated by co-operative pedagogical dynamics, in which each student can learn by teaching and being taught.

The regularity of dialogic literary gatherings is also pointed out as a structuring factor in the development of study habits and the deepening of learning. Continuous exposure to cultural works and the exchange of interpretations in an environment of equal dialogue contributes to the consolidation of fundamental cognitive and literacy skills. These practices, when systematically integrated into everyday school life, favour a more motivating and meaningful approach to learning, while promoting equity and inclusion.

At the SC Crux, a mother's testimony reinforces the positive impact of interactive groups when extended beyond the school walls, involving families and promoting learning that transcends the formal classroom context. In SC Phoenix, the teachers essentially mention the development of orality and argumentative power. On the other hand, two of the interviewees question whether the implementation of these Successful Educational Actions has a direct impact on improving academic learning, as is the case with a fourth year teacher who says "no I feel that's where they're going to learn a lot more" and the school headmaster who has doubts about the learning of all the students, confessing "I don't know if everyone is learning as they should".

At the SC Orion, the reported experience of an initially withdrawn student, who found gatherings a safe space to express reasoned opinions, illustrates the potential of these practices to develop communication skills, critical thinking and confidence in academic participation. This type of involvement not only promotes the valuing of students' voices, but also boosts their autonomy and capacity for reflection, essential elements for educational success.

Similar dimensions are emphasised at SC Pegasus. One measure was the setting of all the PLNM classes at lunchtime, which introduced more balance into the overall organisation of activities, as the headteacher points out. For their part, the teachers emphasise the beneficial effects of the project's activities on the students' performance (ability to interpret and express themselves, autonomy and security, relationships with colleagues and the general public); one teacher has introduced similar sharing practices in her classes, modelled on the dialogical gatherings.

In short, the learning community appears to be not only a pedagogical strategy, but also an ethical principle of educational justice, reinforcing the idea that knowledge is built in interaction and with everyone's contribution. However, the participants identify challenges that hinder the full implementation of inclusive practices, including curriculum rigidity and standardised assessments that do not take into account the different needs and learning rhythms of students, and inconsistency in teachers' pedagogical practices, with some adopting traditional methods that demotivate students and hinder their performance. This inconsistency can lead to demotivation, as illustrated by the experience reported by an AECS mother whose daughter lost interest in certain subjects due to unattractive methods, which ended up having a negative impact on her academic performance.

TABLE 7. IMPACT ON SOCIO-EMOTIONAL COMPETENCES AND RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN STUDENTS (RELATIVE TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION)

CRUX
I think it's been beneficial for their educational success and, what's more, it's making them better people, more empathetic, more willing, to look at others with a different eye. (DCSX1)
(...) And nowadays, he doesn't mention that that boy is from Bangladesh. He doesn't see anything there, he sees a child just like him. And I think that made all the difference, that he never pointed out any difference in this little one. (FCSX7)
So it was very good for them, they felt very valued (...) I think it was very, very good for them. They really enjoyed it, they were happy. (about PCA students taking part in the interactive groups as volunteers). (DCSX2)
Today I know that many of them give up what they're doing to help others. (DCSX13)
The gatherings create a moment of unity, even in hectic classes. There's order, respect for others. (DCSX10)
I think that sometimes there's a bit of insecurity and the shame of perhaps not knowing the answer and the fear of having the other children point the finger. And I think that sometimes there should be a little more mediation in this respect. In other words, as soon as someone points the finger, there's a block that doesn't allow them to go any further with the judgement they're making. (FCSX7)
They know all the theory. But they need an adult present to put it into practice. (DCSX10)

PHOENIX

This is a project, as I say, here we're going to develop a set of social skills that we probably wouldn't work on otherwise, because school (...) because I've said it before, school can't just be about teaching reading, counting and that's it. (DFY1)

(...) there are always four that are present, the four Cs, the C of communication, the C of creation, the C of collaboration, the C of creativity and the C of creative thinking. I usually also add the C of curiosity, which is fundamental to the whole process of wanting to know, wanting to learn and wanting to evolve (...) And in fact, successful educational actions all promote these Cs, they promote these competences that also corroborate the principle of solidarity, the principle of learning not in competition, but in collaboration. (DFX2)

(...) for example in the gatherings - respect for others, for their opinion, knowing how to listen, knowing how to be - and in the interactive groups it's sharing, knowing how to be, knowing how to participate, knowing how to accept others and help. That's added value and it's a different way of not always being the same. (DFX4)

Then from there [gatherings] we're always working on feelings, emotions, behaviours and we're always doing something new. This is because it's a basis. (DFX5)

(...) I notice that it makes sense and that it helps the dynamics of the class, the empathy between the students, bringing parents and the school community closer together, so it's a dynamic that includes everyone and that makes sense. (DFX7)

ORION

(...) since we have a lot of students coming from different areas, we have to integrate them here (...) so that they feel integrated and that they feel that they are being accompanied and that they have support and that they are doing well at school, so to speak, that they are happy. (DOX6)

(...) we have children who speak another language, we have children with emotional difficulties, sometimes with emotional blocks, so we also have to cater for these children. (DOX2)

Contact with pupils with different specificities makes them more supportive, more co-operative, and if they don't, they never know what reality is (...), because in reality they will meet different people, people with limitations. (DOX4)

The creation of the "Valiant Club" was the best strategy, it was the best solution for the behaviour of those children. (DOX5)

We're promoting meaningful learning, as differentiated as possible because they also learn differently (...) there are kids who are more visual, there are kids who need to experience more, listen more, and we have to reach everyone. (DOX3)

PEGASUS

It was very important in this regard, which is the respect that doesn't exist in a so-called normal classroom, and wanting to listen to others and wait for their turn to speak. When we did the gatherings, especially in the gatherings, this space for listening and being attentive often happened. (DPX4)

In some of the footage of them in interactive groups, they're helping. So, look, do it here like this, look here it's to do (...) And this same student [usually very aggressive] would help the others. So I think it was beneficial to have done it (...) But what I felt was that if I did interactive groups all the time, I wouldn't be able to teach (...) but I also needed volunteers, and I didn't have such a large pool of volunteers to be able to implement this all the time. But it was very beneficial. (DPX4)

Teaching students to give an opinion and to argue is a very important thing and the gatherings do that because they have to give an opinion, they have to say why they have that opinion, they can argue (...) and that they can disagree, but they have to substantiate their opinion, it's a very important thing, to know how to talk and how to argue (...) the gatherings for me have that and it's a very nice thing because they respect the rules. (DPX3)

She was a child with a lot of problems (...) and I asked her what she liked best about school, and she said the library (...) I said, but why? Because there are lots of books and one day I want to be able to read them and I want to take them home.

It is well known that the school public has undergone significant changes, giving schools responsibilities that go far beyond academic learning. According to the interviewees, the INCLUD-ED Project has enabled the development of socio-emotional competences in students that would otherwise not be worked on, and the improvement of their interpersonal relationships, through successful educational actions.

The diversity of student profiles, with different cultural, linguistic and emotional backgrounds, is recognised as a reality to be valued and integrated, rather than an obstacle. In this context, interactive groups and dialogical gatherings (literary, scientific or artistic) play a fundamental role in promoting cooperative and respectful learning environments in which all students have a voice and the opportunity to participate actively. These practices encourage mutual respect, empathy and solidarity by providing direct contact with difference and by valuing individual contributions in the collective.

At the SC Crux, this transformation is recognised by a parent who admires her son's growth in an environment where differences are not seen as barriers, but are naturalised from an early age. The involvement of Alternative Curriculum Programme (ACP) students in practices such as interactive groups has allowed them to feel valued and an integral part of the school community. Teachers' testimonies reinforce this perception, highlighting spontaneous behaviours of mutual help, moments of collective celebration of learning and the aggregating force of activities such as gatherings, which promote listening, respect and unity, even in challenging contexts.

At SC Phoenix, the teachers believe that today's school cannot "just be about teaching reading, counting and nothing else (...)" According to the project coordinator, these skills include "key competences that are required in the labour market and throughout life". She also adds that successful educational activities promote the development of the four C's, competences established by the World Forum, "the C of communication, the C of creation, the C of collaboration, the C of creativity and the C of creative thinking."

At Orion, the creation of spaces such as the "Valiant Club" represents an effective pedagogical response to the promotion of positive coexistence and dialogical conflict resolution. This type of initiative allows students to develop skills such as self-regulation, active listening and negotiation, while at the same time reinforcing a sense of belonging and security. Reports indicate that this approach has concrete results in improving students' behaviour and emotional wellbeing, acting as an educational alternative to punishment and isolation. In this way, students are invited to take an active role in building shared norms and managing healthy interpersonal relationships.

At Pegasus, teachers value the impact of the activities carried out on consolidating students' socio-emotional skills and improving relationships between them, especially the dialogical gatherings. Students develop their skills of interpretation, argumentation, dialogue and respect for others, as well as for the rules that promote healthy and democratic coexistence, mitigating conflicts between them. These dimensions also have a very positive influence on students' academic learning, particularly in the field of Portuguese and their relationship with reading (witness the singular expression of the non-reading girl who chose the library as her favourite thing at school (...)). This dimension is also supported by the partnership with the nearby library, where the librarian "makes the book an event. The story is a whole work (...) the book is that object, but then a journey comes out of it" (DPX2).

These accounts seem to show that inclusion not only favours learning, but above all transforms coexistence and the way children relate to diversity. However, important challenges remain if these inclusive environments are to be fully effective in socio-emotional development. One of the obstacles pointed out is the fear of making mistakes and the fear of judgement from peers, which can inhibit the active participation of some students. Insecurity about the possibility of failure, especially in contexts where there is still a lack of effective adult mediation, can undermine confidence and limit opportunities for emotional learning.

This scenario reveals the need for a more vigilant and intervening teaching presence, capable of immediately interrupting judgemental or exclusionary behaviour, guaranteeing the emotional safety of all students. Furthermore, it is emphasised that although students often demonstrate knowledge of

the principles of respectful coexistence, what is lacking is the practical and continuous implementation of these values in everyday school life. This requires the attentive accompaniment of significant adults who can guide, reinforce positive behaviour and mediate conflicts, promoting a school culture based on acceptance and mutual care.

TABLE 8. IMPACT ON FAMILY INVOLVEMENT (RELATED TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION)

CRUX
Ih, they sulk! (about parents who get upset at having to wait to take part in interactive groups) (...) Because he (a teacher) has the queue (...) Only four or five can go at a time. (about a teacher who has a queue of parents who want to take part in interactive groups) (DCSX1)
Participating in these small communities (...) the big impact is really the sense of belonging, which is families realising that this is their school too. (DCSX2)
It's just that the children feel the involvement not only of their own parents, but also of their classmates' parents, because we don't usually stay, or in my case, I don't usually stay with my son's group. So I think they feel that it's important. For them and for us, we also feel more integrated in this connection that S. mentioned between school, family and the child (about interactive groups) (FCSX4)
I think they (teachers) are afraid to bring the parents to school, which I've already challenged them to do, but bring them, bring them, the parents like to come. (DCSX1)
So there are a number of factors here that can make it difficult for the issue of learning communities to take off in another way. The first is opening up the school to strangers, because people see themselves as being invaded. They come to inspect, they come to see, they come to do I don't know what. (DCSX8)
PHOENIX
(...) the biggest difficulty we've had lately is getting families and parents to come to school, it's more or less natural or easier in pre-school education, in the first cycle they come to school or sometimes in some cases where pupils who have greater needs, especially health or cognitive needs the parents come to school more, but from a certain point they stop coming as much (...) (DFY1)
It also gives parents the opportunity to see how things work in the classroom, because sometimes parents also have a hard time when you start teaching in a different way, there are also parents who don't know, this isn't the model they've had and they're a bit resistant, but then I think the opinion is really an asset. (DFX3)
Both they and the families are more willing to speak up, to say what they think, I really liked it, and I've kept going. (DFX5)
(...) the parents being able to see the progress they've made at all levels, and that's brutal (...) (DFX6)
(...) sometimes they had some strange questions about the classroom (...) and by going to the classroom they also realise what the dynamics are like and my relationship with them and that reassures them. There you go, here afterwards, sometimes it also helps, sometimes some conflicts we may have with the parents reassure them (...) (DFX7)

ORION
Those who take part in these successful educational activities are parents, grandparents, family members, people who sometimes don't even have a family connection, but who are part of our external community and get involved. (DOX2)
(...) Oh, you're going to do a very nice job, bring mum and dad to watch, to take part. If we do a rope game, the parents have to go and jump rope, they have to take part and the kids have a great time, having their families there. (DOX4)
Parents in primary school are much more active and help out more, which is fantastic because they (the children) really need that support more too, they're less autonomous and so it's an asset for everyone. (DOX3)
(...) the parents' receptions, one weekend, one Saturday and one Sunday, they arranged our Valiant Club, with everything our children asked for. (...) for me it was the best strategy, it was the best solution for those children's behaviour. (...) (DOX5)
In the tutored library there are teachers, parents, (...) we have two mums, the operational assistant and the library colleague, we open the library after hours and we have an extra space so that the children can have free tutoring, students who have below average results, with difficulties and who use this space. (DOX1)
PEGASUS
At pre-school and primary school level it's relatively easy [to involve families]. The problem begins when, from the seventh or eighth grade onwards, they start to desert. Parents start to disappear. (DPY1)
The answer is by mobilising, and involving, and inviting to parties, to debates, and to interventions and to work within the classes (...) inviting parents to often attend the Class Assembly to see or talk about their activity or to develop an activity with their children, in agreement with the teacher because it's important for all of them to be involved and to value all professions and all cultures. (DPY1)
I did the INCLUD-ED training. So I think it's a lot about family support. I've been very lucky here, I've called in a lot of volunteers from among the parents, I've managed to bring them into the school. So this family-school relationship was very good (...) We all took part . Especially in the interactive groups. Initially, when I didn't have volunteers, it was the teaching staff, the assistants, the CAF staff (...) and even students from other classes. (DPX4)
We've managed to get some parents to come here, including the father of that girl of mine who had her parents in prison, the father came out of prison and a month later he was here and he was very afraid, he liked it a lot. (DPX3)
The school has tried several times to organise a parents' school and Portuguese schools for parents, but this is voluntary, obviously, and the parents don't turn up. (DPX3)

The testimonies systematised in table 8 highlight the central role of family and community involvement in the educational dynamics promoted by the INCLUD-ED Project's Learning Communities.

This model values the active participation of family members: parents, grandparents and other members of the local community; as educational agents, recognising that co-responsibility between school and community is a determining factor in school success and inclusion. By opening up the school to everyone, these actions strengthen the emotional and institutional

ties between students, their families and educational professionals, creating an environment of trust, mutual support and shared responsibility. The involvement of families with the school has increased positively and significantly with the implementation of the INCLUD-ED Project, and this was the unanimous opinion of those interviewed.

At the SC Crux, the existence of queues and even frustration on the part of some parents who are unable to take part immediately demonstrates the value that these actions have come to have for the educational community. As one of the teachers argues, by collaborating directly in school activities, parents develop a sense of belonging, recognising the school as a space that is also theirs. This integration generates multiplier effects: it fosters trust between families and teachers, favours understanding of the content being taught and encourages continuity of educational support at home.

At Phoenix, however, there continues to be some resistance, with family participation from the 2nd cycle onwards being named as one of the difficulties. At pre-school and 1st cycle level, the response and participation is higher, and there is a different culture of proximity because they are smaller schools. The interviewees attach great importance to proximity to the educational community, which includes families, and consider that successful educational actions help families to become more involved in the school.

At Orion, the educational participation of the community, particularly family members, such as collaborative games with families, the direct involvement of parents in the creation of the "Valiant Club" or the regular presence of mums in the tutored library, show that the school is no longer a closed space but a real community space. At Pegasus, all the participants emphasise the important role of the family and note the involvement of parents and families in the lower age cycles, but also their gradual disappearance as the pupils get older. The solution put forward is to invite them to parties, debates, speeches and to work with the classes, particularly in structures such as the Class Assembly and the INCLUD-ED Project activities, where they greatly value their inexcusable contribution (see the case of the father who, just released from prison, gave his testimony (...)). The proposal to set up a parents' school and Portuguese schools for parents didn't succeed, due to the lack of family participation.

Being open to the participation of and by families has a positive impact on several levels: it increases student motivation, strengthens family bonds around learning and allows for more appropriate responses to children's needs, especially those in situations of greater social vulnerability or with academic difficulties. The participation of families is not merely symbolic, but effective, with real consequences in terms of supporting learning and improving coexistence at school. In addition, integrating family members

into school activities helps to transform the educational culture, promoting more democratic, collaborative and inclusive practices. The feedback given by parents has been very positive in the sense that this participation helps them to have a new perspective on the school - it allows them to enter the classroom, it allows them to establish positive relationships with students and other parents and it allows them to participate actively in the teaching-learning process of their children. The relationship between family and teachers becomes stronger, allowing for a more positive interaction in resolving any difficulties that may arise.

However, there are still major challenges to consolidating this collaborative approach. One of the most frequently mentioned obstacles is the fear of some teachers of opening up the classroom to parents. There are also those who see the presence of families as a possible form of surveillance or intrusion, interpreting it as an "invasion" of the teaching space. This kind of resistance, often rooted in more traditional views of the teaching role, hinders the creation of a culture of transparency and sharing, which is essential for full inclusion. What's more, the teachers themselves say that not all colleagues are open to this, which jeopardises the dissemination of family involvement practices across the school.

TABLE 9. INCLUSION POLICIES/CULTURES AND PRACTICES (RELATED TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION)

CRUX
And so we have to include them all. And include us too as adults in the school, because we also have different working styles, all of us. (DCSX2)
Inclusion, which requires resources, time and availability, is much more difficult than social inclusion itself. (FCSX3)
I think that this school has been working very hard to ensure that this inclusion is effective, but there's a long way to go, because in most cases it's not to say that they won't let us, there are problems every day, etc. It's just that in most cases, not to say the overwhelming majority, schools don't have the necessary conditions for this inclusion to be effective. (DCSX8)
I just think it's a shame that, at staff level, this inclusion isn't a priority. Because most schools aren't prepared to manage some of the more sensitive issues. (FCSX5)
I agree that there really should be specific training, more people, physical conditions in the school, which also don't exist (...) (FCSX3)

PHOENIX

I don't know, I think it's a project that can promote equity. But are we doing it right? I don't know, maybe not, I don't know, we're doing it right, but I don't know. I have some doubts, but that's it. (DFY1)

(...) we really want to include and we make a big effort, but sometimes we should have more support so that these kids don't feel so left out. (D)

It's a start, it's a start. It was a way for us all to start opening up and realising that it works (...) (D)

Because I think we're thinking that we're going to include and when we do, we only include the child and we forget that when we include, we include the whole family. (D)

I think it's positive, but I don't think it's done as it should be. (D)

In that respect I think it's very positive and I notice that it facilitates their learning. (D)

ORION

For me, inclusive education is about giving everyone the opportunity to develop as social individuals, not just functional individuals. (DOX1)

Our aim is for all students to feel part of the school and to be included. What's more, we want everyone to have the opportunity to experience different areas so that they can define their life project. (DOY1)

We have a decree law that guides us, which is DL 54. Since Decree-Law 54, there have been many changes (...) often in schools it seems that Decree-Law 54/2018 is only for children who have cognitive or emotional difficulties, but (...) what we have to do here is try to include all children. (DOX2)

(...) we have a development plan for each student, and in this plan all students must have the universal measures. (DOX1)

If [the universal measures] aren't enough, then we make a request to the EMAEI, a referral for the student to be observed for any selective measures. (DOX3)

We adapt according to the measures that the student has in their development plan, and all students have a development plan. (DOX4)

PEGASUS

We are part of the network of schools for intercultural education (...) (DPY1)

We've been running Portuguese as a non-native language for over 10 years (...) this diversity and teaching Portuguese to the students was the first thing that was fundamental for the kids to integrate and be included in the community. (DPY1)

Then, of course, we started with projects, one of which was INCLUD-ED, but also others (...) (DPY1)

My class is multicultural, I have six different nationalities (...) I have nineteen students and it was a very challenging class (...) it's a mostly male class. So out of the nineteen I had four girls. (DPX4)

At INCLUD-ED we did interactive groups, which (...) worked very well. It was very interesting. (...) We did the Ball Club. So they had five balls of each colour. And I distributed the marbles (...) And every week they changed group, which was really to make them work with all their mates. (DPX4)

most of them adapt very easily, (...) this Pakistani girl, what I discovered at one point, was that she had advanced maths skills (...) she kept up with the first year kids in Portuguese, but in maths she did specific work (...) as teachers, (...) this involves a huge amount of work [differentiation] (DPX3)

The testimonies compiled in table 9 reveal an understanding of inclusion policies and practices, reflecting a broad conception of inclusive education, centred on valuing diversity and promoting the integral development of all students. This vision is in line with Decree-Law 54/2018, which introduces an approach centred on equity and the personalisation of educational responses, through universal, selective and additional measures, adjusted to the needs of each student throughout their journey.

The interviewees demonstrated knowledge of inclusive education, defining it as education for all, regardless of the more idiosyncratic characteristics of the students They emphasised that SEAs support this vision by enabling educational activities for everyone in inclusive contexts. The vision of inclusion presented transcends the walls of the school and is understood as a social and ethical requirement. In this sense, it is not only a public school duty, but a structural necessity to prepare children for a diverse world. There is also a reflection on the internal diversity of the teaching staff, recognising that working styles and pedagogical beliefs influence inclusive practices.

At the SC Crux, a mother's statement reinforces the idea that school is the privileged place to learn to live with difference: "there is no other way to be in public school (...) than inclusion". Another mother observes that the social and cultural integration of students seems to occur more naturally and easily, while the inclusion of students with specific needs requires more time, resources and intentionality. At Phoenix, they still find it difficult to include students with more severe disabilities, both in successful educational activities and in other recreational activities that mainly require them to leave the school grounds, essentially due to a lack of resources and the existence of barriers to accessibility. Despite the difficulties experienced, they believe that more informal activities and projects, particularly the INCLUD-ED project, promote inclusion and equity, but, according to one of the testimonies, there is doubt - "we do it to do it well, but I don't know, I have my doubts."

At the Orion, the interviewees show a practical and progressive application of this legal framework, through the drawing up of individual development plans for all students, with measures adapted to their profile and evolution. In addition to complying with regulations, the practices described demonstrate a strong ethical and pedagogical commitment to building a democratic school, where all students have real opportunities to experience different areas of knowledge, build their life project and develop as social individuals and full citizens. In addition, the SC Orion has adopted the methodology of working with/projects, based on a conception of the student as a subject with social and historical rights, an active participant in the process of constructing their own knowledge. This approach values the development of creativity and the stimulation of critical awareness, promoting more autonomous and meaningful learning. The cross-curricular nature

inherent in Project-based Pedagogy makes it possible to establish relevant connections between different areas of knowledge, allowing students to understand that the themes and problems addressed are not presented in isolation, but emerge interconnected in the complexity of everyday life. In this sense, this methodology favours learning that is more contextualised, relevant and applicable to real everyday situations. However, not everyone shares the same level of involvement with group work

> (...) it's still not clear to all colleagues (...) it's still not in everyone's head, it's difficult. Working with project work methodology is difficult, because I think teachers have to know how to work in groups and have to be very aware of co-operative work, of what real co-operative work is, in order to get students involved in this type of work. (DOX5)

SC Pegasus early concern with inclusion is emphasised, given the diversity of its students, as it has been talking about the need for inclusive measures for at least 10 years and has chosen the teaching of Portuguese as a non-native language as a benchmark measure. The numerous projects that converge towards this end are emphasised, most notably INCLUD-ED. At the same time, teachers emphasise the mobilisation of different strategies and practices to respond, in context, to the specificities of their students in a differentiated way. They also emphasise the development of partnerships with other school clusters at national and international level associated with INCLUD-ED. As with the SC Orion, there have been various stages in setting up the LCs, including the creation of the dream with the entire educational community, as well as the establishment of other collective decision-making processes and structures through the creation of committees, namely mixed committees that include teachers, parents and students.

In short, despite the recognised collective effort, the interviewees point to a complex path and a sense of concern. They believe that Educational Inclusion is necessary and important, but structural challenges persist and there are not enough resources to ensure that it is "done well" and that it reaches everyone equally. The lack of suitable conditions in schools and the resistance of some teachers with a traditional view of teaching are obstacles mentioned. The distance between teacher and student, materialised in practice, makes it difficult to build more horizontal pedagogical relationships, which are necessary for a truly inclusive school.

TABLE 10. THE SCHOOL AS A LEARNING COMMUNITY OR IN THE PROCESS OF BECOMING ONE (RELATIVE TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION)

CRUX
We have to work with them. (referring to the ATL technicians, within the logic of the extended school community) (DCSX1)
So, within the logic of this learning community, we've really started to involve the families, we've started to involve the operational assistants, the teachers from the other school, at group level. (DCSX2)
It's spectacular to see this closeness and openness. (...) A list was made, and then at the meeting with the headmaster she explained all the points and how she could improve on those points to improve the school. (FCSX6)
I think that's what a learning community is all about, except that, in all honesty, many of us are reluctant to open up our schools to outsiders or foreign elements. (DCSX8)
What I mean by a learning community is realising that everyone can contribute to students' success. And what is 'everyone'? The 'everyone' is the assistants, the teachers, the therapists, the man in the shop next door, the firemen in the neighbourhood (...) the parents, the families. (DCSX13)
PHOENIX
I've been thinking about getting together with Joana and other colleagues, to see if we can come up with something, with a way of reaching out to the other cycles next year, to bring the community, the community as a whole, into the school to work with us in a different way and so that our students can actually learn in a different way. (D)
Not necessarily. There are teachers, there are teachers who are aware of this paradigm, who are also aware of the project that is successful educational actions (...), but there isn't the consistency, from my point of view, that allows everyone to be aligned with this benchmark. (D)
There are learning communities, not with the full access that is advocated in INCLUD-ED, but through some of the INCLUD-ED actions that are being applied in the school. (D)
I don't know if the school is (...), so it's by classes, I don't know if, how can I explain it to you? I don't know if AAA can be considered a community, if only, for example, two classes take part in the groups, or do these dynamics. (DFX6)
ORION
There are only two INCLUD-ED learning communities in the school: EB1 and JI. The other schools in the school group carry out successful educational activities, namely interactive groups and dialogic literary gatherings. (DOX6)
(...) with the reflection we do during the year and with the adjustments and sharing, we see what needs to be adjusted in order to improve. (...) We do reflection at school level and we do it at large group level, with the 11 teachers involved from the 3 school units. (DOX6)
We've done big projects and smaller projects related to the theme and when the history teachers were talking about and making work scripts about the dictatorship (...) (DOX4)
In the Dream Commission, we held a dream day and invited the parents to dream and from there we have a group that is responsible for resolving pedagogical issues, infrastructure issues, human resources, in other words, improving the school and what the students need in order to have better educational results. (DOX1)
Joint committees can be of various kinds. (...) We're now going to have a conflict resolution committee. (DOX1)

PEGASUS
The logic of the learning community is fundamental if everyone is to succeed. We're increasingly concerned with intervening as early as possible; pre-school and primary school are fundamental areas and whatever we manage to intervene at this level, at a very early stage, we'll see benefits later on in terms of schooling, in terms of learning and inclusion for everyone. (DPY1)
The learning community is about having a dream, what do we want for this school, and implementing it here. (DPX4)
Each school is like a living being, it has its own will and evolves at its own pace (...) [this school in particular] has been accelerating a little more in terms of the process and in terms of involvement with people and families, it has been taking more in-depth action and by having more depth, more dynamics, it has effectively started to have more capacity. (DPY1)
There isn't yet a community with a sense of [learning] community. There are various actions that are being tried to be implemented. I think we could become one. But we're not yet. (DPX3)
This school (...) never refuses entry to anyone (...) not foreign students, not students with disabilities (...) there is a group of people who have been with the group for at least 20 years. But a large part of the teaching staff is floating and projects that start one year may not continue the next. (DPX3)

Based on the excerpts presented in Table 10, it appears possible to infer a paradigm shift within the school's organisational culture, guided by the valorisation of the community as a central axis of educational transformation. The school increasingly positions itself as a space that transcends its physical boundaries, acknowledging that educational success relies on the joint involvement of families, support staff, teachers, and members of the local community. The regular implementation of dialogic literary gatherings and interactive groups signals an openness to the dialogic paradigm and cooperative learning. The formative intentionality expressed in the testimonies—particularly the efforts to ensure that teachers recognise the pedagogical value of SEAs and integrate them naturally into their practices, revealing a strategic orientation towards the expansion of the model.

At the SC Crux, openness to dialogue and co-responsibility is highlighted by a mother, who values the new management's listening and transparency, in a logic of jointly building solutions. Despite internal resistance to the transformation into a learning community - as one teacher points out ("many of us are reluctant to open up our schools to external elements"), revealing a cultural change that is still incomplete and challenging - the understanding of this community as an inclusive ecosystem, where "everyone can contribute to the success of the students", signals a more democratic, shared educational vision linked to the territory, although it is still developing.

In Phoenix, the INCLUD-ED project came to the school grouping through a direct invitation from the Director General of Education, to which there was immediate interest on the part of the Grouping Director. Although its implementation has been more concentrated at 1st cycle level, there has been an effort to extend it to other cycles with the aim of bringing the

community as a whole to work with the school so that, in turn, students can learn differently. Despite having teachers who are sensitised to successful educational actions, they feel that the schools in the Grouping cannot be fully considered learning communities, as there is no consistency in their application. "The community needs to be interconnected, it needs to be functional, it needs to work every day, it needs to be strengthened in order to bear the fruits of its labour." The resistance to getting involved in these types of projects and communities may lie with the teacher themselves, in the sense that there is a "fear of going into the unknown and especially of opening the door to our classroom, learning communities imply an open classroom."

In the SC Orion, the testimonies presented make it possible to identify two different levels of implementation of the INCLUD-ED model in the Grouping in question: on the one hand, two schools that have already formally set themselves up as INCLUD-ED learning communities and which apply all the Educational Actions for Success, and two other schools that consistently implement some of the SEAs , namely interactive groups and dialogic literary gatherings. One of the constraints pointed out by teachers in joining the LCs also has to do with the training that has to be given to new teachers at the start of each school year "What's tiring is that every year we have to train our colleagues. That part is very tiring" (DOX4).

SC Orion has a measure called FICA "Facilitators of Interdisciplinarity, Collaboration and Learning" which aims to pedagogically bring together a set of teaching Human Resources (HR), sufficient and available in the AE, to help develop effective project-based learning. However, in the dynamics of interactive groups, when a volunteer is missing, they call on FICA, as this UR testifies "(...) when one or more volunteers are missing, we call on the colleague(s) who are on FICA at that time" (DOX5). Schools that see themselves as Learning Communities incorporate the principles of dialogic learning in a structured way, promoting the active participation of all educational agents - teachers, students, families and members of the community, through practices such as the Dream Commission, the Conflict Resolution Commission, Family Training, the Tutored Library, Interactive Groups and Dialogic Talks. These dynamics express a commitment to the social transformation of the school, based on the co-construction of the educational project, participatory management and the articulation between the academic and social dimensions of learning. The collaborative and continuous reflection between teachers, evidenced in the testimonies, ensures that practices are monitored and adjusted, consolidating a culture of inclusive innovation and continuous improvement. In short, even at different stages, all the schools mentioned share a common vision of an inclusive, participatory school centred on the success of all students, consistently positioning themselves on the path towards Learning Communities.

At Pegasus, the reality is similar: within the grouping as a whole, the schools have their own rhythms and one of them stands out for the consistency and continuity it attaches to the INCLUD-ED Project and its activities, promoting the SEAs, in particular the interactive groups and dialogic literary gatherings. Another school follows, but at a slower pace, and the other schools in the cluster don't show such encouraging results. In this journey, the role of the school coordinator has been fundamental at every stage, from the start of the project to the current situation, including successive training processes. However, the school's teachers feel that they are not yet a real learning community, despite their activities in this area and the fact that they could become one. Overall, the grouping has other projects besides INCLUD-ED: *Espaço* B, a reception room for students who are in transition when they arrive in the Portuguese education system and other mechanisms for welcoming families, providing framework and support, such as the student and family support office, the school education office and the EMAEI; they also mention projects with parents' associations, with the other parishes, with partner organisations in the community, clubs, which they get involved in and want to take part in, in a logic of the learning community that is fundamental for everyone to succeed.

This set of voices expresses, in short, a creative tension between innovation and resistance, and a clear commitment to collaboration as a way of building a more inclusive and participatory school, overcoming the challenges inherent in this process.

DATA OBTAINED THROUGH DIRECT OBSERVATION

The data obtained through direct observation is the result of observing certain situations relating to successful educational activities in the three groupings where it was possible to make these observations, namely interactive groups and gatherings.

Interactive Groups

The organisation of the interactive groups follows different strategies in the various SCs. While at the SC Crux the volunteers are mostly students from classes at more advanced levels (although family members still took part), who support the early years classes, at Phoenix, Orion and at Pegasus there is a predominance of adult volunteers, including teachers and family members. The organisation of the groups and the involvement of volunteers have made it possible to optimise the human resources available, reinforcing equity in access to learning and promoting inclusion. The presence of families is generally received enthusiastically by the students, creating an affective and motivating environment. For example, in a 2nd grade class at the SC Crux, with 27 students organised into six groups, a maths activity

focused on fractions took place, with the participation of two fathers and four mothers as volunteers. Two students with reading difficulties were given adapted materials with reading and writing exercises. At the end of the session, the parents were recognised with certificates presented by the children themselves. This activity illustrates the potential of involving families in the educational process, not just as pedagogical support, but as a way of strengthening emotional bonds and co-responsibility for learning.

Observations have shown that interactive groups, by valuing interaction as a central element of the learning process and fostering a sense of belonging and collaboration between students, especially when combined with active methodologies and the pedagogical use of digital resources, contribute to the creation of collaborative and dialogical learning environments that are more inclusive, motivating and pedagogically effective.

For example, in a 5th and 6th grade class at SC Orion, in the subject of Natural Sciences, the classroom was structured into six interactive groups, each made up of four students and led by an adult volunteer - four teachers, a mother and a grandmother - and six different tasks were proposed on the subject of "Human Body Systems", all based on active methodologies and integrating digital resources, namely the "Digital Classroom" platform, the "Virtual School" and, in a particularly innovative way, the use of virtual reality tools. The latter aroused great enthusiasm among the students, contributing to increased motivation, attention and appropriation of content through an immersive experience.

By way of example, in a 4th year Phoenix class, in which four mums took part as volunteers, in 4 groups of 6 pupils each, with different abilities and interests, there was a prior explanation to the volunteers, as it was the first time they had taken part. The four activities - tangram, wheel calculations, crossword puzzles (numbers in words) and crossword puzzles about the human body - were passed around all the groups for 10 minutes in each group. All the students took part in the tasks, remained involved throughout and the spirit of mutual help was present in all the groups. The activities were planned in such a way as to relate content from different subjects - maths, Portuguese and environmental studies - and adapted to the students' learning profile. The class had a student with Down's Syndrome who receives support from the specialised support unit and an operational assistant and with a task adapted to his learning profile, but he always carried out the same task and there was no need to change activities - the tangram. The class teacher always acted as a mediator, involved the volunteers and promoted pedagogical differentiation strategies in each group whenever necessary. At the end of the session there was a moment for the students and volunteers to give *feedback* on the activities. The *feedback* given was positive. Pedagogical intentionality and prior planning, as well as guidance from the volunteers, are essential, and in general there

is a competent professional practice on the part of the teachers, who value pedagogical differentiation and cooperation between students as strategies for educational success.

Artistic, musical and literary gatherings

The gatherings observed, some literary and others artistic and musical, were conducted in different ways in the various SCs studied, not always following the INCLUD-ED model.

In Orion, for example, the literary gatherings observed did not always focus on works by renowned authors in the field of national and international culture, but there were readings of newspaper reports and readings of works that focused more on current affairs than on themselves. For example, there were two literary gatherings, one on the theme of "Laws and Freedom", based on a newspaper report, with 7th and 8th graders, and another with 5th and 6th graders, based on the text "What if Portugal was at war?", focusing on human rights. In the latter case too, there were unexpected dynamics: individual readings during the gatherings, rather than preparation at home, due to the lack of commitment on the part of the students.

By contrast, in an artistic gathering observed at the SC Crux, with a 2nd year class of 28 students, focusing on a work by the artist Vincent van Gogh, "Room in Arles", the session began with a brief presentation of the author and his context, followed by collective observation of the painting, individual reflection and sharing among the children, in an atmosphere of mutual listening and respect, and concluding with a creative proposal, in which the students freely explored the work from their own perspective. This experience demonstrates how art can be a catalyst for dialogue, aesthetic sensitivity and personal expression, promoting meaningful learning in an open and respectful environment. Also at Phoenix , the gatherings observed focus on well-known authors. For example, in a 4th grade class, a musical dialogue gathering was observed with the listening of a song "Bach". At the beginning of the activity, the teacher gave a brief explanation about the composer and musician Johann Sebastian Bach, and then there was an opportunity for all the students to speak. However, the class was constantly interrupted by other teachers and students due to the lack of human resources at the school in question (teachers and operational assistants), which disrupted the smooth running of the activity. The participation of a student with Down's Syndrome was also problematic, as he was not present from the start, showed resistance and could not be accompanied by a special education teacher or operational assistant, which meant that the class teacher had to interrupt the participation of the other students several times in order to calm him down. In an outburst, she said that there was a lack of collaborative work with the special education teachers

accompanying the student and confessed that there had been no prior preparation for his participation in the musical gathering.

This practice, despite the difficulties observed, appears to be a space for dialogue and collective construction of meaning, where active listening and critical participation are encouraged from the earliest years of schooling. In general, it proves to be an effective practice in promoting inclusion, democratic participation and student involvement, contributing to their all-round development, in line with the principles of a school committed to equity and social justice.

Students' opinions on their educational experiences of inclusion at school

In Table 11 and following we present some of the recording units selected from the focus groups with students, in the three groupings where it was possible to do so, and these URs are examples of the opinions of the interviewees considered most representative. The tables are followed by a brief joint interpretative analysis of the four cases.

TABLE 11. OPINIONS ON INTERACTIVE GROUPS – FAVOURABLE AND LESS FAVOURABLE OPINIONS

Favourable opinions	**CRUX** Total number of students interviewed - 28
	(The older boys in the interactive groups) can help (...) They help us learn, if we have any doubts about anything. (YC, 4)
	(...) normally, no, it's not just the parents. What used to happen was that our teacher would organise if the parents wanted to teach a specific subject or art. Then, from time to time, students from this school, from other classes, sixth, seventh, would also come and help us with work and stuff. (XC, 5)
	(...) I think it's important for us to go, because that way we're helping the younger ones, and we're also still learning something that we don't remember, and remembering the subject, that sort of thing (...) (XC, 6)
	I think it's good because it's good to train the collective spirit, which can help us not to work alone because in the future, this happens a lot with my mum, there's no work that's done alone, it's all in a group. (YC, 6)
	When I went to help them, I felt like a second teacher. So, yha, then I think about the things I do here at school and try to help there. (YC, 8 PCA)
	ORION Total number of students interviewed - 11
	I like doing interactive groups, learning new things. (YO, 3)
	We learn to work better in groups. (YO, 4)
	Improves self-esteem. (YO, 3)
	We help our friends with more difficulties. (YO, 2)
	PEGASUS Total number of students interviewed - 20
	Because we learn more and, instead of making things difficult, we learn more through interactive groups. (XP, 4)
	Right. We can get to know everyone a bit better. And it's an easier way to work. (YP, 4)
	It's a game where we can learn things we've already done. And we need volunteers. Each table has to have an adult to help us. (XP, 3)
	We can do lots of things in groups. We can talk too. If we need something, we can ask questions. Either with the teacher or with someone in the group. (XP, 3)
	When it's interactive groups, the teacher chooses the groups, but now we were doing some work on the forest and we chose the groups. (YP, 2)

Less favourable opinions	**CRUX** Total number of students interviewed - 28
	Some of the interactive groups there, in the fifth or sixth year, are just clowning around. They don't help anyone.
	Sometimes I've seen some of them chatting while they're helping. But it's not chatting to help, it's chatting about other things, apart from the lesson. (YC, 3)
	(...) for me one of the biggest difficulties is when we're explaining an exercise to the student, and the student doesn't want to know, and we're there trying to understand the exercise and help him, and he doesn't want to do it. And sometimes they also disrespect us, as L. and S. have already said. (XC, 6)
	PEGASUS Total number of students interviewed - 20
	Sometimes there are people I don't agree with, but our teacher always says that we have to do it in a group so that we can learn, to do it with other people, to practise with our group, to learn that everyone has to agree with something, in short. (XP, 3)
	I don't like it either, sometimes in some groups, because there aren't any people I like, and there are a lot of people who like to fight. It's complicated, isn't it? It also makes me want to ask the teacher to leave the group and go to a singing group. I like to stay in the corner, hidden away. (XP, 3)
	No, it doesn't bother me, it's like when we're doing something and then the teacher gets angry and then we can't work anymore, to do things with a group. (YP, 2)
	It's not so good working with people who aren't friends, but we have to. Even so, because we already worked with A. and I. yesterday, but we didn't want to, but we did. (XP, 3)
	I think it's more or less, because we're doing the group and then someone else switches to another group and then the person from the other group comes back to the group and then we always switch, and then we decide, but we've already decided everything and then we have to decide everything again. (YP, 2)

The excerpts presented in Table 11 show, through the students' voices, the transformative power of interactive groups as an inclusive and collaborative pedagogical practice. From the earliest years, the enthusiasm for the presence of family members in the classroom is visible, as expressed by a child in the 2nd year of SC Crux when he happily reported the simultaneous arrival of his father and mother. Students recognise the value of help from the "older boys", who take an active role in mediating learning, especially when in doubt. In Orion, too, the students recognise the potential of this practice in the development of academic and socio-emotional learning. Collaboration between peers proves to be not only effective for those who receive support, but also meaningful for those who provide it. Fifth and sixth year Crux students describe their participation in the interactive groups with a sense of mission and pride, highlighting the rotation between classes and the perception that the younger children "like it when we go into the classroom to help them". The idea of "collective spirit" appears as an essential value, with a projection for the future: "no work is solitary, it's all in a group," says a 6th grader, linking the school experience to professional and family life. In 8th grade, the PCA students reinforce this view, reporting how they

felt useful and valued when supporting the younger ones. One of them said he felt like "a second teacher", revealing the importance he attached to helping and the responsibility he took on in this role. This experience allowed them not only to revisit their own school career, but also to reflect on their attitudes, abilities and possible futures. To summarise, interactive groups, as experienced by the students, represent a practice that brings generations together, strengthens ties between school and community, and transforms learning into a shared process where teaching and learning are intertwined in an affective, collaborative and human way.

The excerpts also reveal tensions and challenges experienced by students in interactive group contexts, indicating that the experience does not always correspond to the pedagogical intentions behind it. Criticism from the younger students - as in the case of the 2nd year student who says that his 5th or 6th year classmates "are just there clowning around" - expresses discontent with inappropriate behaviour, which compromises the learning environment and undermines confidence in the collaborative dynamic. In Year 3, the observation that some students "talk about other things, outside of class" points to a lack of focus and clear guidance as to the role of the supporter, suggesting that peer intervention does not always effectively contribute to the construction of knowledge. This problem is reinforced by the testimony of the 6th grader, who, despite his commitment to helping, faces resistance and disinterest from younger classmates, as well as episodes of disrespect, which can lead to frustration and emotional exhaustion. Finally, the account of the 8th grader reveals an ambiguous position: although he is willing to help, he ends up taking a paternalistic and undemanding stance, doing the exercises for his younger classmates and relativising the importance of mistakes ("they did the exercises badly. But it was OK"). This attitude, although well-intentioned, jeopardises the autonomy and learning of the younger ones, as well as weakening the formative sense of the activity.

Taken together, these reports highlight the importance of reinforcing pedagogical mediation, clarifying the roles of the participants and ensuring systematic monitoring, so that interactive groups can materialise as spaces for true collaboration and mutual learning.

TABLE 12. STUDENTS' OPINIONS ON LITERARY AND ARTISTIC GATHERINGS

Favourable opinions	**CRUX**	Yes. We've already done a Starry Night one for the cover of the first year tests. (Yc, 2) And one of Van Gogh. We had to see what was there. I know what was there! There was a clock melting. (YC, 2) Note: the children gave several examples and said in unison that they had really enjoyed the activities) I think it's very good because we can say everything we think about the book. We can say everything we know and what we think about the book or the story. And express our feelings about the book. (XC, 6) I think gatherings are a kind of development for children, instead of learning normally in class, to understand more like oral comprehension, if it's in a viewing, and written comprehension in a literary gathering. (YC, 6) I think it's good because the whole class has various ideas, and because in the test, when it comes to understanding the text, I can have that idea from my other classmate that I thought was good, I can have my own, I can have one that I've already heard about the text. (XC, 6)
	ORION	Sometimes the teachers have a notebook, like this, a sheet of paper, and then they say who wants to give their opinion, and she writes down the names, and then each person says their opinion and we respect it (YO, 3). And the teachers ask for any comments, sometimes other people say they have a different opinion, but it's always correct, it's our opinion (YO, 4). The literary and artistic dialogic literary gatherings are very important, because we learn about many important painters and people who have lived (YO, 4) We also learn from our friends' opinions (YO, 2)
	PEGASUS	Yes, and ours is (...) We have a painting and we have to see things that are there, what the painter thinks should be done and so on. This picture shows something we do, as J. said, at an artistic gathering. But here everyone reads a book. (YP, 3) That's why we always do something on Wednesdays. Sometimes we watch films and we give our opinion and then sometimes the teacher, when she gives drawings, tells us not to Google what that artist did, so that we can think that everyone has their own opinion. (XP, 3) The gathering takes place on Thursday just like the interactive groups, but one day the gathering and the other day the interactive groups. (YP, 1)

Less favourable opinions	**CRUX**
	Yesterday we had our first one and I always tried to speak up. But I respect other people's opinions. (XC, 4)
	Yesterday we had our first get-together, and my colleague, whose name is S. - usually misbehaves - just (...) imagine, a colleague of mine was talking and he sometimes interrupted and spoke over the top. (YC, 4)
	Normally, sometimes I don't respect very well, but when it's something important, I do. But sometimes I don't realise that they're talking and sometimes I'm joking with my classmates. (YC, 4)
	PEGASUS
	Normally [during meetings] this happens several times, and we even have to stop talking, because our friends are already joking, they're already talking over us. (XP, 4)
	Sometimes, when we have gatherings, at first everyone is nice, respecting us, and then they get more and more tired. (XP, 3)
	When we do meetings, sometimes we do them in the classroom, but most of the time we do them here in the library (...), at first everything is fine, and then your back, your feet, your arms, and then your shoulders hurt. (XP, 3)
	We tell the teacher, then the teacher calls the two of them [who were clashing] and then the teacher talks about it and then everything's fine. (YP, 2)

The students' testimonies (compiled in Table 12) reveal a rich and spontaneous understanding of the value of discussions in the school context. From the earliest years, children show enthusiasm for activities that involve artistic observation and creative expression, such as when in the EYFS they associate the work *The Starry Night* and Van Gogh's images with experiences at school. This aesthetic and emotional involvement indicates that, even at the earliest ages, gatherings are perceived as significant moments of sharing and discovery. In later years, students begin to explicitly recognise gatherings as collective practices of reading, listening and expressing opinions. They consider them "nice" and enriching, as they allow the whole class to share ideas, feelings and interpretations. The understanding that learning by exchanging points of view favours skills such as oral and written comprehension and knowledge about relevant works and authors stands out. In the SC Crux, a 6th grader remarks that he can use ideas discussed with his classmates in his assessments, highlighting the formative function of the discussions in consolidating knowledge. These comments suggest that, in addition to the content covered, what students value most is the space where they can have their say and construct meaning together, respecting the diversity of opinions and sharing knowledge. The gatherings thus emerge as an inclusive and democratic practice, where you learn from the other and learn to listen to the other.

TABLE 13. STUDENTS' OPINIONS ON FAMILIES IN SCHOOLS

Favourable opinions	**CRUX**	
		Rarely, it only happened once with my parents. Because the father of someone who was going to the interactive groups was absent. So my mum and dad came (...) And I liked it. (XC, 2)
		So far only parents have come. (X, 2nd) (*no grandparents, uncles (...))
		My mum's already gone! She's a lawyer and she's already been to our office to do a trial. And I helped her do it. (YC, 4)
		I've already experienced this because I used to go to a public school and there were lots of activities where parents, grandparents, pupils from the third cycle too, for example, came and it was really cool. (XC, 6)
	ORION	
		I also like it because from time to time the volunteer is my dad, but I also like the others. (YO, 3)
	PEGASUS	
		We do it once a week, we call it interactive groups, which some parents come to school to help us do. (YP, 4)
		That [parents at school] was last year. And it wasn't just a father, it was a father and mother of S., who had his birthday. (YP, 2)
		We've also had [a parents' meeting to discuss the school and measures to improve it] in the canteen, where the parents were and I was in the classroom and it was the last day of school. (YP, 2)
		And also in K.'s story [previous quote], when that was over, they very quickly took it all away, there were lots of tables with lots of food on them. (YP, 2)
		[They complain to the school, but there are no changes] Except when the parents come. (YP, 4)

The children's comments on the presence of families (table 13) reveal a positive attitude towards the presence of families at school, highlighting different levels of involvement and meanings attributed by the students to family participation. In the case of the SC Crux, with more expressions, it can be seen that in the first years of school (1st and 2nd year), the unexpected presence of parents in a classroom activity is received with surprise and joy. In the following years (3rd and 4th grade), there is a growing desire for parents' participation to become more structured and frequent. In the 5th and 6th grades, one student recalls past experiences at another institution, reinforcing the value students place on the presence of families at school. The memory of activities with parents, grandparents and older pupils is described as "very cool", indicating that these experiences have left a positive mark and that the school's openness to the community is recognised as an enriching practice.

The absence of unfavourable opinions may indicate both a school environment that genuinely welcomes family participation and a difficulty among

students in expressing criticism, whether due to discursive or contextual limitations. The lack of provocative questioning by the interviewers may also explain the lack of less positive statements about the presence and involvement of parents at school. This observation emphasises the need to foster spaces for continuous and diverse listening, capable of capturing more complex and even contradictory perceptions about the relationship between school and family.

TABLE 14. OPINIONS ON THE LEVELS OF INCLUSION ACHIEVED AT SCHOOL

	CRUX
Successes	Sometimes, when my classmates from other countries feel excluded, my teacher takes them aside to talk to them, to see what's going on, and then to talk to the class to see if they can help. And whenever a new child comes into the classroom, the teacher chooses someone to introduce them to the school, and, for example, tell them where the toilets are, where our classroom is - because sometimes you can get confused with where the classroom is - and all that stuff. (YC, 4)
	(...) and also, that right we were talking about of everyone going to school, I would also find it very interesting to have, like, a blind teacher or a teacher who can't hear. Because it would be interesting. And I also think that school is good for everyone, because everyone should be able to learn something, even if they have difficulties. (XC, 5)
	A while ago, our Portuguese teacher read us a poem about a black lady, and at the end of the poem she said, "I am black and proud of it. And I think that's great and so do I, the school, everyone has the right to have a school where they learn, where they are educated, where they are cared for, where they learn to respect each other (...) (YC, 6)
	Living with very different people is also good for us, because it helps us to empathise with others and develop this quality. (XC, 7)
	ORION
	We can't make fun of people because they have difficulties. They're not more than us, nor less than us. (YO, 4)
	It's not about leaving them out either, we have to help, give a bit more support. (YO, 2)
	We have colleagues with difficulties, we have to pay a bit more attention. (YO, 3)
	We have the tutored library, it's a different way of learning, but you can learn. (YO, 4)
	If I saw a classmate alone in the playground, I'd go up to him and say (...) Hi, do you want to play with me and my friends? If he said no, I'm not sure what to do, but if he said yes, I'd let him come and play with us. (YO, 2)
	And he'd be happier. (YO, 4)

PEGASUS

Successes

I feel good [socialising with children who are different, from other countries, other races, other languages] because at the same time as I'm learning about their culture, I'm also learning a bit about myself. (YP, 4)

When we do maths, that's fine, they're with us, but when it's Portuguese, they're never with us. (XP, 4)

When we have Portuguese, they don't stay with us and they stay in Portuguese as a non-native language. (YP, 4)

When a boy comes from another country and can't integrate well, we have to play with him, help him do his homework, try our best to get him to integrate quickly [statement after dialogue between several of the students]. (YP, 4)

They [friends who come from other countries] don't usually play much. They tend to play more with the kids from their countries or from other countries because they understand better and can speak English with them and with us it's more difficult. (XP, 4)

Teacher M. always does this for some teachers. When we're like this, sometimes there are new pupils and she always gives it to a pupil to see how that pupil is doing, to help her speak Portuguese, to show the school. (XP 3rd) [Another pupil] A. has already taken care of two. I've been with her. (YP, 3)

CRUX

Difficulties

(...) it's because they're in different countries, (...) I know because of (their) skin colour (YC, 2) I've seen people being excluded from certain things, and it's not their fault (...) I have a friend, who is my best friend, and sometimes when we're playing ball at my school, my mates don't want him to play because he makes a lot of fouls, but it's not his fault. He tells me he can't control himself (...) And I feel sad. (YC, 4)

I'd like to include them, but they like to play alone more (...) The three of them, you can see they've been friends for a long time. They even used to go to this school, but they failed and ended up coming to our class. (YC, 4)

(...) he used to be a gypsy, now he doesn't consider himself a gypsy. I wanted to say that, but in our class there were people who ran away without knowing what it really means to be a gypsy. (YC, 5)

(...) because sometimes in this school there are people who are racist, who make fun of people who are black, people who are of another religion. (XC, 6)

(...) while in theory they know that we should respect, we should help, we shouldn't fight, then in practice it's the complete opposite. I've seen many people, for example at school, who think that because someone doesn't have designer clothes, they're going to abuse them just because they bought them in a cheap shop, and they judge themselves for it. For someone who has some physical or psychological difference, it would be even worse. (XC, 7)

(...) because there are also a lot of teachers who perhaps aren't used to having contact with these people who have disabilities, and that's why we have to get used to living with them. (XC, 7)

	PEGASUS
Difficulties	I think they could improve the toilets, because downstairs in the gym, the toilets have wet floors. (YP, 4) I think there could be two assistants in the playground, because sometimes there are a lot of conflicts. One day a boy had a nosebleed and another wanted to play ball. (XP, 4) We could improve our classrooms, because the ceiling is falling down, the paint. (XP, 4) I think it could also be improved a bit, like, we'd stay here in the second floor classrooms, because we have to climb a lot of stairs every day. (XP, 4) [these fights happen] because if someone wants something and they say they've already got it first, or someone has hit me, fought with me, cursed at me. And it's almost always about Z., in fourth year, for example, more about boyfriend stuff. (YP, 3) My friend and I have had many fights, but we're still best friends. (XP, 3) It's complicated for parents, but not for us [living with children who are different, a bit different from us] (YP, 2)

The excerpts in table 14 reveal a strongly positive perception by the students of the inclusion they experience at school, marked by values of equality, respect, empathy and diversity. The voices of children and young people express not only acceptance of difference, but also an active appreciation of inclusive practices that recognise everyone's right to learn, live together and be respected. In the younger students' speeches, there is an intuitive and sensitive understanding of equality - "everyone is the same inside", "they are not more of us or less of us", and also of the right to difference, recognition and commitment to supporting those who have more difficulties, both in terms of academic learning and interpersonal relationships. They recognise the importance of the universal right to play, food and education, regardless of gender, nationality or status. Solidarity between peers appears as a concrete practice of inclusion, as in the example of the SC Crux where colleagues helped an Indian student learn Portuguese.

As we move towards the older students, especially in the SC Crux, more elaborate reflections emerge about social justice and the importance of diversity in the school environment. The students mention specific situations in which the school has acted to prevent exclusion, such as welcoming new classmates, teachers intervening to resolve conflicts and recognising difference as something enriching rather than an obstacle. Also noteworthy is the appreciation of living with diversity as a means of personal development: students recognise that being with people from different backgrounds, cultures and conditions makes them more empathetic and aware. This perception goes beyond mere acceptance; it reveals a critical understanding that the school has a fundamental role to play in building a fairer and more plural society. In addition, the students recognise rights and duties as something shared by everyone, reinforcing the idea that

inclusion is a collective principle, involving both institutional action and the responsibility of each individual in building an environment of respect and belonging. The image of the school as a place where everyone is treated "as if they were the teachers' children" symbolically summarises the welcome and care perceived. Also in SC Crux, the excerpts reveal a critical awareness on the part of the students of the difficulties of inclusion still present in the school context. From the first years of school, the children identify signs of exclusion motivated by visible differences, such as skin colour or the way they play, showing that even in contexts that promote inclusion, experiences of prejudice, rejection and isolation persist. In the early years (2nd grade), the children already realise that difference can be a reason for estrangement - "some people don't like to play because the others are different" - revealing an early apprehension of inequality in interactions. As they get older, students become more capable of describing specific situations of exclusion, namely of classmates with behavioural difficulties or with different school records, as in the case of students who "failed" and prefer to remain isolated. In the 5th and 6th years, there are more explicit reports of discrimination, such as prejudice against gypsy or black students, and the realisation that there are colleagues who "joke about it without knowing what it is". This dissociation between theory and practice is strongly expressed by a 7th grader, who observes that although they talk about respect, "in practice it's the complete opposite". Students denounce racist attitudes, exclusions based on religion, appearance or socio-economic status, pointing to a tension between inclusive discourses and the real practices of everyday school life.

Finally, there is the realisation that exclusion is not only the result of the attitude of classmates, but also of limitations on the part of some teachers, who are "not used" to dealing with diversity, especially with students with disabilities. This observation broadens the reflection to the institutional dimension of inclusion, indicating that it requires training, sensitisation and commitment from the entire educational community. These statements show that the feeling of belonging is not guaranteed for everyone and that simply being at school does not imply being included.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter we sought to analyse how Learning Communities can promote the development of an inclusive school, i.e. a school capable of involving the diversity of its members in rich and transformative learning experiences, in active participation and in meaningful relationships with others, supporting social cohesion and educational success for all.

With regard to the creation and development of the LCs, it was possible to find in the speeches of the educational actors interviewed some of the stages recommended by the INCLUD-ED model, including the creation of participatory moments with the whole community, including family members, to create the dream of the school; the definition of lists and collective decisions in setting priorities and directing financial resources; the organisation of various committees focused on different tasks, namely dream committees and conflict resolution committees.

We can't say that these practices are carried out in all the SCs, but those who mention them do so with some enthusiasm, although they recognise limitations. There are also references to the development of collaborative projects between teachers and their pupils, collaboration between school structures organised to promote inclusion, and working with different problems through universal, selective and additional measures.

SEAs such as pedagogical workshops, interactive groups, the mobilisation of family members and other volunteers from within and outside the school appear to be the main practices put in place to reduce inequalities, support pupils with more difficulties, meet pupils' diversity and promote their inclusion in school and society, and are generally highly valued. However, these practices do not come without tensions and challenges, including the reactions of some students and the lack of preparation of some teachers to manage these spaces.

We found some criticism from students (more than from teachers) about situations of resistance, disinterest, disrespect or patronising from colleagues in the interactive groups, which highlights the need for greater guidance for volunteers and a focus on proposals on the part of the teachers who organise these activities. Also in relation to the gatherings, we found, through direct observation and the students' opinions, difficulties with communication, attention and respect for who is speaking at any given time. In addition to these specific practices, there are collaborative dynamics involving the whole community, through its organisational structures and networks, favouring empowerment and learning for all.

In line with other studies, the data points to a significant impact of these practices on students' academic, socio-emotional and ethical learning (e.g. Álvarez-Álvarez, 2017; DeLuis & Ocon, 2016; Lopez-Azuaga & Riveiro, 2020; Rodriguéz & Vallejo, 2016; Silva et al., 2024; Zubiri-Esnaola et al., 2020). These include different literacies, critical and creative thinking, motivation and confidence in academic participation, autonomy, self-regulation of emotions and self-esteem, mutual support, empathy, respect for others and shared responsibility. Recognising multiple ways of learning and feeling and promoting collaborative and participatory processes are among the main ways of creating a climate of emotional well-being and motivation

for learning and school. However, there were also signs of insecurity, fear of making mistakes and fear of judgement from colleagues on the part of some of the students in some of the activities, which once again points to the need for the presence and close monitoring of teachers so that these difficulties can be overcome.

With regard to the interpretation of the sense of LC in relation to educational policies and the specificities of school contexts, the data points to an appreciation of these in the transformation of schools and educational action, towards a broader involvement of all school actors, more collaboration with families, greater student participation, in short, towards a school that is more inclusive, participatory and open to dialogic learning. However, there are indicators of resistance, non-adherence and inconsistencies on the part of professionals and families, as well as a differentiated ease/difficulty in some schools and groups in developing these communities, most of which do not fully integrate the SEAs suggested by INCLUD-ED.

This data is consistent with the case studies carried out in the Alentejo region, presented in the next chapter, and with research carried out in other countries (e.g. Geletu & Mihiretie, 2023; Silva et al., 2024; Silva, 2024). This data shows how much needs to be done to bring about cultural change, which implies a long and complex road ahead.

In some kindergartens and primary schools, this development of LC seems to be easier, but here too it varies from class to class in most Clusters. Single-teaching, fewer teachers and greater family involvement at an earlier age seem to be some of the factors that boost collaborative dynamics and family participation in building and realising a joint dream.

However, there are factors that are more specific to each cluster, school and class, regardless of the level of education. This includes the role of top leadership and programme coordinators in creating strategic guidelines and structural conditions to facilitate this development, providing support and favouring democratic decision-making processes. The role of teachers and other professionals is central to the development of inclusion, but also of all other actors, including families and pupils.

All in all, we can conclude that these school clusters are on the way of becoming learning communities and there are many positive indicators about the development of educational inclusion. The positive perceptions and attitudes of teachers and students stand out. This perception goes beyond mere acceptance; it reveals a critical understanding that the school has a fundamental role to play in building a fairer and more plural society.

The students recognise rights and duties as something shared by everyone, reinforcing the idea that inclusion is a collective principle that involves both institutional action and the responsibility of each individual in building an environment of respect and belonging. The students' statements show,

however, that the feeling of belonging is not guaranteed for everyone and that simply being at school does not imply being included. They denounce racist attitudes, exclusions based on religion, appearance or socio-economic status, pointing to a tension between inclusive discourses and the real practices of everyday school life.

Teachers also reveal a complex path that is still under construction with regard to school inclusion, indicating concerns about the lack of suitable conditions, such as human and material resources, as well as resistance to building more horizontal relationships with students and collaborative relationships with colleagues and other partners, as well as difficulties in including students with more severe disabilities. This is a joint and individual process that requires time, persistence, openness, continuity and commitment, which is renewed and expanded every day and cannot be taken for granted. Starting somewhere and observing the progress made from there are factors that motivate and deepen these same Learning Communities and Inclusive Education.

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CHAPTER 6

LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND INCLUSION IN SCHOOLS: FOUR CASE STUDIES IN ALENTEJO

Maria José D. Martins
CARE, Centro de Investigação em Saúde e Ciências Sociais,
Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre
Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais,
Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Teresa Oliveira
Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais,
Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre, Portugal

Amélia Marchão
CARE, Centro de Investigação em Saúde e Ciências Sociais,
Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre
Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais,
Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre, Portugal

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Maria José D. Martins
CARE, Centro de Investigação em Saúde e Ciências Sociais,
Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre
Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais, Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Teresa Oliveira
Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais, Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre, Portugal

Amélia Marchão
CARE, Centro de Investigação em Saúde e Ciências Sociais,
Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre
Escola Superior de Educação e Ciências Sociais, Instituto Politécnico de Portalegre, Portugal

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, we will describe and analyze how the INCLUD-ED project, as conceived by the CREA group (2017), from the University of Barcelona, was appropriated and implemented by four school clusters (SC) in the Alentejo region, exploring and reflecting on its impacts on student learning, sociability and inclusion. Of these four clusters, two are located in Alto Alentejo (Portalegre district), one is located in Baixo Alentejo (Beja district), and one is located in Alentejo Central (Évora district). All of these clusters are located in areas of low population density (among the lowest in Portugal) and are all considered priority intervention territories (TEIP) by the Portuguese Ministry of Education, given that they are characterized by serving populations with socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

The INCLUD-ED project, and the successful educational actions it advocates (Flecha, 2015), thus presents itself as a pedagogical model in line with the TEIP philosophy (Despacho No. 7798/2023), which is why the Directorate-General for Education of the Ministry of Education of Portugal initially made available, in the 2019/2020 academic year, manuals and training with trainers from the CREA group (2017), on this educational model. The management of the SCs that decided to join the project formed groups

of teachers who attended this training. Subsequently, the SC appointed an INCLUD-ED coordinator, who, together with teachers who had already received the training, provided dialogic training to colleagues who also decided to participate in the project in the following years.

METHODOLOGY

This research followed a qualitative approach, using a descriptive-interpretive case study (Amado & Freire, 2000) of four school clusters (SC) in the Alentejo region, involving analysis of the schools' documents (namely the educational projects and the information available on the official websites), interviews with 50 adults (directors, programme coordinators and volunteers), observation of classes and other pedagogical activities with field notes, and 12 focus groups with students.

The interviews and focus groups were subjected to content analysis procedures that broadly followed the guidelines of Bardin (2013).

CHARACTERISATION OF THE SCHOOL CLUSTERS

Table 1 gives a description of the SC studied (referred to by the fictitious names ESTE, SUL, OESTE and CENTRO), in terms of the number and type of schools they comprise, their territorial spread and the human resources they have at their disposal.

TABLE 1. CHARACTERISATION OF SCHOOL CLUSTERS – NUMBER AND TYPE OF EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENTS AND HUMAN RESOURCES

	ESTE	SUL	OESTE	CENTRO
Number of schools	7 schools	6 schools	12 schools	11 schools
Typology	In the city: · 1 EB2/3 (headquarters of the EA) · 2 EB1/JI In rural areas: · 4 EB1/JI	In the city: · 1 EB2/3 (headquarters) · 1 EB1/JI In a small town: · 1 EB1/2/3/JI In rural areas: · 3 EB1/JI	In the city: · 1 EB3/ES (headquarters) · 1 EB1/JI · 1 EB1/2 In a small town: · 1 EB1/2/3 · 1 EB1/JI In rural areas: · 3 EB1/JI · 2 EB1 · 2 JI	In the city: · 1 EB2/3 (headquarters) · 2 EB1/JI · 1 JI In rural areas: · 5 EB1/JI · 2 EB1
Human resources	119 teaching staff 66 non-teaching staff (10 senior technicians [including 3 psychologists], 49 operational assistants and 7 technical assistants)	123 teaching staff 90 non-teaching staff (incl. senior technicians: 2 psychologists, 1 social worker and 1 animator)	240 teaching staff 122 non-teaching staff (operational assistants and other senior non-teaching staff)	106 teaching staff 41 non-teaching staff (5 senior technicians and 36 operational assistants)

Notes. JI - Pre-school education; EB1 - 1st Cycle of Basic Education (6-10 years old); EB2 - 2nd Cycle of Basic Education (10-12 y.o.); EB3 - 3rd Cycle of Basic Education (12-15 y.o.); ES - Secondary Education (15-18 y.o.).

Table 2 shows the number of students in each SC, by school cycle, at the time of data collection, which in the ESTE SC took place between the 2022/2023 and 2023/2024 school years and in the other SCs only in 2023/2024.

TABLE 2. NUMBER OF STUDENTS PER SCHOOL CYCLE IN EACH OF THE SC

	ESTE	SUL	OESTE	CENTRO
Pre-school Education	121	181	254	251
1st Cycle	362	383	505	434
2nd Cycle	188	180	266	196
3rd Cycle	245	207	451	157
ES	0	0	384	0
PIEF courses	26	1 class*	1 class*	13
Evening courses (EFA+ER+PLNM)	0	0	25	0
Totals	942	951	1885	1051

Notes. ES - Secondary Education (various scientific-humanistic and professional courses); PIEF - Integrated Education Programme; EFA - Adult Education and Training; ER - Recurrent Education by Capitalisable Modules; PLNM - Portuguese as a Non-Mother Tongue;
* PIEF classes include students counted in 2nd and 3rd Cycles.

Table 3 shows the proportion of foreign students in relation to the total number of students in each SC.

TABLE 3. PERCENTAGE OF FOREIGN STUDENTS AND THEIR NATIONALITIES

	ESTE	SUL	OESTE	CENTRO
Total number of students	942	951	1885	1051
Students of foreign nationality	90 (9,55%)	85 (8,9%)	142 (7,53%)	79 (7,52%)
Nationalities (in order of frequency)	17 countries (Brazil, Angola, United Kingdom, Pakistan, Cuba, Italy, Venezuela, India, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, China, Finland, Ireland, Malaysia, Spain, Sri Lanka and Ukraine)	12 countries (Brazil, Moldova, Pakistan, Romania, Switzerland, Cuba, Peru, Ukraine, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, India and Spain)	17 countries (Brazil, Angola, India, Pakistan, Ukraine, China, Colombia, Cuba, Mozambique, United Kingdom, Venezuela, Russia, Guinea-Bissau, Bulgaria, Honduras, Italy and Sri Lanka)	7 countries (Brazil, Romania, Ukraine, China, Nepal, Angola and India)

From the data presented, it is clear that the SC known as OESTE is larger in terms of the number of establishments, the levels of education and the diversity of training on offer, compared to the other three, which are similar to each other, especially in terms of the levels of education and the number of students.

The percentage of foreign students is similar in all four clusters, ranging from 7.5% to 9.5%, with a wide variety of origins (and consequently mother tongues), but with a marked predominance of Brazilian nationality. All the

SCs are attended by Roma pupils, and in the SUL SC the percentage of these pupils is around 12 per cent of the total number of pupils.

The four SCs have a Multidisciplinary Inclusive Education Support Team (EMAEI) that assesses and supports students with regard to the application of universal, selective or additional measures provided for in the legislation in force (Pereira, 2018). They also implement various educational projects and activities that involve many teachers and students. Table 4 shows a list of those underway in each SC.

TABLE 4. LIST OF PROJECTS BEING IMPLEMENTED BY THE SC IN THE 2023/2024 SCHOOL YEAR

ESTE	SUL	OESTE	CENTRO
· INCLUD-ED · Health Education Programme · Collaborative Leadership Academy · Ubuntu Leaders Academy · Eco-Schools · ERASMUS+ · 4 in Line · Live Science Club · School Cultural Plan (as part of the National Arts Plan)	· INCLUD-ED · Eco-Schools · European Club · School Newspaper · More Success	· INCLUD-ED · Health Education Programme · Ubuntu Leaders Academy · Youth Parliament · ERASMUS+ · Ludopedagogical Centre · Eco-Schools · Living Science Club at School ·"Sweetening Life" cookery project · School newspaper · School Library · Philosophically · Support for High Performance Athletes	· INCLUD-ED · Ginja Programme for the Promotion of Socio-Emotional Skills

CHARACTERISATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

At ESTE SC, 15 adults took part in the study - eight teachers (seven female and one male), two family members (a mother and a father) and five volunteers (family members and non-teaching staff from the SC, four female and one male).

Five focus groups were conducted with 21 children - 10 attending 3rd or 4th grade (1st Cycle), nine attending 6th grade (2nd Cycle) and two attending 9th grade (3rd Cycle). In 3rd grade, the focus groups were made up of four boys and one girl (Mage= 8.25); in 4th grade, two boys and two girls (Mage= 8.75); in 6th grade, seven girls and three boys (Mage= 11.0); and in 9th grade, two girls (Mage= 14.0). Two of the students were foreigners, but from Portuguese-speaking countries.

The following activities were observed: a lesson in a class of 2nd and 3rd graders, with volunteers who ran interactive groups with the teacher; a tutored library activity (extra support for those who need it); and three dialogical gatherings: two artistic gatherings in the area of plastic expression - one with a pre-school group, based on van Gogh's "Sunflowers";

the other with a 6th grade class, on "The Möbius II Ribbon" by Escher; and a musical gathering with a group of 1st and 2nd graders.There was also a musical workshop with a group of 1st and 2nd grade students, based on Puccini's "Madame Butterfly".

At SUL SC, 11 adults took part in the study, eight of whom were teachers (one male and 10 females), one family member (a mother) and two volunteers (retired teachers).

Three focus groups were held with 13 students in either 7th or 9th grades. In 7th grade, three boys and four girls took part, divided into two groups (Mage= 12.25); in 9th grade, the focus group included three boys and three girls (Mage= 14.5). One of the participants was a foreigner, but from a Portuguese-speaking country.

Two activities were observed: a literary discussion in a 7th grade class to discuss Saint-Exupéry's "The Little Prince"; and a lesson observation in a 7th grade class with volunteers who organised interactive groups with the teacher. In addition to the teacher, the lesson involved 13 students (seven boys and six girls) and five volunteers: two family members (a father and a mother), a retired teacher and a businesswoman from the community, who was also a family member of a student from another class.

At OESTE SC, 18 adults took part, eight of whom were teachers (two male and six female, aged between 48 and 66), eight family members (one male and seven female) and two volunteers (retired women attending the Senior University).

Three focus groups were conducted with 17 students in 2nd grade, 6th grade and 10th grade (secondary school). In the 2nd grade, the group was made up of three males and two females (Mage= 7.6); in the 6th grade, one male and four females (Mage= 11.0); in the 10th grade, three males and four females (Mage= 15.14).

Two gatherings were observed: a dialogical artistic gathering and a community dialogical literary gathering. The first had 30 participants, including 27 students (14 girls and 13 boys) and three teachers (one male, who was the mediator, and two females). The discussion took place during the 10th grade English class, in the school library, and was aimed at analysing Vincent Van Gogh's "Starry Night". The community dialogical literary gathering was attended by various members of the school community: one student, 12 teachers, two technicians, one member of the municipality and three members of the local community. Of the 19 participants, 17 were female and two were male. The meeting was also held in the school library, was open to students and teachers, and aimed to analyse the article "On gratitude" by Pieta and Freitas, published in a scientific journal in 2009.

At CENTRO SC, six adults took part, all female teachers.

A focus group was conducted with four 2nd grade students, two boys and two girls (Mage= 8.0).

Three dialogical gatherings were observed in the classroom: two literary gatherings - one in the 3rd grade, based on the traditional tale "The Puss in Boots" by Charles Perrault, and another in the 5th grade, with debate, analysis and interpretation of the poem "Antigamente" by Luísa Ducla Soares - and one artistic gathering, in the area of plastic expression in 2nd grade to discuss Miró's painting "The Garden", which was digitally visualised by all the students.

INSTRUMENTS

Three scripts were drawn up to conduct the interviews with the teachers, family members and other volunteers, and to organise the focus group with the students. These scripts covered the same dimensions presented in the previous chapter.

Informed consent was previously obtained from the teachers, students, carers and volunteers who took part, and the confidentiality of the data obtained was guaranteed.

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

In order to understand how the project was implemented in each of the SCs, a survey was developped of the successful educational activities carried out, based on information obtained mainly through interviews with the Principal and the INCLUD-ED Coordinator of each of the SCs, but also on statements made by teachers and students. Table 5 systematises the successful educational actions that were implemented.

TABLE 5. SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTIONS PROMOTED IN EACH OF THE FOUR SCS AND THE SCHOOL LEVELS IN WHICH THEY WERE PROMOTED

		SUL	OESTE	CENTRO
Dialogical gatherings	JI (Kindergarten) 1st Cycle 2nd Cycle	3rd Cycle	JI 1st Cycle 2nd Cycle + 3rd Cycle + ES	JI 1st Cycle 2nd Cycle (only 1 teacher)
Interactive groups	1st Cycle	3rd Cycle	1st Cycle	Not carried out
Community educational participation (family members and volunteers at school)	JI 1st Cycle	3rd Cycle	JI 1st Cycle 2nd Cycle + 3rd Cycle + ES	Not carried out
Extra time for those who need it/ Tutored library	1st Cycle	Tutorial support for retained students and support for students with specific needs	Support for retained students and students with specific needs	Support for retained students and students with specific needs
Family training	Existed, organised by the coordinator and other technicians	Not carried out, but planned for the near future	Exists, organised by the coordinator, and PLNM is offered to families	Not carried out
Dialogical teacher training	There were 2 moments: first, organised by CREA trainers, then by the coordinator	There were 2 moments: first organised by CREA trainers, then by the coordinator	There were 2 moments: first, organised by CREA trainers, then by the coordinator	Firstly with trainers from the CREA group
Dialogical model for conflict prevention and resolution	Not carried out	The model was replaced by class assemblies	It was only dynamised with the 1st Cycle	Not carried out

Note. The term "coordinator" refers to the coordinator of the INCLUD-ED project who existed in all four SCs.

Analysing Table 5 reveals that the SCs were not all involved in the INCLUD-ED project in the same way. The implementation of successful educational actions seemed to depend on the decision of the management, the teachers and the number of teachers involved in the project.

The teachers also identified some obstacles to the implementation of the project, namely the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting lockdowns, which coincided with the start of the project in the different SCs; the resistance of some teachers to innovate and experiment with new pedagogical practices; and the fact that three of the four SC had multiple projects underway, which, although not in conflict with the INCLUD-ED philosophy, involved many teachers.

Thus, OESTE SC seems to be the most involved in the INCLUD-ED project, at the different levels of education and with the greatest implementation of the different educational actions. CENTRO SC, on the other hand, opted to implement only the dialogical gatherings and integrate them into the Pedagogical Innovation Plan (drawn up under Ordinance no. 181/2019, of 11 June, amended by Ordinance no. 306/2021, of 17 December, published in the *Diário da República*), which allows for the amalgamation of some subjects in the 2nd Cycle. At ESTE and SUL SCs, the actions were implemented mainly in the school cycles of the teachers who were the local coordinators of the INCLUD-ED project (1st and 3rd Cycles, respectively). At SUL SC, plans were being made for the 2024/2025 school year to expand the INCLUD-ED project in order to implement it in primary schools and organise training for parents.

In particular, with regard to the Dialogical Model of Conflict Prevention and Resolution (DMCPR), this educational action was replaced at SUL SC by class assemblies, which were designed to discuss topics of interest to students and to act as a conflict resolution and violence prevention strategy. Only OESTE SC implemented the DMCPR in primary school, either because the activity seemed more appropriate for students in this level of education, because it raised more questions for teachers, or because they resorted to other strategies to deal with conflicts and aggression. However, little evidence was obtained on how they dealt with situations of conflict and/or violence. Of particular note is an experience in the 1st Cycle of OESTE SC, previously described in Silva (2024), in which two teachers report that they are implementing the "Clube dos Valentes" (Club of the Brave):

> Here, I've already started doing the Club of the Brave. For me, I confess that it's more difficult to implement (...) it has to do with behaviour. (...) There's a child in this group, in this club, which is our class, who hasn't respected the rules that are laid down for that team. So that child will be helped by the group. How? The child leaves the group. They'll be helped, they'll be (...) I'm going to use this word, but they'll be excluded, they'll be left out of the group, until they show that they've changed their behaviour, that they've reflected, the other classmates will help with this. Then the child rejoins the club. It's the club of the brave, there are 21 of us brave and we all have to be in this club.
>
> In fact, if a pupil misbehaves, it's the school that has to sort it out. It's there, it's in the class (...). They made the classroom rules themselves. The club of the brave is another successful educational initiative. It's also part of conflict mediation. And then preventing it. So they know. They make the rules. They dictated them. And we always have to say: "If you fail, you don't believe what you're saying. And the rules are out there. You made them."

With regard to the tutored library, or the extension of study time for those who need it, although all the schools have some form of support

for students who are held back or have specific needs, only the ESTE SC reported the implementation of this educational action, in the sense proposed by INCLUD-ED, in a primary school. A non-teaching technician from ESTE SC who volunteered for this activity reports:

> It's not like an ATL [free time activities centre], but it's also a mixture, where first they have to do the homework they've brought from the classroom, which is a bit reminiscent of support rooms (...) but then they finish their homework and move on to the more playful part, which we try to articulate with the difficulties of the classroom (...) in the tutored library there's room for all that, for them to be creative and show their skills (...).

ADULTS' OPINIONS ON THE IMPACTS OF INCLUD-ED

The results of the interviews with adults made it possible to identify a number of categories relating to the project's impacts:

- Improvements in learning and academic skills (evidence of gains in cognitive skills, motivation, academic progress and pupils' success at school);
- Improvements in socio-emotional skills and good coexistence between students and the rest of the school community (evidence of improved social relationships between students and acceptance of differences);
- Improvements in family involvement and communication (evidence of greater family involvement in the school, with impacts on students' well-being and learning, and improvements in school-family communication);
- How the school operationalises inclusion, in terms of policies, culture and practices, with a description of the strategies, obstacles and challenges to inclusion;
- The school as a learning community, and the stage it is at in this process.

Below is Table 6, which includes examples of the recording units considered most representative of the interviewees' opinions , classified in the first three categories described above, as well as the frequencies for each of the four SCs.

The percentages were calculated in terms of the total number of adults interviewed in each SC, whose statements referred to each of the categories. Part of the data from the ESTE SC was published in Martins et al. (in press).

The content analysis of the interviews highlighted the fact that teachers, family members and volunteers believe that successful educational activities have helped to motivate students towards academic learning, promote and improve critical thinking and, above all, improve relational dimensions such as socio-emotional skills, mutual respect, active listening skills, teamwork and solidarity (insofar as successful educational activities encourage mutual help

between students). In particular, with regard to the dialogical gatherings, they considered that they helped to motivate reading, promote argumentation skills, improve speaking and writing, increase vocabulary, improve text interpretation skills and also accept differences and respect the other person's opinion. All the teachers, family members and volunteers were of the opinion that the successful educational actions contributed to promoting some academic learning, social cohesion and a positive social environment, improving social interaction between students, and between students and the rest of the educational community (Table 6).

The data in Table 6 also shows that the majority of teachers, family members and volunteers believe that the successful educational actions allow families to be more involved in the school, especially with regard to primary school pupils, since with INCLUD-ED, parents go to school more and participate more in its activities. The testimonies of family members (in general, fathers, mothers, grandmothers and grandfathers) show that it is rewarding for them to get to know the school, the classrooms and the students. As far as the gatherings are concerned, reading books together is seen as an activity that brings families together and gives them something to talk about. When they involve other members of the community, they give the students different perspectives on the works being analysed.

TABLE 6. ADULTS' OPINIONS ON THE IMPACT OF SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTIONS IN THE 4 SCS

Categories and definition		
Impact of successful educational actions on learning and academic skills (evidence of gains in cognitive skills, motivation and academic progress of students)	**ESTE** n = 15	15 (100%)
		The weekly literary gatherings led a student (who had many difficulties with reading) to enjoy reading; they involved parents and children in homework (DX1)
		The school has acquired several literary classics and the students are more motivated to read (DX7)
	SUL n = 11	9 (81,82%)
		In the interactive groups, students learn to work in groups, and in the gatherings, to speak in public (FX2)
		Dialogic gatherings are not as good as interactive groups, because it is difficult to motivate students to read; in interactive groups there is dynamism and motivation, due to the mediation of volunteers (DX10)
	OESTE n = 18	12 (66,67%)
		Students develop their ability to argue (in English) and their critical thinking (DY1)
		They acquire a lot of vocabulary and feel free to ask questions about what they don't know (DX4)
		[Gatherings] They reached the end of 12th grade having gained a taste for learning, researching and knowing more (DX6)
		They weren't afraid to put their ideas across; they developed their vocabulary and their ability to argue, put forward an idea, criticise constructively (DX7)
		They develop creativity and argumentation (FX4)
	CENTRO n = 6	6 (100%)
		In the gathering, they develop the ability to argue, to put forward ideas, to value their own opinion and that of others; they are able to interpret a text and associate it with real life (DX1)
		[Gatherings] develop the power of argumentation, orality and critical thinking. I've been doing it since 2019 (DX2)
		They develop their way of thinking, their ability to express themselves; they become more mature (students aged 7, 9); they learn to look at the works and say what they feel (DX4)
		They really enjoyed the gatherings, they wanted to do one every week (DX6)

Categories and definition		
Impact of successful educational actions on socio-emotional competences and good coexistence between students (evidence of improved social relationships between students and acceptance of differences)	**ESTE** n = 15	15 (100%)
		[Literary gatherings, interactive groups, tutored library, dialogical gatherings with teachers] The greatest impact is in emotional and relational terms (mutual help, solidarity); knowing how to argue about a subject, speaking without fear, without shame, exposing their ideas, helping other children; they liked it a lot and everyone was willing (DX2)
		[They developed respect for others, argumentation and critical thinking; they said they liked it a lot (DY2)
	SUL n = 11	11 (100%)
		Literary gatherings promote mutual respect and the ability to listen to others; interactive groups promote collaboration and mutual help between students (DX8)
	OESTE n = 18	13 (72,22%)
		Promoted class cohesion and the integration of special education students, which increased their self-esteem and value in the class (DY1)
		Promoted collaboration and unity in the class (DY1)
		They help each other, they all listen to each other (DX4)
		They feel equal, they feel that everyone can contribute to knowledge (DX6)
		Development of knowing how to be, knowing how to listen, knowing how to share in a group; promotes social interaction (DX7)
		They respect and support each other (DX9)
		They learn to respect others, work in groups, accept differences and respect each other's time (FX3)
		Argumentation, coexistence, rules of civility, knowing how to live in a community, respecting others, waiting their turn (FX6)
		They end up including a child who may have difficulties in this area, which is a form of inclusion (FX8)

Categories and definition		
Impact of successful educational actions on socio-emotional competences and good coexistence between students (evidence of improved social relationships between students and acceptance of differences)	**CENTRO** n = 6	6 (100%)
		They feel valued; they respect the opinion of others; it improves relationships and increases closeness between them; they feel they are not forced to speak; gradually, even the shyest and those with more difficulties begin to feel free to speak, because they know they won't be corrected; it promotes communication skills and equality; even one of the two children with specific needs participates (DX1)
		It improved interpersonal relationships and the way people look at each other; everyone wanted to take part; even the kids with difficulties work, with help, and are valued by their mates (DX2)
		[Gatherings] even make Roma students feel interested and not afraid of being laughed at and giving their opinions; everyone participated a lot; it promoted sharing and debate that didn't exist; they weren't used to having this freedom and security, that nothing is wrong; they respect each other's times and spaces (DX3)
		They learn to enjoy poetry, read poems and dismantle them in a playful way; they make their own poems spontaneously; they find beauty, see and discover different things in a painting (DX6)

Categories and definition		
Impact on family involvement and communication (evidence of greater family involvement at school, with impacts on students' well-being and learning, and improvements in school-family communication)	**ESTE** n = 15	15 (100%)
		We devised an activity and crossed three projects [Ubuntu Academy, Eco-Schools and INCLUD-ED]; some family members volunteered and the children [1st Cycle] love to see them at school, they learn a lot from them; they began to value mothers and fathers of all ethnicities, there was an appreciation of difference; it has worked really well; the dynamics that are established in the interactive groups are extremely interesting, even more so than in the gatherings, because there we have a volunteer at every table (DX6)
		Because of INCLUD-ED, the community, the families, are more participative, more open to projects, because the school is full of projects; I took part in parent training in two actions, on tantrums and being patient (VTX4)
		It's good because we interact with the students and they interact with us, there's no separation between students, teachers and parents; we're able to join forces, do things together; it creates a different bond, a closer relationship between parents and all the students; there should be more of this participation to solve problems; parents just don't come more because of their professional activity (VFY1)
		[I've always read the books with my daughter; I've taken part as a volunteer in interactive groups and as a mum I've followed the meetings from a distance, during lockdowns; I think these activities are an asset to the school (VFAX13)
	SUL n = 11	11 (100%)
		I see more parents taking part in the school, I see parents I've never seen here before; these actions are an asset; the students respect each other more; as a volunteer in the interactive groups, I try to get everyone to take part; my daughter seemed embarrassed that I was in the class, but everyone behaved and worked well and enjoyed the experience (VFX2)
		[INCLUD-ED] It gets the school involved in the community and the community is able to give positive input to the school (VFX3)

Categories and definition		
Impact on family involvement and communication (evidence of greater family involvement at school, with impacts on students' well-being and learning, and improvements in school-family communication)	**OESTE** n = 18	13 (72,22%) Families also feel an integral part of the school (DX6) They get an idea of what the child is doing, how they behave; this openness to the [families] was very good (DX7) Greater parental involvement (FX1) It was gratifying to come to the classroom; you get to know the kids' reality a little bit; it's very important for them to have a mum or dad there; that exchange between parents and pupils and teacher is very important (FX2) It's important to come into the classroom and participate and play an active role; the kids, when they see their mum in the classroom, feel that she cares about their education, their learning and that of their classmates; it's a way of bringing families closer to the school and understanding how the school works; this is very important, because there are parents who are very distant (FX4) It's always beneficial to get to know the school space; the school space being open to the community, to whoever is available, is totally rewarding for both sides (FX5)
	CENTRO n = 6	6 (100%) The gatherings are much more valuable, because the children take the texts with them to read with their families, which involves the family in the school; it's very important for the parents to be involved in what we're doing; it was very gratifying for me to see that the parents were interested, that they studied the texts together; They chose the part of the text they liked best and then wrote it down; when the kids choose a part of a story or a song or look at a picture and like an element more, they explain why and I ask them to relate it to things in their lives (DX2) The gatherings allow them to have something they're going to do with pleasure with their parents, and to involve their parents in what they're going to do; the gatherings are to be worked on at home, as a family; if it were homework, they wouldn't bring it with them; it's good to feel accompanied when they take their work home, and that means they end up doing it and doing it with pleasure; this has been a way of bringing them closer to their parents (DX5)

Notes. A - Educational assistant; D - Teacher; F - Family member; T - Senior technician; V - Volunteer; X - Female; Y - Male; CERCI - Social Solidarity Cooperative focused on the Education and Rehabilitation of Citizens with Disabilities; APPACDM - Institution of the Portuguese Association of Parents and Friends of Mentally Handicapped Citizens.

Table 7 shows the opinions of adults regarding the implementation of inclusive education and the transformation of SCs into learning communities, bringing together examples of the registration units considered most representative.

TABLE 7. ADULTS' OPINIONS ON THE IMPACT OF SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTIONS IN THE 4 AES ON INCLUSIVE EDUCATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SCHOOLS INTO CAS

Categories and definition		
Does the school have an inclusive policy, culture and practices? (adults' opinions on how the school operationalises inclusion and to what extent the SC is an inclusive school)	**ESTE** n = 15	15 (100%)
		We do everything we can to promote inclusion; we are concerned about reaching out to parents; we have a student and family support office, the special education teachers work closely with the psychologists, the social worker, the families and the other teachers; we have a learning support centre that operates in 3 of our schools; we are a reference school for autism spectrum disorders; parents are aware of the work that has been done and come to this school; we have a series of technicians here who have done a good job; most autistic children are integrated into classes; some after school have time with the Special Education teacher, or he goes to the classroom liaising with the head teacher; as schooling progresses, some children with ASD go to CERCI but others continue their studies (DX11)
		Difficulties with inclusion occur with children with multi-disabilities and severe disabilities, children who wear nappies and are of school age; they have to go to the classroom, but their behaviour isn't stabilised, they don't follow what the teacher says, they can't even listen to a story; that's not inclusion; we're improving our therapy room, we have two rooms equipped with lots of things, the Snoezelen, music, the suspended swing; it's very good for calming them down (DX11)
		In this school, inclusion is clearly practised, it's a national reference school for autism; we have a PIEF course aimed at children at high risk in terms of behaviour; sometimes there are children with high levels of disability who don't do well here and are referred to CERCI or APPACDM (DX5)
		Inclusion is also about including students who come from outside; there are many students of other nationalities here; there are Brazilians with a different accent and there is the language barrier with some students; I have a Ukrainian in the class I support, I use Google Translate and I try to be attentive so that he is not excluded from the group (TX12)

Categories and definition		
Does the school have an inclusive policy, culture and practices? (adults' opinions on how the school operationalises inclusion and to what extent the SC is an inclusive school)	**SUL** n = 11	11 (100%)
		The school is a space for inclusion; the various clubs available contribute to inclusion (sports, arts, European issues); tutorial support for those with learning difficulties, Portuguese language support for foreign students (DX5)
		The school promotes inclusion because all students take part in group work, both migrants and Roma (VX1)
		The school is inclusive because it offers Portuguese as a non-native language to students who don't speak Portuguese; they have a Portuguese non-native language class; there is an excellent student who submits her work in English because she doesn't have a good command of Portuguese; the activities also include students with more difficulties; there are obstacles to inclusion with students with profound disabilities, such as severe autism spectrum disorder associated with aggression; in a class with 20 to 25 without a specialised teacher it is difficult to achieve the inclusion of these children (DY7)
		Inclusion is teaching everything to everyone; we promote inclusion; I try to hold meetings with Roma families; we try to encourage them to continue studying, not to leave school prematurely; last year we had a mediator (DX8)

Categories and definition		
Does the school have an inclusive policy, culture and practices? (adults' opinions on how the school operationalises inclusion and to what extent the SC is an inclusive school)	**OESTE** n = 18	18 (100%)
		At the moment, Decree-Law 54 has taken the focus away from special education teachers and made the educational context of the group, in the classroom, more encompassing; in special education, we have everything: we have pupils with universal measures, with selective measures, pupils with additional measures (DX3)
		Inclusion is everyone making gains in terms of learning (DX4)
		It's bringing everyone into the school, loving the school and our students; being able to give them better conditions (DX5)
		In terms of cultural, economic and social diversity, we are very diverse; increasingly the teacher has to have strategies to integrate all students, from different backgrounds, but also from a cognitive, socio-cultural and economic perspective; to integrate students who come from outside, as well as Roma students and the so-called "tendeiros" who are a mixture of these ethnicities (DX5)
		If you work for inclusion, you have to find resources, material and human; it's important to have more resources for this inclusion that we need (FX11)
		Inclusion isn't about putting all the students in a classroom, that only workson paper; having a student in a classroom who doesn't understand anything that's going on there is not inclusion; I don't see inclusion as it's written in the 54, for me inclusion is a life project for those who have more disabilities, whether physical, cognitive or multi-disability; putting an autistic pupil in a classroom where he's aggressive, doesn't speak, often has attitudes that even frighten others, that's not inclusion (DX3)
		[PIEF and CEF courses] The definition of the network itself, the training on offer, means that the school mobilises a range of more practical activities; the integration of these students, when they move from basic to secondary school, into vocational courses has helped in their integration process and for them to achieve professional certification, integration into the labour market, the development of life skills; in the 3rd cycle, the CEFs have contributed a lot. In the 3rd cycle, CEFs have contributed a lot: this differentiated and practical response has allowed many students to complete basic education, which they would hardly be able to do in a normal pathway, not least because at the end they have to take the end-of-cycle exams in Maths and Portuguese (DY2)

Categories and definition		
Does the school have an inclusive policy, culture and practices? (adults' opinions on how the school operationalises inclusion and to what extent the SC is an inclusive school)	**CENTRO** n = 6	6 (100%)
		[Gatherings] It's a way of including everyone; we want to include, but we have a big obstacle, which is the language they bring; with my Chinese student, I initially had to use Google Translate: her parents were already here, but she arrived later and didn't speak any Portuguese; gradually, in the SC, they managed to get her to have some support classes, and she was able to learn very easily: communicating was more difficult, but she was able to understand; with these children who are arriving it's difficult, because there's no possibility of giving them the support they need, and in the classroom it's difficult; inclusion is opening up the school to everyone; I have children with difficulties in my classroom and the ideal would be for them to be there and socialise with their classmates and be integrated into the class, but there are difficulties in terms of human resources to give the necessary support in the classroom; I have these situations, and many days I'm on my own; there's a colleague from Special Education, but she doesn't have much time, and I have a support colleague who comes in from time to time; it's difficult, because the situations are complicated and there are children who need constant monitoring with measures, but the problem is the concrete application in the classroom (DX1)
		Inclusion is having children from all over the world in our classroom, in our school, in our grouping, and all being welcomed in the same way; we have children arriving, each with a different reality and a different path; these children are not to blame for what is behind them, but we can make a difference to what is ahead; we have to welcome them, even if it's a lot of work, another different exercise, another different assignment, we don't understand the language; we have to make an effort, at first it's difficult, then it becomes less difficult; the important thing is not to give up (DX2)
		We needed more support for the classroom to cope with the children with selective and additional measures; [students with severe disabilities] some can't read or write; we have a non-teaching teacher in the library who teaches Portuguese to foreigners (DX5)
		Here, we all have Roma children and children of other nationalities; the Roma had a lot of difficulties and learnt to read and write, which they didn't know; [2nd cycle] they had a lot of adaptations; the innovation plan was to combat the lack of attendance of the Roma, the curriculum is different, they work on the subjects in an articulated way (DX6)

Categories and definition		
Is the school a learning community or not? What stage is it at in this process? (Adults' opinions on whether the school has become or is becoming a learning community)	**ESTE** n = 15	0 (0%)
		The EA is inclusive, but it's a pity we're not yet fully a LC, even if it were only in two or three schools; it's necessary to link all these projects; in the 1st cycle we have it easier, but it's still complicated to manage everything (DX1)
		I don't know (DY2)
		[Most of the volunteers didn't understand the question.]
	SUL n = 11	0 (0%)
		I think we're at a very early stage of LC (DX9)
	OESTE n = 18	0 (0%)
		It's a journey that you make; there are contexts where it's easier to develop this approach; the important thing was that we managed to make this interaction between the classroom and what's going on outside, and what's going on outside and the classroom; this is where the true nature of learning communities lies (DY2)
		A learning community is this path that all schools should follow, which is a school open to the community, in which everyone, not just those who are here in this room, me and the assistants, but the [parents] are a very active part of the children's school journey; at classroom level, there is this interaction between them, this sharing (DX7)
	CENTRO n = 6	0 (0%)
		[I could never do it, because it involves other kinds of actions; I can't do it alone, there would have to be a group of people interested in contributing to making it happen (DX2)
		The whole school would have to be working in the same way; in this sense, we're not there yet; we're at the dissemination stage, making it known, which is still very early (DX1)

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With regard to conceptions of inclusion, the majority of teachers consider the concept in line with the current proposals of various authors (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Martins et al., 2023; Semião et al., 2023; UNESCO, 2020), that is, in a comprehensive way (an education with everyone, for everyone and responding to the needs of each one), not just related to disabilities and specific needs, but covering any type of diversity, such as differences

in ethnicity, language, religion, culture, country of origin, etc. A teacher considers his concept of inclusion in this way:

> For me, the concept of inclusion is as broad as possible. It can't be limited to the issue of students who have some kind of special educational need, although of course they deserve our full investment and support (...), it's a bit like the spirit of Decree-Law 54 [2018], which covers everyone. We may all have, at some point, or throughout our lives, some kind of need that jeopardises our full inclusion, as citizens, as professionals, as people. (DY1 - OESTE SC)

With regard to the existence of a culture of inclusion and the implementation of inclusive policies and practices, as advocated by Both and Ainscow (2002), all the teachers, family members and volunteers considered that the SCs and the successful educational actions promoted in each of them promote the inclusion of all students. Some SC even clarified the different strategies they put into practice to achieve this. Thus, at OESTE SC, the diversity of the training offer, in terms of the variety of courses and alternative pathways, is seen as a way of responding to the diversity of students. At ESTE SC, one of the inclusion strategies is its classification as a reference group for autism spectrum disorders, under which it takes in 30 children with this diagnosis (3.18 per cent of the school population at the time of data collection). To this end, it has some material and human resources that do not exist in all SCs, such as a Snoezelen room, occupational and speech therapists, in addition to the technicians who usually work in SCs (psychologists and special education teachers). At SUL SC, the existence of a Portuguese as a Non-Mother Tongue (PLNM) class is seen as a way of meeting the needs of foreign students whose mother tongue is not Portuguese. At CENTRO SC, adherence to the pedagogical innovation plan, which includes dialogical gatherings, was considered as a way of including Roma students and combating their usual high level of absenteeism.

With regard to foreign students whose mother tongue is not Portuguese, the teachers of the four SCs mentioned either tutorial support in Portuguese, at small groups, or the creation of a PLNM class for students of different ages and levels, as well as the use of English and Google Translate to facilitate communication with students who do not speak Portuguese.

Although everyone recognises the efforts towards inclusion, teachers are critical of this issue, pointing to the lack of material and human resources to achieve full inclusion. For example, almost all teachers believe that including children with multi-disabilities and severe disabilities is much more challenging than including children whose mother tongue is not Portuguese. In general, they believe that it's not enough to place students with multi--disabilities or more severe disabilities in the classroom in order to achieve

full inclusion, since more human and material resources are needed on the part of the SC to achieve this (see Table 7).

With regard to adults' opinions on whether or not the school is a learning community, family members and volunteers had some difficulty understanding the concept. All the teachers felt that the SCs are still at a very early stage of building the school as a learning community, either because not all the teachers have joined the INCLUD-ED project, or because there are difficulties in attracting volunteers and family members (given that their professions and schedules are not always compatible with school schedules). As a result, the teachers believe that the SCs are not yet learning communities, but they are working towards it (see Table 7). It should be emphasised that most teachers understand the concept from the perspective of the INCLUD-ED project, although there are other perspectives on it (Vanblaere & Devos, 2016).

OBSERVATIONS OF SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES – GATHERINGS

Dialogical literary and artistic gatherings were held in all four SCs, and all the literary, musical and plastic works chosen referred to well-known authors in international and national culture. In the case of paintings, the students discussed the themes of the paintings, the colours, the shapes, the incongruities (as in Escher's work) and ended with plastic expression activities alluding to the theme of the painting. In the case of the musical gatherings, the students tried to identify which instruments were played and the musical styles, and discussed the emotional states that the music evoked. In the literary gatherings, they usually read the books or excerpts from the books at home (the younger ones, with their parents) and discussed in the gathering what they liked most and least or what had impressed them the most. With the youngest, reading always involved the family. In most cases, the literary discussion was also a pretext for developing writing skills in relation to the themes covered in the books. In all the gatherings, the students sat in a circle (the youngest sitting on the floor), the rules were previously defined as to when each person should take the floor, and there was always the possibility of each person speaking, waiting for their turn. Some gatherings took place in the context of a Portuguese or English lesson, and others in out-of-school time, in the school library.

For example, the field notes from the gathering on "The Little Prince", discussed with 7th graders from SUL SC, revealed that the students had a kind of roulette wheel that indicated their turn to speak, and that they related the excerpts read to their personal experience. Most of the students were moved by the work, one student even cried, and her classmates comforted her. At the end, the teacher asked for an evaluation of the

activity and everyone rated it positively, considering that it involved tolerance, respect, co-operation, the ability to listen and respect the feelings of others. At OESTE SC, the 10th grade gatherings were in English, organised by an English teacher and with the collaboration of volunteers from the Senior University.

OBSERVATIONS OF SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTIVITIES – INTERACTIVE GROUPS

Only two educational activities involving interactive groups were observed, one at ESTE SC with 1st grade students, and the other at SUL SC with 7th grade students. Both mobilised volunteers and followed INCLUD-ED guidelines. The classes involved had a small number of students, who got involved in the tasks with enthusiasm.

In a lesson with a 1st grade class at ESTE SC, the following field notes were collected: the class had 11 1st and 2nd grade students; the teacher made three interactive groups, one with three students and two with four students; there were four volunteers in the room (a grandfather, a grandmother, a father and a master's student). The teacher organised an experimental activity in which the volunteers had the task of supervising to ensure the children's safety; the students followed the teacher's instructions to carry out three experiments lasting 15 minutes each; the groups of pupils rotated from table to table to take part in all the experiments; the volunteers always stayed at the same table. For example, the experiment "The fat man with the hot air", which took place in the Environmental Studies subject, with the aim of showing students how hot air expands and cold air contracts. For this experiment, the following were needed: a balloon, two tall tubs, a plastic bottle without a lid, hot and cold water, and a kettle to heat water, which should only be used by the adult at the table, in order to prevent any kind of accident, namely preventing the children from burning themselves with the hot water. After the activity, the students filled in evaluation forms with the results observed during and at the end of the experiments, showing enthusiasm for the experiments and a desire to repeat them.

STUDENTS' OPINIONS ON THE IMPACT OF INCLUD-ED

Table 8 summarises the favourable or unfavourable opinions, and respective frequencies, of the students from the four SCs about their involvement in the different educational success actions and the fact that their families are involved in the school's activities. The percentages were calculated in terms of the total number of students who took part in the focus groups in each SC, whose statements referred to each of the categories. The recording

units included are examples of the opinions of the interviewees considered most representative.

Analysing Table 8 shows that taking part in successful educational activities seemed to motivate students to learn, and the majority of students enjoyed those they took part in. In particular, with regard to the dialogical gatherings, they all enjoyed them very much and felt that they had learnt more from this educational activity than just listening to the teacher. They emphasised the motivation to read, the improvement in reading, speaking and even writing, the development of argumentative skills, active listening and respect for the turn and opinion of their classmates. At SUL SC, some students said they had improved their grades in Portuguese and, at OESTE SC, they said they had improved their oral expression in English (as some of the gatherings were in English). The students felt that taking part in the gatherings facilitated self-knowledge, communication and getting closer to their peers. The younger ones mentioned learning the "moral of the story" in fables and other stories, and the older ones valued the gatherings with other members of the community for the different perspectives and information they brought to the debate.

TABLE 8. STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND OPINIONS ON SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTIONS

Categories		
About interactive groups Sub-category: Favourable	**ESTE** n = 21	15 (71,43%)
		In groups I have more ideas and then I learn from other people (X6th)
		We did lots of science [groups] and one Maths group; Ah! It was beautiful, beautiful, I miss it (Y4th)
	SUL n = 13	12 (92,31%)
		I think we're better able to debate ideas and listen to other people's opinions; it seems to fit better in our heads to listen to a colleague talking than a teacher, but a colleague who understands the subject; groups, and perhaps gatherings, are more interesting, it makes us want to learn more (X9th)
		We learnt more, in a different way, with fun; as well as learning about the subject, we learnt other things, how to communicate and discuss better with each other (Y7th)
		We learnt to work better as a group, to help each other and not leave the other behind; [with the volunteers] we learnt in a different way, with more peace and fun (Y7th)
	OESTE n = 17	3 (60%)
		So we learnt things we'd never heard of and never done (Y2nd)
		I like working in groups, reading and doing Maths (X2nd)
		[Only the five 1st grade students answered this question]
	CENTRO n = 4	[Not carried out, although the students mentioned working in other types of groups occasionally.]

Categories		
About interactive groups Sub-category: Less favourable	**ESTE** n = 21	6 (38,57%)
		The others don't let me give them ideas, so I like to work on my own sometimes (X6th)
		It depends on the groups, and whether or not everyone contributes to the work (X9th)
	SUL n = 13	1 (7,69%)
		[Group work or individual work] It depends on the subjects and occasions (Y7th)
	OESTE n = 17	2 (40%)
		I like working alone better because it lets me think better, I don't have to talk to anyone (Y2nd)
		What I like least about the group [work] is that the kids in the group talk a lot (X2nd)
	CENTRO n = 4	[Not applicable]
On dialogical gatherings Sub-category: Favourable	**ESTE** n = 21	21 (100%)
		I liked listening to other people's opinions and others listening to ours (Y4th)
		We'd listen to everything and at the end whoever could work out the meaning of the fable would tell us (Y4th)
	SUL n = 13	13 (100%)
		If we only read the book at home, we'd only have our vision of the book; by having a discussion, we'd have everyone's vision (Y9th)
		I think learning is much more interesting and interactive; it's better than having a teacher spewing out the subject on the board for the students to listen to, memorise and take the test; studying a book, expressing opinions in a fun way, is more interesting than listening to the teacher just explaining the subject; I think this has made the majority of students increase their grades a lot (X7th)
		I think I've also improved my grades with the meetings, because I've started reading (X7th)
		We learnt to listen to each other, to give each other time to speak, to respect each other's time, to listen to each other's opinions; we talked about the language of the book and I think my grades in Portuguese went up a bit (X7th)

Categories		
On dialogical gatherings Sub-category: Favourable	**OESTE** n = 17	16 (94,12%)
		We learnt to read more, to practice reading (Y2nd)
		What I liked best was the conviviality (...) and people saying what they liked best (Y6th)
		The first time, we were very shy and then we started to realise what it was all about; the gatherings helped us to talk, to push people more (...), to argue our opinions a bit (X6th)
		[Gatherings] have helped us become more interested in reading and it's more fun (X6th)
		It was a way of bringing people in the class closer together and making it easier to communicate with each other and learn; at first we all spoke at the same time, and now we're learning to respect when the other person is speaking (X10th)
		It helps us to know ourselves better, because it leads us to go beyond the limit (...), to see all the possibilities that our mind will tell us about that painting (X10th)
		I had the opportunity to deepen my oral production in English (X10th)
		Once, we did it in partnership with Senior University enrollees, about Munch's "The Scream", and it was fun, because it's interesting to see how different points of view meet; it was an intergenerational activity in which we all woke up (X10th)
	CENTRO n = 4	4 (100%)
		First we listen to the story and then we talk about the parts we liked the most and the least; I like the literary part best; I like to talk about the part I liked the most (X2nd)
		We see a painting and say things about it, if it's realistic, if it's not realistic; we talk about what we liked and the teacher always asks why (Y2nd)
		We learn the arts better and then we go and work on the artist (Y2nd)
		Learning in the gathering is knowing the moral of the story; in the "3 Little Pigs", we learnt that we have to be hardworking, because the straw house was knocked down because he just wanted to rest; and the last little pig made a brick house, he worked to make it (Y2nd)

Categories		
On dialogical gatherings Sub-category: Less favourable	**ESTE** n = 21	0 (0%)
	SUL n = 13	0 (0%)
	OESTE n = 17	1 (5,88%) It was another homework; we had Saturday and Sunday to read (Y2nd)
	CENTRO n = 4	[Preferences were ranked between the 3 types of gatherings.]
About families at school Sub-category: Favourable	**ESTE** n = 21	16 (76,19%) I liked it, because I feel good with my family; if they were in the classroom, I'd feel good (X3rd) Our mums and dads would come into the classroom to do things with us, it was nice! (Y4th)
	SUL n = 13	12 (92,31%) I asked my dad to come and he, who never goes to school, came and I liked it and he liked it too and wanted to come back (Y9th) I like my dad in the classroom; I think it's fun to learn from him because of his life experiences (X7th)
	OESTE n = 17	I like it when mums and dads come to class to do activities (X2nd) I like it when my mum comes to class, because everyone likes to see their mums (Y2nd) [The question was only asked in 1st Cycle]
	CENTRO n = 4	[Not carried out.]

Categories		
About families at school Sub-category: Less favourable	**ESTE** n = 21	5 (23,81%) I would be embarrassed if my mother came to class to see my behaviour (X6th) It would be embarrassing if my mum took part in class (X9th)
	SUL n = 13	1 (7,69%) I was a bit embarrassed about my mum in class (X7th)
	OESTE n = 17	
	CENTRO n = 4	[Not carried out.]

Notes. X - girl; Y - boy; the ordinal numeral identifies the year of schooling. The percentages were calculated on the basis of the total number of pupils who took part in each SC, and reflect the fact that the pupil refers to units of meaning that fall into that category; in OESTE SC, in the category of opinions on interactive groups, the total refers only to 1st Cycle pupils.

With regard to the interactive groups, most of the students like working this way because they have more ideas, learn more, help each other more and enjoy the presence of the volunteers. The younger ones love it when family members are in the classroom, and most of the older ones do too. However, some of the older ones feel a little embarrassed and awkward with their parents in the classroom, probably for developmental reasons inherent in the adolescents' greater desire for autonomy from the family. A minority gave less favourable opinions of the group work, which related to the attitude of the group members, because they didn't all engage in the same way or talked a lot during the work.

Table 9 shows examples of the students' opinions on inclusion in schools, which are considered the most representative.

TABLE 9. STUDENTS' EXPERIENCES AND OPINIONS ON INCLUSION AT SCHOOL

Categories		
On inclusion at school Sub-category: Achieved	**ESTE** n = 21	16 (76,19%)
		Our class has students from other countries (Y6th)
		We sometimes use Google Translate with a Ukrainian boy (Y6th)
		We have a boy in our class who is a bit autistic (X6th)
	SUL n = 13	10 (76,92%)
		I speak reasonable English, so I help with the work and give information to those who don't speak Portuguese; I'm also her friend and the others are friends too; some teachers also give her work in English (X9th)
		There are support classes and tutorials for those who have difficulties or have failed (X9th)
		When there are conflicts, we try to have a conversation with the person; if that doesn't work, we go to an adult; if that doesn't work either, we go to our parents or get involved (X7th)
		At first, I was kept away from the class because two girls, who pretended to be my friends, spread rumours about me; then I started talking to other girls and made new friends, who helped me integrate into the class; the teachers also helped a lot (X7th)
		There's an autistic boy in our classroom, he has some different activities and adapted tests, but he takes part in the gatherings (X7th)
	OESTE n = 17	9 (52,94%)
		We have two special pupils in our classroom, one doesn't speak; there's a Special Education teacher who comes to the classroom, but she helps everyone who needs it (Y2nd)
		There are children of other nationalities, many Brazilians, and other nationalities who can't speak Portuguese (X6th)
		I think the library teacher teaches them PLNM (X6th)
		In the gatherings, instead of arguing about who's right, we try to find a link in everyone's opinion (X10th)
		Last year, we had a disabled student who only had a few lessons with us and who always had the help of an assistant, and we tried to help (Y10th)
	CENTRO n = 4	2 (50%)
		We need to help people with disabilities (Y2nd)
		The teacher and some of the pupils help the kids who have more difficulty; people are all the same, but some have more difficulties, it's their right to go to school (Y2nd)

Categories		
On inclusion at school Sub-category: Difficulties	**ESTE** n = 21	5 (23,81%)
		[About a pupil with autism spectrum disorder] When he's angry, he bangs his head on the table and makes a racket and nobody can stand it, and the teacher doesn't punish him! (Y6th)
		There's a boy who cries a lot and is always being teased (Y6th)
		He [an older pupil] beat up and called an Angolan girl black (X6th)
		Some pupils posted ugly comments on Facebook about a girl and nobody knew who it was (X6th)
	SUL n = 13	3 (23,08%)
		[About Roma students] I tried to make friends with them, but they were always picking on me (X7th)
	OESTE n = 17	8 (47,06%)
		[On Roma pupils] They don't want to be included and they act in a way to not be included; some only come to school so their parents can get benefits (Y10th)
		[On PLNM support] The school is running out of subject specialists; I took the 9th grade [national] exam without any adaptations, and there were sentences I didn't understand (X10th)
		Sometimes I see that Indian girl on her own, because she can't speak Portuguese, and in our school we still don't understand English very well; some boys are silly and pick on her (X6th)
		There's a situation of a boy at school, with a leg problem, who is being teased and threatened and nobody says or does anything about it, but prints have started arriving on his father's mobile phone about the names they called his son; it's very unfair (Y10th)
	CENTRO n = 4	2 (50%)
		[About the Roma pupils] They beat us often; they're older, they're the ones who failed; one is bigger than my father (Y2nd)
		[They mention that they don't play or get along with some of the Roma kids in another class]
		I think some [disabled] pupils should go to another school (X2nd)

Notes. X - girl; Y - boy; the ordinal numeral identifies the year of schooling. The percentages were calculated on the basis of the total number of pupils who took part in each SC, and reflect the fact that the pupil refers to units of meaning that fall into that category; in OESTE SC, in the category of opinions on interactive groups, the total refers only to 1st Cycle pupils.

With regard to inclusion at school, the majority of students were in favour of including all students, regardless of their disability, ethnicity, mother tongue, culture or other differences. They also reported that students with disabilities and Roma children take part in successful educational activities and that foreigners are given extra support to learn the Portuguese language. Some

commented that they tried to get along with everyone, others that they tried to speak English or use Google Translate with their foreign classmates who don't speak Portuguese well, and even that they tried to help their disabled classmates, but some students were even more critical of this issue than the teachers, especially the secondary school students at OESTE SC.

Thus, in the OESTE and CENTRO SCs, difficulties were reported in relations with Roma pupils: a student from the OESTE SC suggested that they are the ones who don't want to integrate and that they only go to school so that their families can receive state benefits, and pupils from the CENTRO SC mentioned difficulties in relationships and good coexistence with this particular sub-group. Students from all four SCs (especially from the ESTE and OESTE SCs) also mentioned episodes of exclusion that refer to difficulties in getting along, episodes of bullying and cyberbullying, motivated by ethnic reasons or other vulnerabilities inherent to the characteristics of each student. Younger children say they turn to adults for support in these situations, but some of the reports from 10th graders at OESTE SC reveal a perception of bullying and cyberbullying situations with no consequences for the perpetrators. These students also report dissatisfaction with the fact that bus timetables force them to spend many hours at school, with no occupation or place to be, which can facilitate the occurrence of these situations. In the words of one of the 10th graders: "The timetables aren't good, we have a lot of hours of classes, we spend a lot of hours in the corridors of the school and on transport (...)"

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The case studies revealed that not all the SCs adopted the INCLUD-ED project in the same way and that none of them fully implemented the project's philosophy. All of them adhered to the dialogical gatherings and this was the most successful educational action at all school levels. The data obtained confirms that the teachers used reference works from the universal cultural tradition (both national and international), thus helping to promote knowledge and respect for tradition in the students and their families, an aspect emphasised by Flecha (2022) as central to education. Interactive groups were implemented in three of the SCs studied, and predominantly in 1st Cycle classes; only in SUL SC were they implemented in 3rd Cycle.

The content analysis of the interviews with adults revealed that, in general, teachers, family members and volunteers felt that the successful educational actions contributed to motivating students to learn, improving academic learning (in terms of critical thinking, argumentation skills, reading and

writing) and, above all, improving students' socio-emotional skills, relationships between them and relationships between all members of the school community. This has allowed families to be more involved in school activities, thus facilitating school-family communication and preventing family members from being called to school only when their child breaks a rule or gets involved in a conflict. Most of the volunteers were family members or other staff from the school.

The content analysis of the focus groups with the students was congruent with this data, revealing that the students felt more motivated to learn, improved their skills in speaking, writing and argumentation, and also improved their relational skills, in terms of respect for their peers' opinions, active listening, civic-mindedness and positive social interaction between them and the rest of the community. Some students even reported improving their grades in some subjects as a result of taking part in these successful educational activities. All the students from the four SCs enjoyed participating in all the successful educational activities organised, especially the dialogical gatherings, which was, coincidentally, the activity most implemented in all four SCs. These data are in line with those obtained by other authors (Molina Roldán et al., 2021).

As for achieving an inclusive school, both teachers and students were more critical. The former considered the inclusion of children with severe disabilities to be more challenging than the inclusion of pupils whose mother tongue is not Portuguese, given that in both cases material and human resources would be needed to achieve full inclusion. The pupils reported some episodes of exclusion that referred to situations of bullying and cyberbullying associated with the vulnerabilities of some classmates or ethnic issues. The older students were more critical than the younger ones (who reported asking for help from adults) and had a perception that the school didn't have strategies to deal with these situations.

We also found, in line with these statements, that the dialogical model of conflict prevention and resolution was one of the least used successful educational actions. What's more, it wasn't evident in three of the four SCs that there was a conflict resolution and violence prevention strategy, despite it being an objective that was included in all the SCs' educational projects. Only in SUL SC was the class assembly strategy mentioned as a way of resolving conflicts and preventing violence, instead of the dialogical model proposed by INCLUD-ED, which is perhaps more applicable to younger students.

When it comes to thinking of the school as a learning community, all the teachers felt that, although desirable, it is a goal that has not yet been achieved, either because not all teachers get involved in this type of project, or because it is difficult to involve family members and the community

in school activities. Many family members don't have work schedules compatible with taking part in school activities, so community involvement has predominantly taken place with Senior University enrollees and retired teachers. Teachers see the concept in the sense proposed by INCLUD-ED, which implies the involvement of the community in the school and of the pupils in the community; volunteers and family members found it difficult to understand the concept and, as a result, to take a stand.

Nevertheless, teachers, family members and students considered that participation in successful educational actions helped to motivate students for school activities and promote fundamental learning, social cohesion and inclusion (Molina Roldán et al., 2021).

This study had some limitations, namely the fact that the participants were not a representative sample of the SCs, the number of participants in each SC varied a lot, especially with regard to the students, which may have contributed to the fact that the criticisms of inclusion were more numerous in the ESTE and OESTE SCs, the ones in which the most students participated.

In short, schools as learning communities for inclusion are still, in these four SC, a process under construction to which the educational community is committed, despite the many obstacles and challenges they recognise this process is still facing.

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CHAPTER 7

LEARNING COMMUNITIES AS A PATH TO INCLUSIVE EDUCATION: POTENTIAL, CHALLENGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sofia Freire
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Otília Sousa
Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa, Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Maria João Mogarro
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

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Sofia Freire
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Otília Sousa
Escola Superior de Educação de Lisboa, Instituto Politécnico de Lisboa
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Maria João Mogarro
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

INTRODUCTION

As part of the INCLUD-ED project, Learning Communities have emerged as a proposal for realising inclusive education, by seeking to promote the active participation of students, teachers, family members and other adults in the community at school. They are also based on the foundational idea that everyone may participate, as everyone occupies different positions in the social space, and as such is equipped with different valid knowledge and life experiences for promoting students' learning . To realise these ideas, a set of Successful Educational Actions (SEA) have been defined; these SEAs act as practical guidelines for supporting schools in the process of transforming into Learning Communities and for guaranting its functioning as a Learning Community (CREA, 2020a; Flecha et al., 2003).

Successful Educational Actions are essential for guaranteeing community participation in the educational process as well as dialogic learning, which have been associated with the benefits that have been pointed to Learning Communities. Therefore, we will analyse some of the results of the LC4Inclusion project in the light of these two ideas - participation of the community and dialogical learning. In particular, the aim of this chapter is to problematise the potential and challenges of Learning Communities as a path to inclusive education, and, based on some of the results, to make a set of recommendations. We will start with a brief introduction to some key ideas of Learning Communities and Successful Educational Actions.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL ACTIONS (SEA): WHAT ARE THEY? WHAT ARE THEIR POTENTIALS AND CHALLENGES?

Learning community is the name proposed by Flecha and his team for schools that have embraced the project of becoming a community, with the aim of reducing school failure and improving learning for all students (CREA, 2020a; Díez-Palomar & Flecha, 2010; Flecha et al., 2003; Soriano et al., 2022). This community has unique characteristics that make it a Learning Community. Indeed, these schools - or Learning Communities - take on a different way of organising the decision-making process and promoting the active participation of students, teachers, family members or other adults, in curricular activities or in activities outside the classroom (Díez-Palomar & Flecha, 2010; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022).

Furthermore, these communities are built around the idea of dialogic learning, which involves accepting a diversity of contributions, assessed on the basis of the validity of arguments rather than on the basis of power relations (Aubert et al., 2009; Díez-Palomar & Flecha, 2010; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022), 2009; Díez-Palomar & Flecha, 2010); dialogic learning also requires promoting interactions between the various members based on dialogue between equals, through which different members of the community seek mutual understanding and consensus (Aubert et al., 2009; CREA, 2020d; Díez-Palomar & Flecha, 2010; Flecha et al., 2003; Soriano et al., 2022).

The implementation of SEAs is essential to start a process of transformation (Morlà-Floch et al., 2022) and it is, at the same time, the guarantee that schools will function as a Learning Community (CREA, 2020a). SEAs are actions that generate the best academic results in all students, empirically showed in studies carried out for this purpose, and which are transferable to any context, producing the same positive results (CREA, 2020b).

The authors have identified a number of SEAs, some of which are more clearly oriented towards building and maintaining a community based on dialogic learning (e.g., community educational participation, family training, dialogic teacher training, dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution), and others are more clearly oriented towards the learning of students and the whole community (e.g. Interactive Groups and Dialogic Tertulias), although both dimensions are related (Morlà-Floch et al., 2022; Soriano et al., 2022). In fact, it is the process of establishing dialogical interactions that enriches the learning processes (Soriano et al., 2022).

And in fact, all SEAs are based on the importance of dialogic interaction and dialogic learning - two essential dimensions that underpin instrumental learning (Aubert et al., 2009; CREA, 2020d) (i.e., learning competences defined in the curricula and considered essential), which also underpin students' academic results (e.g. García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015;

Villardón-Gallego et al., 2018); in addition, dialogic interactions and learning are also the base forimproving relationships between students,and social cohesion among the several elements that compose the educational community (Soriano et al., 2022).

Although the authors identify numerous SEAs (CREA, 2020b), studies tend to focus mainly on Interactive Groups and Dialogic Tertulias , which may suggest, according to Morlà-Floch et al. (2022), that Learning Communities tend mainly to implement these SEAs. In fact, in their systematic review of the literature, in which 63 studies were reviewed (involving students aged 3 to 12), most of the studies focused on Interactive Groups (n= 22) and Dialogic Tertulias (n= 12); in addition five of the studies reviewed focused simultaneously on both SEAs and five on all of them.

Despite being less studied, family participation emerges as a central dimension of Learning Communities and is often presented as the driving force behind improvement of students' Learning, as well as of interpersonal relationships and social cohesion (e.g., Cantero Rodriguéz et al., 2018; CREA, 2020e; Flecha, 2012; Morlà-Floch et al., 2022; Soriano et al., 2022). The study of families tends to focus mainly on their educational participation through their involvement in Interactive Groups or Dialogic Tertulias (e.g., Morlà-Floch et al., 2022).

On the other hand, other forms of family participation seem to be less explored, such as their involvement in decision-making on school issues through joint working committees, their participation in decision school structures or in informal spaces for dialogue, even though these actions are also recognised as central to school transformation (Díez et al., 2011). Similarly, studies seem to focus less frequently on training for families, even though this SEA is also recognised as fundamental to facilitating family participation in school, as it is based on egalitarian interactions that favour the emergence of dynamics of trust and proximity between teachers and families and social cohesion between the members of the Learning Community (García et al., 2019).

In view of the above, two aspects seem to be central to the construction and maintenance of Learning Communities and the benefits associated with them: participation by the educational community in the process of transforming the school and SEAs as spaces for dialogic learning. It is in the light of these aspects that we will analyse the studies and results presented in the previous chapters.

RESULTS OBTAINED BY THE LC4INCLUSION PROJECT

PARTICIPATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY IN THE SCHOOL'S TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

The process of transforming schools into Learning Communities is the result of a decision. It is essential that the educational community consensually decides to go ahead with this process, or at least that the majority of teachers decide to do so (CREA, 2020a); which is why it is so important to raise awareness and present the ideas behing the Learning Communities and their benefits.

After the decision has been made, the transformation process begins with the dream phase, in which "the entire educational community dreams of the school it wants and it is a matter of dreaming without limits" (CREA, 2020a, p. 11). The dream has this underlying idea of transformation (Flecha, 2009). *What to change? How to change in order to provide the best education for students/children?* According to Díez-Palomar and Flecha (2010),

> Learning Communities aim for transformation at various levels: transformation of the learning context, transformation of previous levels of knowledge, transformation of expectations, transformation of family-school relations, transformation of social relations, both in the school and in the community, and, finally, the equal transformation of society (p. 25).

After the dream comes action. Action requires a democratic and participatory selection of priorities and the development of a plan on how to implement those priorities, taking into account the resources needed, how to reorganise spaces or new ways of working (CREA, 2020a; Flecha et al., 2003). Joint committees (involving different elements of the community, such as teachers, educational staff, students, family members) are key to putting the change process into action and keeping the Learning Community running (Flecha et al., 2003).

In our project, we contacted schools/school clusters that had previously been identified by the Ministry of Education as Learning Communities. We therefore came across Learning Communities that had already been formed. However, we don't know how the transformation process took place. *How were teachers sensitised and involved in the transformation process? How were the dreams of the various members of the educational community integrated into the school's transformation project?*

When answering the question about what changes they consider relevant to implement in the school/ school clusters in order to develop an inclusive education, teachers did not explicitly mention the idea of transforming the school or the idea of working collaboratively with the educational

community, nor did their ideas reveal ways of understanding the educational community as a source of resources that can be used to improve student learning and inclusion processes (Kamp et al., 2025, *chapter 4*). On the contrary, their answers still seem to be based on the idea that inclusive education involves changing others - students, resources, families, colleagues, an idea that is not in line with the idea of the Learning Community as a space in which families get involved together to find solutions to problems within the school, or the idea of a school that is open to the community and in which everyone feels responsible for the students' learning (Flecha et al., 2003). *What does this result mean? How involved are teachers in the process of transforming schools into Learning Communities? Or at what point of the transformation process are these schools/school clusters?*

The case studies of the Lisbon and Tagus Valley area (Caetano et al., 2025, *chapter 5*) suggest that schools/school clusters are at different points of transformation. In some clusters, participants shared a feeling of a Learning Community , although that feeling was still confined to certain schools or school cycles; in other participants, some doubt persisted and some teachers felt that they were not yet functioning as a community. In the case studies of the Alentejo region, teachers felt that their school clusters are not yet working as Learning Communities, even though they mentioned their desire to mantain the process of transformation (Martins et al., 2025, *chapter 6*).

In most of the eight schools/school clusters that took part in the case studies, there were two sessions of dialogic training for teachers, one of which was run by CREA trainers and the other by the Include-ed coordinator. However, it should be noted that in one case, only the first training session took place and, in another case, the training session involved only two school cycles and not the whole school. It is also unknown how many teachers took part in these training sessions. *Will these two training sessions be enough to raise awareness and teach teachers about this new model of school organisation, based on concepts that are different from the usual ones (e.g. dialogic learning), requiring the implementation of practices that are different from the usual ones (e.g. interactive groups and dialogic tertulias)?* The time of the year in which the training took place could be a determining factor in teachers' ability to think about how to integrate these SEAs into their curricula and planning.

In reality, these are not just new practices, but a radically different conception of how to think about teaching and the teaching space and how to relate to the community. The process of change takes time. Time to understand appropriate and new concepts, time to make required adjustments and time to mature ideas, to identify with the project and to commit with it.

Notably, changes in practices can facilitate changes in beliefs or understanding of new educational perspectives (e.g., Guskey, 2002; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003). By developing new practices, conditions may be created for teachers to develop new understandings about their experience and, in doing so, to revise their beliefs about aspects of their experience, or in this case, their practice (Loucks-Horsley et al., 2003). In fact, new practices can create moments of doubtor, according to Mezirow (1991), a disorientating dilemma . In these moments, the assumptions, expectations and beliefs that usually guide teacher's actions are no longer useful for making sense of the experience; and in these situations, a process of revising assumptions, expectations and beliefs begin, which is what the formation and development of Learning Communities ultimately requires. It is in this sense that the implementation of SEAs may work as an engine for changing practices and, eventually, for promoting new ways of understanding school organisation, collaboration with the community and family participation.

However, in order for the new practices to translate into new understandings and beliefs about the aspects that support these practices, they need to be followed by a period of systematic data collection and analysis of outocmes reached (Guskey, 2002). In this case, it will be important that implementation of SEAs is followed by moments of systematic data collection and analysis regarding the effects they had, for example, on students' learning, on their social and emotional development, and on school-family relationships. And in this sense, it is also essential for schools/school clusters to collect objective measures, measures that go beyond the perceptions and opinions of those involved in the SEAs. Gathering data is all the more essential whenthe goal is toto involve the whole educational community in the transformation process. Indeed, sharing and discussing with others is central to any process of change (Baptista et al., 2020), as it encourages critical analysis of practice and facilitates the joint construction of knowledge about practice (Butler & Schnellert, 2012).

The longitudinal study, which aimed to describe teachers' and students' conceptions of what inclusion is and what inclusive practices are, and which involved collecting data at three different times (Santos et al., 2025, *chapter 3*), indicates that the 38 teachers who took part in the three stages of data collection value collaborative reflective practices and recognise their importance for building professional knowledge and re-evaluating their own practices. However, in order for the beliefs and assumptions that underpin practice to be analysed, questioned and revised, it is essential that sharing and participation takes place without constraints, in a context where everyone feels that they have equal opportunities to share beliefs, challenge, defend, explain, evaluate evidence and arguments, where everyone is open to other perspectives and is willing to listen and seek common ground between different points of view (Mezirow, 1994, 1997).

And this brings us back to the relevance of implementing SEAs, which are based on dialogical processes and, as such, are privileged contexts for this questioning and revision.

SEAS AS SPACES FOR DIALOGIC LEARNING

SEAs, which are based on a dialogic learning model, have a transformative potential. Indeed, these actions also work asideal contexts for dialogue and joint reflection on the changes.

The eight schools/school clusters that took part in the case studies mainly implemented Interactive Groups (n= 14) and Dialogic Tertulias (n= 24). The type of SEAs and how they were implemented varied between cycles and between schools and/or school clusters.

In the case of the school clusters of the Lisbon and Tagus Valley area (Caetano et al., 2025, *chapter 5*), Interactive Groups were observed mainly at primary school level. In one of the school cluesters, the Interactive Groups mainly involved 6th grade students as volunteers; in another school cluster, the volunteers of the Interactive Groups were mothers (n= 6), but in one case there were also two teachers. Similarly, Dialogic Tertulias were observed on the primary school level, with no reference to the presence or absence of volunteers. The evaluation of the adults (teacher, director and coordinator, volunteer who is neither a family member nor a teacher, or a family member) was positive, both in terms of the development of communication and critical thinking skills, as well as regarding classroom management, namely better management of students' different learning rhythms and the possibility to monitor students' progress on a more individual basis. These adults also mentioned increased collaboration and mutual help between students. Students interviewed also had a very favourable opinion of Interactive Groups, Dialogic Tertulias as well as of the participation of families in various SEAs.

In the case of the schools/school clusters of the Alentejo region (Martins et al., 2025; *chapter 6*), Dialogic Tertulias were mainly observed in pre-school classes, 1st and 3rd cycle classes and there was no reference to the presence of family members. As for the Interactive Groups, mentioned was made to a father, two mothers and a retired teacher having attended to one of it , and to two grandparents, a father and a master's student having attended to the other Interactive Group. Interviewed adults identified positive aspects, such as improvment of students' motivation for learning, of social and emotional skills and critical thinking and, in the specific case of the Dialogic Tertulias, they made positive references to motivation for reading, improved orality, writing and reading. Students' responses mainly highlighted their motivation and enjoyment of this way of organising the learning process and, in the case of the younger students, the enjoyment regarding family's

participation (but not so much in the case of the older students). Alongside the positive evaluations, adults and students also identified difficulties and challenges, such as the low participation of volunteers and the persistence of conflict between students and groups of pupils.

Low participation of volunteers

One main challenge identified in the all the cases was low participation of families in the school life. This is clear in one of the results showing that no parents have showed interest for participating in a training for parents, as mentioned by a teacher interviewed in one of the school clusters of the Lisbon and Tagus Valley area (Caetano et al., 2025, *chapter 5)*. Martins et al. (2025, *chapter 6*) refer to difficulties in making school-family schedules compatible. This difficulty may have also resulted from teachers' resistance to opening up their classes to families (Caetano et al., 2025, *chapter 5*).

Schedules and resistance may explain the low participation of adults (namely family members) in the Dialogic Tertulias in most schools, and also the low participation in the Interactive Groups (and indeed, in one of the school clusters, one of the Interactive Groups involved 6th grade students as volunteers). In some schools of the Alentejo region, implementing Dialogic Tertulias within a classroom context may have been the solution found to implement it even without volunteers, namely families. On the contrary, we might wonder whether this more formal context may have led to less participation. In fact, some authors report that families'low self-esteem and insecurity, especially of those with lower levels of education, are the reason behind their greater resistance to participating in actions that they consider to be related to academic content (Cantero Rodriguéz et al., 2018; Valls & Kyriakides, 2013).

Volunteers' participation is an essential condition of SEAs, based on the idea that the diversity of people expands possibilities for interactionand thus of learning (Flecha, 2009). In addition, the quality of this interaction is also key for learning; it must be a dialogical interaction, where everyone is motivated to search for a common basis for understanding (there is no room for the imposition of ideas) (García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015). According to Zubiri-Esnaola et al. (2020), it is this type of interaction that actually favours equal opportunities for participation. This is also why volunteers play such an important role in SEAs.

In Interactive Groups, students have to explain the task to each other, justify their decisions and make their thinking visible in order to reach a common understanding (García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015). However, egalitarian dialogue does not arise naturally by bringing students together. Students (or some of them) naturally won't explain, justify or make their thinking visible through interaction with the other (Valls & Kyriakides, 2013). Therefore, the volunteer has the central role of encouraging peer support, creating

conditions in the group for each student to explain and justify their action or decision and to ask questions in a context of equal interactions (García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015), or in the case of younger children or groups that are not very collaborative, or where some of children present with greater difficulties in regulating attention and behaviour, the volunteer has a role in modelling behaviour, encouraging mutual support, managing the participation of each member of the group and managing students who are more disconnected from the task and the group (Zubiri-Esnaola et al., 2020). Therefore, the participation of volunteers in SEAs is an essential condition for their successful implementation and will underpin the benefits that are recognised.

Conflict situations between students and groups of students

A second challenge, mentioned by the different participants, is the fact that situations of conflict and negative school interactions remained, as well as the need for constant and attentive adult mediation in the day-to-day running of the school in order to prevent negative interactions between students and promote positive ones; the students themselves who took part in the interviews recognised these difficulties (Caetano et al., 2025, *chapter 5*; Martins et al., 2025, *chapter 6*). This was also a dimension pointed out by the students who took part in the extensive study, who also identified challenges in terms of interpersonal relationships (between peers, with teachers and staff) and the need for change at this level (Kamp et al., 2025, *chapter 4*). This result is in line with other studies, which along with the benefits, also point out limitations in the results obtained, namely the need for mediators to resolve conflicts (e.g., Morlà-Floch et al., 2022). In the specific case of the schools/school clusters that took part in the study, the way in which some of the SEAs were implemented may explain some of these difficulties.

Dialogic Tertulias have been identified for their benefits in terms of prosocial behaviour. For example, in an attempt to compare the effectiveness of Interactive Groups with the effectiveness of Dialogic Tertulias in terms of students' prosocial behaviour, through a quasi-experimental study with 4th grade classes (students aged 8-11) from eight schools, Villardón-Gallego et al. (2018) found that students involved in Dialogic Tertulias improved their prosocial behaviour, but not those involved in the Interactive Groups. The authors explain this result by the fact that Dialogic Tertulias are developed around classic universal works that deal with themes such as prosocial behaviour, and where each person share their vision and reflections on these themes. On the other hand, Interactive Groups are organised around curricular content and their dynamics do not offer moments for reflection regarding the experience of collaboration, which is important for students to internalise the benefits of sharing, help each other and collaboration.

Numerous Dialogic Tertulias have been implemented in the school groups studied. However, in many situations, the Dialogic Tertulias were developed in the context of the class and of certain school subjects, and have not always used classic universal works. In these situations, the logic may have strayed from the original idea, affecting the expected outcomes of this type of SEA.

In addition to these SEAs, the Learning Communities propose a specific dialogical model focused on solving conflicts and improving social coexistence at school and at the educational community level (CREA, 2020c). This SEA involves the whole community through dialogue aimed at understanding the origin of conflicts and jointly defining a set of rules to prevent and solve them. The involvement and commitment of the whole community to the norms and rules defined by everyone is an essential dimension in ensuring that conflicts are resolved effectively (Capllonch et al., 2018), but at the same time it represents a difficulty, due to the time and investment required to organise assemblies, discuss the norms and reach a consensual agreement around these norms (Morlà-Floch et al., 2022).

The dialogic model of conflict prevention and solution has been implemented in two of the school clusters studied, at kindergarten level and at primary school level; there is also reference to four sessions held at a primary school level in another school cluster. However, the participation of the whole community, which is an essential condition for this SEA, was not evident (Capllonch et al., 2018; Morlà-Floch et al., 2022) and two clusters mentioned that they have replaced this SEA with class assemblies. According to the proposal (e.g., García-Carrión & Díez-Palomar, 2015; Zubiri-Esnaola et al., 2020), SEAs are developed around the fundamental idea of dialogic learning. *Are class assemblies based on this idea and its realisation?*

The idea of dialogic learning is indeed a central idea of SEAs, and underpins many of the benefits associated with them. However, given the way in which some SEAs have been appropriated, these conditions may have not been met and the benefits may have not been as wide-ranging as might have been expected.

CONCLUSION

Learning communities, like communities of practice, seem to be a favourable path for the development of inclusive education (Freire et al., in press). Indeed, these communities are guided, on the one hand, by goals such as learning and the social and emotional development of all students, and, on the other hand, they seek to work as a learning context that facilitates the

revision of assumptions and beliefs, which is another essential dimension for the development of inclusive education (Freire et al., in press).

However, transforming the school into a Learning Community is a demanding process, as the results of this project show. This transformation process involves learning and developing new concepts and knowledge, but also identifying with a new conception of school and of school-family relationship, accepting a new model of school organisation based on sharing spaces, knowledge and opening up the classroom, and stepping out of their comfort zone to implement a set of SEAs. Furthermore, teachers are not the only element central to the success of these Learning Communities; volunteers, and in particular families, are also essential. However, as the results of this project show, it is not easy to promote community participation, particularly families' participation.

Despite the difficulties encountered, numerous benefits were also pointed out by those who had direct contact with the SEAs, both in terms of students' learning and social and emotional development, and in terms of improving school-family relations. In the longitudinal study (Santos et al., 2025, *chapter 3*), teachers also emphasised the importance of the sense of community and the development of relationships of trust for favouring a process of sharing and negotiating visions, values and of collective decision-making and, in this sense, the possibility of professional development. And indeed, Learning Communities also seem to be privileged spaces for professional development for inclusive education (Freire et al., in press), and this could be another argument for supporting the transformation of schools into Learning Communities. However, given the demands, this process needs to be monitored, which is why we propose a set of recommendations.

A central idea of Learning Communities is their empirical nature, based on a systematic process of data collection and analysis (CREA, 2020b; Flecha et al., 2009).We add that it is also essential to systematically collect and analyse data about the transformation process itself. And this requires, as pointed out in the Policy Brief of the Instituto de Educação of the Universidade de Lisboa, *Caminhos para a inclusão educativa num contexto de diversidade* [*Pathways to Inclusion in a Context of Diversity]* (Freire, 2024), "fostering a school culture that promotes teacher professional development and that is orientated towards research of practice, and towards joint action and reflection" (p. 6).

In fact, if the idea is to transform the **whole** school and/or school cluster into a Learning Community, the change that arises from implementing the SEAs should not be confined to just a few participants, its direct beneficiaries. The entire educational community has to become aware of the benefits that have been achieved by the SEAs. The transformation begins with a group of teachers who identify the benefits of SEAs, but progresses when

they disseminate what they have learnt and try to involve their colleagues with the new practices. Therefore, it is up to the school management to create spaces and times for teachers to meet and collaborate (Freire, 2024). It will also be important to access the perceptions of those who have not implemented the SEAs and to monitor it. How do these teachers perceive SEAs as developed by their colleagues? What benefits do they identify, particularly in their students? Depending on what they perceive and evaluate, will they want to get involved in this transformation process and implement SEAs in the future? It may also be important to provide them with objective measures that go beyond the perceptions of the teachers, students and volunteers involved in the project. In fact, it will be these objective measures that could encourage them to implement SEAs, thus starting a cycle of new personal experiences and the possibility of revising assumptions, beliefs and expectations, which are essential in the process of transforming schools/school clusters into Learning Communities. Projects that involve schools and university in data collecting and analysis and in enabling joint reflection) may play an important role in school transformation and improvement (Freire & Tinoca, 2023), as demonstrated by the LC4Inclusion project.

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CHAPTER 8

EPILOGUE: BETWEEN HOPE AND COMMITMENT

Ana Paula Caetano
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

Luís Tinoca
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

EPILOGUE: BETWEEN HOPE AND COMMITMENT

Ana Paula Caetano
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

Luís Tinoca
UIDEF, Instituto de Educacão, Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal
(https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/04107/2020)

As we reach the last page, we haven't closed a study: we've inaugurated an itinerary. These pages have revealed tangible experiences, solid data and precise recommendations on how Learning Communities can transform schools into a space of belonging. However, no map can replace the journey.

Throughout the reading, we listened to teachers who turned silence into dialogue, directors who swapped organisational charts for shared decision-making circles and students who found an echo for previously inaudible questions. What unites them is the conviction that learning is not about accumulating content, but about weaving links that broaden the horizon of what is possible. This certainty now urges us to look beyond the school walls.

FROM SCHOOLS TO LIVING TERRITORY

If anything has become clear, it's that learning doesn't end when the doorbell rings. Neighbourhood assemblies that host dialogue meetings, community libraries that organise interactive groups or local radio stations that broadcast collaborative projects confirm that the whole territory can become a classroom. The potential for inclusion is thus measured not just by school indicators, but by the school's ability to radiate a culture of participation to squares, health centres, fairs and digital platforms. Whenever a migrant mother reads aloud an excerpt from Mia Couto to a class, and whenever that class takes that voice home, the centre of learning moves to a multiplicity of places.

WITHOUT ROMANTICISM: THE COURAGE TO RECOGNISE FRACTURES

There are still wounds that no innovative method can disguise: the precariousness of resources in rural areas, the emotional overload of teachers, structural racism, bureaucracy that stifles creativity. To deny them would be to silence the very voices we want to amplify. Perhaps the most valuable legacy of Learning Communities is not the inventory of successful practices, but the willingness to inhabit tension. Inclusion demands that we leave the comfort of quick consensus, negotiate contradictions, err in public and welcome dissonant narratives. Ethical questions then arise that become the driving force of the future: who remains outside the circle, despite our enthusiasm? What criteria define success in the face of such unequal starting points? How can we ensure that giving voice to some does not result in silencing others? We don't have definitive answers, but we do have the commitment to keep these questions burning.

THE CLOCK IS TICKING

The urgency of inclusive schools cannot be resolved in funding cycles or political mandates. Cultural change takes time: time for today's children to return as tomorrow's teachers; for today's volunteers to become demanding parents; for statistics to become names and faces. Each micro-victory, a class that drops out of the failure rankings, a group that shares leadership, a pupil who rediscovers the pleasure of writing, signals sedimentation. Although the tide of inclusion goes against established interests, history shows that where dialogue is a daily practice, the walls eventually give way.

A POST-PANDEMIC LENS

The health crisis has exposed the anatomy of inequalities, but it has also accelerated unlikely networks of solidarity: parents who have become digital mediators, teachers who have migrated methodologies to the screen, young people who have taught grandparents how to use mobile phones. This pedagogy of care cannot be wasted. If we can maintain collaborative learning on dispersed screens, we can rethink rigid curricular policies; if affective listening has sustained isolated students, it can also humanise assessment processes.

GESTURES OF CONTINUITY

We need to map the invisible, through local observatories where students themselves identify those who remain under the radar and co-construct activities with them. We need to encourage exchanges between schools from different regions, not just to share good practices, but also dilemmas, fostering a diplomacy of the commons based on mutual fragility. And we mustn't forget that joy, the triumph of life over fear, as Spinoza taught (2020), is a pedagogical subject. Commemorations, artistic events and community gatherings perpetuate in our collective memory the certainty that learning from others is in itself a legitimate reason to celebrate.

HOPE AS A POLITICAL CHOICE

Hope is not naive optimism; it is a political choice for the power of transformation that every community contains. When we choose hope, we decide to act in spite of uncertainty, to listen in spite of tiredness, to learn in spite of mistakes. This book demonstrates that, when schools reimagine themselves as Learning Communities, hope ceases to be abstract and becomes a concrete instrument for change.

We therefore hand these pages over to those who have travelled them. May they serve as a compass for new paths, and not as a closed trail. The path of inclusion expands with every step taken collectively. And perhaps, with courage and imagination, the school can become the place where everyone learns from the world and from each other.

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TECHNICAL DATA

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COORDINATORS

Luís Tinoca and Ana Paula Caetano

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Wilfried Admiraal

COLLECTION

UIDEF

EDITOR

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