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Inclusion in Public Schools: Learning to think and Learning to Live Together

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter we present a proposal for public schooling firmly based on the values of the democratic educational project that emanated from the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1959, 1989). At present, we live in difficult times in Europe. It might be argued that under the pretext of the financial crisis, conservative policies promoting the private sector have launched a plan to dismantle public education with perverse and unfair arguments about its quality and equity (Ball and Youdell, 2008). One of the major challenges we face internationally is the urgent need to defend democratic education in public schools.

Our case is that decisions about the curriculum are value judgments. As teachers we need to be aware of our own worldview and of the value of education from our own perspective. That is, we need to consider what model of society we want to build and live in and what kind of citizenship we will form with the school education model we implement. If we are aware that our actions directly impact on students' future, adopting one curriculum or another is not a naïve decision/action. If we understand that some educational models restrict possibilities of access to knowledge for students (and so contribute to social exclusion) and that others promote rich engagement with knowledge for all, our consequent actions as teachers contribute directly to social inclusion. Our position is that equity and social justice demand a model of inclusive education in public schools.

We define the public school as the institution where all children and young people receive a public education from kindergarten until college/university. Although we acknowledge the existence of specific contextual features in different communities and different nations, our stance is that freedom and equality are underpinning principles of any school aspiring to be a public school. Public schools are not businesses: they are a basic, necessary and universal good. They make ideological and moral choices, giving equal prominence to two key

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factors in their decision making – ethics and the nature of the curricular knowledge they will develop.

This secular, scientific, democratic, intercultural and inclusive public school is called to develop a social and political function of great importance: to form citizens able to and live freely and think critically in a plural society. We need to be clear about the knowledge that educational institutions should develop and about the most appropriate teaching strategies to enable learners to become reflective, critical persons who respect and engage with all cultural aspects of their community. Both 'what' students should learn and 'how' that learning must be enacted and provided should be the basis of the curriculum in public schools (López Melero, 2012). This chapter explores this idea.

In the first part of the chapter we develop the concept of public school education with reference to the principles of inclusive education, social justice and equity as ways of achieving fairness, high quality education and a common curriculum for all children. In the second part we present some strategies for achieving inclusive education. Finally, drawing upon our experience, we present a particular educational model, a research-based project, as a practical example of how to implement these principles and strategies and so resist the imposed neoliberal educational policies of mercantilism, exacerbated ranking and 'effectiveness' that only increase inequality and social exclusion (Apple, 2004).

INCLUSIVE PUBLIC SCHOOL EDUCATION: REQUIRED BY SOCIAL JUSTICE

Fraser (Fraser and Honneth, 2006; Fraser, 2008) argues that, social justice requires acceptance of and respect for differences, and that there is, therefore, a crucial need for change in educational policies so that they take better account of redistribution issues (to overcome socio-economic injustices), recognition issues (to overcome socio-cultural injustices) and representation issues (to overcome political injustices). The public school should therefore provide education for all students without distinction, taking a stand for both recognition and celebration of differences and equity. From this perspective, terms like 'equity', 'Human Rights', the 'Rights of the Child' and 'social justice' cease to be mere discursive devices and become fundamental pillars of the guiding policies of all sectors of public education.

This line of thought has influenced the work of the UN (1948, 1989, 2006) and UNESCO (1990a, 1990b, 1994), which have focused all efforts and initiatives in an international agenda of inclusive Education for All (EFA) The following principle presents the central argument succinctly:

> The Framework principle is that schools should accommodate all children regardless of their physical, intellectual, emotional, linguistic and other conditions. This should include disabled and gifted children, street and working children, children from remote or nomadic populations, and children from linguistic, ethnic or cultural minorities and children of other disadvantaged and marginalized areas or groups. These conditions create a rate of different challenges to school systems. In the context of this Framework, the term 'special educational needs' refers to all those children and youth whose needs arise from disability or learning difficulties. Many children experience learning difficulties and thus have special educational needs at some time during their schooling. Schools have to find the way of successfully educating all children, including those who have severe disadvantages and disabilities. There is an emerging consensus that children and youth with special educational needs should be included in the educational arrangements made for the majority of children. This had led to the concept of inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994: 6).

That is precisely the quintessence of inclusive public education: advocating not only the right to education for all children and the learner's responsibility for learning, but a quality of education that responds to the challenge of our century, which will be met when all children are educated in the mainstream education system.

However, inclusive education is a term that does not have a conceptual definition or theory unanimously accepted by the entire international educational community. The educational practices and discourses associated with the idea of inclusive education are even more confused, contradictory and disparate (Ainscow, 2004; Ainscow and Miles, 2008). The emergence of the idea of inclusive education has been a catalyst for the educational systems of all countries and it has generated reflection and heated debates among all sectors and actors (international agencies, governments, education professionals, academia, families, students, politicians, non-governmental organizations). For many years, discussions have continued amongst advocates of inclusive education as a process of transformation of the school system to respond to each and every learner and an educational and life philosophy that focuses on social justice, the dignity of every human being and democracy and also amongst critics, skeptics and detractors who resist the implementation of this set of ideas (Miles and Singal, 2010; Allan, 2014).

In the context of these debates and disagreements, how can we clarify the concept of inclusive education that we wish to promote to meet the requirements of social justice? We argue that identifying the distinctive characteristics of an inclusive school involves thinking through the meaning of 'differences' (in a broad sense) and 'intelligence' on the one hand, and the nature of the learning process on the other. The education models to be developed depend on our understanding of these terms.

'Differences' and 'Intelligence'

The idea of a fair school taking account of the diversity of learners has been an aspiration in many educational models. This aspiration recognizes that human nature is not a machine built according to a pre-set pattern and that we can no longer accept uncritically the concept of 'intelligence' as biologically predetermined. Instead, 'intelligence' is considered to be the outcome of cognitive, linguistic, emotional and social processes and it can be acquired and developed if educational contexts offer the right opportunities. The emphasis here is on the idea that 'intelligence' is not a matter of genes, but of opportunities (Cole, 2004; Gould, 1987; Kozulin, 2001; Llomovatte and Kaplan, 2005; Vygotsky, 1995).

Respect for learners' differences in pursuit of educational equity is an extremely valuable principle for public schools. It is understood not only as equality of opportunity, but also as equal development of cognitive and cultural skills. To achieve this, each student must be educated according to their needs and given 'equivalent opportunities' to develop. This way of thinking about a 'common curriculum' is distinct from the idea of an 'identical curriculum' where 'equality' implies that all students should experience the same curriculum content and pedagogical strategies. The concept of 'equity' therefore adds precision to the concept of 'equality' by addressing both the uniqueness and the diversity of human nature. Differences, far from being an obstacle, are considered a learning opportunity.

In the reality of most schools and classrooms diverse learners often do not have the same learning opportunities as pupils considered 'normal', even when they are included in the same classroom. What usually happens is what Young (2000) referred to as an 'internal exclusion, "originating" areas of discrimination' when 'people lack effective opportunity to influence the thinking of others, even when they have access to the fora and procedures of decision-making' (2000: 53–55). In other words, together in the same classroom, but separated by the curriculum. This educational apartheid, which continues to exist, is usually seen as inevitable and is seldom discussed. To achieve genuinely equitable inclusive education, it is necessary to conceive of and actively develop a new culture, a culture of solidarity, cooperation and respect for human diversity.

The Learning Process

This new culture needs different policies and pedagogy (Ainscow, 2004), new learning and teaching practices. An inclusive educational culture is not about teaching the culture of diversity as a value. It is about how to live in classrooms democratically by fostering respect, participation, collaboration and peaceful coexistence amongst all participants. The main purpose of this educational experience is to deepen the democratic life of the school; it is about joining efforts to achieve freedom and equity educationally and to fight for an increasingly humanized and cultured school environment (López Melero, 2004). This should be the orientation of the educational practices in a public school, which respects Human Rights and the Rights of the Child.

The practical implications are demonstrated in the Roma Project, described later in this chapter as an exemplar – research-based educational activities, which address (through collaborative learning and action) problematic situations recognized by the whole learning community as significant for them, and which motivate and engage all learners and develop their individual responsibility for contributing to the solutions.

An important aspect of the learning process in schools is assessment. We need to consider how to make assessment serve inclusion rather than exclusion. It is a matter of ethics as well as one of learning. We should give attention to how our learners are affected by the assessment process. Assessment intended to promote learning should be educative, rather than mechanical or technical assessment. Assessment approaches need to be consistent with the teaching–learning experiences and aims. If these are essentially democratic, the assessment processes must also be.

In light of these considerations, the following three points are important:

- Assessment (for learning) should not be confused with common tools used in schools such as examinations and checking procedures (or similar techniques), the function of which is to provide evidence justifying the award of a qualification.
- Assessment instruments should be chosen according to the type of information we want to collect and, above all, with educational purposes in mind.
- Assessment must be considered as an educational activity through which the teacher and the learners evaluate the quality of what has been learned, or identify specific knowledge intended to be learned but not in fact grasped – it is a process involving dialogue and joint decisions about matters such as central and secondary aspects of the learning undertaken and reasons why success may not have been complete.

If we teach our learners to learn to think and live, we have to assess in ways that show whether they are in fact learning to do these things. We need to know what kind of changes and transformations have occurred in both students and teachers: in their knowledge and their thinking processes, in the language they use, in their attitudes and behaviours and in their actions. 'Qualifications type' assessment, tacked on to the end of the teaching and learning processes and often in effect an instrument of selection and exclusion, typically does not provide evidence about the achievement of such sophisticated learning aims. In order to be educative, the assessment should always be related directly to key learning aims and contribute directly to the learning processes of both the learners and the teacher.

The types of learning processes (and assessment) involved in this educational model are entirely consonant with the intention to engage fully with the uniqueness of every individual in very diverse groups and to promote strongly the democratic life of the school. They develop critical, responsible, independent learners, able to think and to live; to distinguish what is significant and relevant from what is of secondary importance; to compare and contrast thoughts and ideas; to investigate; to argue; to reason; to talk; to meet high standards; and to live in peaceful coexistence – that is, people, who do things the best way possible. Only if we ensure this

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type of comprehensive learning can we claim to be educationally inclusive.

SOME STRATEGIES FOR BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE SCHOOL

Although UNESCO's efforts to promote an Education for All and quality education for all children were widely proclaimed at the Jomtien Conference, Thailand (UNESCO, 1990b) and through the Salamanca Statement, Spain (1994), unfortunately, in 2015, there are still many children who do not have the opportunity to be educated and to acquire or to share culture. The right to education has been stolen (Darling-Hammond, 2001). The teaching process in some schools is reduced to a set of procedures that hardly cause any significant or relevant learning. Therefore, one of the main challenges for the public school is to give back to all children 'their right to learn'.

To succeed in developing and implementing inclusive education as we have described it, there will need to be a review of educational practices and initiate processes of deconstruction and construction of school contexts in order to build a new school culture or, at least, to give new meaning to the current one. Two broad strategies can be identified as crucial to the process: 'Learning while Teaching' and 'Cooperative, Supportive and Dialogic Learning'. These strategies are not completely separate; aspects of each are relevant to the other.

Learning while Teaching

Teacher education is the cornerstone of any educational innovation. The search for the best pedagogical approaches for all students to learn benefits the teachers themselves first. As they develop awareness of what is needed to develop inclusive education, teachers will change their understanding of their own roles, of the learner and of the curriculum.

In the traditional system, the teacher has three functions: they act as transmitter of the learning materials; evaluate the progress and achievements of the learners at the end of the teaching–learning process; and act as a role model of an educated person with a high standard and expert training. By contrast, in an inclusive school, the teacher's role should be very different: first they must know how to work with very heterogeneous classrooms (in terms of ethnicity, gender, disability, religion, origin, multilingualism, etc.), and second they have to learn alternative pedagogical strategies to respond to the complexity and diversity of the classroom context. It is no longer sufficient to give the same oral or written explanation to the whole class. There is a demand for other learning activities such as research-based projects, seminars, workshops and working groups where knowledge is built in a social and cooperative manner.

In the traditional system, the teacher can regard the learner as primarily a recipient of the learning materials. The have to absorb these passively, have a minimum capacity of attention and memory and know how to put these into play when the circumstances require. In this banking knowledge system (Freire, 1970) learners behave in accordance with imposed rules. If an individual does not succeed in doing this, they will be considered unfit for a normal education and will become part of the 'special education' group. It is often argued that children need to be placed in this special group because they are not mature enough to benefit from mainstream education. However, we know that well-planned school learning, besides broader aspects of education, causes development. We do not have to wait for the child to mature because learning itself produces the development, which constitutes maturity (Vygotsky, 1995). From this point of view, the learner, far from being a passive recipient of information and imposed rules, learns actively by investigating, exploring, selecting and transforming the learning material.

In the traditional system, the teacher would understand the curriculum as information and

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rules about how to learn this information. Society decides on the content of what is to be learned in each subject area and selects the ways in which this content will be presented to learners (for example, in textbooks or other learning materials) and that is what students should learn in order to be considered 'educated' persons. The world's views and cultural traditions are already pre-established (Nussbaum, 2006) and the school's mission is to transmit them to children. Learners have to 'absorb' them as they are, using the associated intellectual tools. In current thinking about learning, the learning materials are no longer just information, they become generators of reflection and action. Teaching is no longer simple delivery of static and standardized information divided into fragments of isolated, unconnected and decontextualized disciplines, rather it builds the learning potential and higher thinking abilities (a logical thought process) of the learner.

The idea that the role of the teacher is not that of mere transmitter of some past knowledge/information that students have to memorize, but should be one of teaching how to construct knowledge that does not exist yet, is not actually new.

It very clear to Montaigne (2007), when he was arguing in the sixteenth century, that:

> The preceptor should not lose sight of what the purpose of his efforts is; he should not put much interest in teaching his pupil the date of the ruin of Carthage and the customs of Scipio and Hannibal; nor to inform him of the place where Marcelo died, but to make him to see that Marcelo was killed in that place because he was not at the height of his duty. Learners should not be much interested in events, but in learning how to grasp their meaning. (Montaigne, 2007: 115).

To know some decontextualized, factual information does not mean that you really know or understand it. It means only that it has been retained in the memory. As Montaigne (2007) goes on:

> The bees extract the juice of different flowers and then they produce honey, which is their own product; the thyme or the marjoram are not: thus, the notions from specific disciplines are transformed and modified to perform a kind of work that belongs to the learner's mind; thereby they are forming his knowledge and insight (Montaigne, 2007: 110).

Montaigne's idea, although not contemporary, seems to ring true when we think about the process of learning and development that enables the learner to respond effectively to the highly complex challenges of our actual and future society. Indeed, more recent authors have emphasized the role of the teacher as a facilitator, co-inquirer and a committed leader and organizer (together with learners, parents and other education professionals) of a meaningful, relevant and contextualized teaching – learning process in the classroom and in the school community (Cazden, 1991; Darling-Hammond, 2001; Vygotsky, 1979; Wells, 1995).

Curriculum should be thought of as responding to and developing all dimensions of the human being: cognition and metacognition, the language and the meanings of communications, values and the development of personal, social and moral autonomy. We agree with Gardner (1995) who coins the concept of development of multiple intelligences and performances. The teacher needs to know what knowledge students should learn *and* how learning activities should be planned, organized and enacted: both constitute the curriculum. This is not just an academic issue, but is also an ethical one: the truly effective and committed teacher understands that it is not just a matter of *content* but one of how learners live this process and how their identity is transformed through the process of learning (Maturana, 1994). The dual purpose of public education is 'to learn to think and to learn to live' through communication systems, norms and values that teachers and learners establish in classrooms.

Cooperative, Supportive and Dialogic Learning

In inclusive education both students and teachers are involved in the construction of knowledge. Traditional classrooms should

become living and learning communities. Teachers must reorganize what happens in them so that all children, without distinction, have equivalent opportunities in the joint construction of knowledge and the meaning of this knowledge for the learners depends upon the quality of the interaction, participation and support that occur in the classroom. This kind of learning might be called 'apprenticeship' in the analysis of real life situations experienced by students. The concepts, phenomena, facts and main ideas to be understood are learning strategies that enable children to resolve these problematic situations. This mode of constructing knowledge in a social way involves the formation of heterogeneous groups, the members of which are interdependent and share things such as the same space and common goals, various learning materials, different functions involving some degree of responsibility and some common standards of understanding to enable them to reflect together on a common task (Johnson et al., 1999; Slavin, 1999).

Cooperative learning replaces the competitive organization in traditional classrooms (Johnson et al., 1999). Classes become living and learning communities where children enjoy being part of the world that each generates together with the others. Being part of this process means working in groups, taking or acquiring responsibilities, sharing the common tasks and the inherent challenges of the group. It is not about socializing the seats, but rather the learning (Cazden, 1991) because each learner has a role, a responsibility. Shared learning generates shared intelligence and the group is cognitively enriched because the origin of intelligence is social (Cole, 2004). For students accustomed to learning where teachers and textbooks are dominant, cooperative learning may initially seem rather disconcerting.

In these classrooms, children have to change their perception of learning as 'just work'; they have to understand that going to school is to build knowledge with other children, not following textbooks and stipulated exercises and assignments but addressing problematic situations that are significant for the whole group of learners. In classes focused on cooperative learning, children take responsibility for their learning, reflect, talk and act purposefully and collectively whilst the teacher observes and guides them. This kind of learning shares many characteristics with the highly interactive dialogic learning described by writers such as Bruner (1990), Freire (1993), Vygotsky (1979) and Wells (2001). It makes the job of the teacher more creative and original, but also more challenging and demanding, to ensure that all children have equivalent opportunities to participate in the construction of knowledge and develop the confidence to achieve this through cooperation with others.

AN EXEMPLAR OF AN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION MODEL

Research-Based Projects in the Classroom – the Roma Project

We believe that project-based methodology (Dewey, 1971; Kilpatrick, 1918;) synthesizes all the curricular and pedagogical strategies we have proposed earlier as characteristic of inclusive education. In recent years, it has become very common to hear teachers saying, 'In our school, we work using project-based methodology', but it is not clear that everybody understands this term in the same way. Our use of the term 'projects' means 'research-based projects' as the foundation of learning. A research-based project does not involve traditional subject matter learned in linear progression nor taxonomy of objectives to be neatly achieved. Rather, a research-based project is a way of 'learning to learn in cooperation'. It is a dynamic process comprising collaborative thought and action – first thinking through what will be investigated and achieved, and then putting it into practice. It involves an attitude of permanent search combined with dialogic inquiry (Wells, 2001). The process of conducting a research-based

project will foster learners' cognitive and cultural development, as well as the mental organization needed to build knowledge and to comprehend the world. The methodology takes us away from the Aristotelian idea of bookish education and engages us in social construction of knowledge.

As an example we present the *Roma Project*, an educational model that we have been developing and implementing with the main purpose of making inclusion a reality in our schools. This explicitly social justice-oriented educational model addresses any kind of discrimination in schools and seeks to be increasingly positive towards and respectful of human differences (in accordance with Human Rights and the Rights of the Child).

The Roma Project is an ongoing interdisciplinary research and education project that started in 1990 in Spain and extended into various countries, including Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Ecuador. It involves various groups of teachers, families and mediation experts. As a research project, it aims to provide ideas and reflections on the construction of a new theory of intelligence, through development of people's cognitive, metacognitive, linguistic and emotional processes and their autonomy. Its basic and fundamental purpose is the improvement of school, family and social contexts through democratic co-existence and mutual respect, as well as personal, social and moral autonomy (López Melero, 2004).

What differentiates this educational model from others is its heuristic approach, its continuing openness to finding out new things, its dual perspective (the theoretical and the practical mutually influencing one another) and its sustained commitment over the past 25 years to improving education for all children. This improvement occurs at an academic level, contributing to building and deepening of knowledge about genuinely inclusive education (in areas such as curriculum construction, teacher's professional development, action research) and it also occurs in the transformation of schools into real living and learning communities.

The scientific foundation of our practices in this project drew upon the epistemological theory of Habermas (1987a, 1987b) and, more specifically, his theory of Communicative Action, the Action Research conception of Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), the conception of intelligence of Luria (1997; Luria et al., 1986) and the ideas about development of logical thought processes and the resulting theory of development and learning of Vygotsky (1979, 1995). We drew upon a combination of the mo[illegible] Luria and Vygotsky, w[illegible] represented by Bruner ([illegible] education as a way of a[illegible] human beings – educator and learner – are educated together in a dialogic encounter (Freire, 1993). Another main theoretical foundation is the Biology of Knowledge and the Biology of Love of Maturana (1994), which characterizes development and human actions as resulting from a huge number of causes that interrelate and interact with each other in a world of emotional networks (López Melero, 2004).

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In the Roma Project, the research-based projects are a way of learning to think and learning to live together.

Starting from a problematic situation identified through the curiosity and interest of the learners, not the teachers, and the learners' previous concepts about the nature of this problematic situation (these initial ideas can be described in Vygotsky's (1979) terms as the learners' actual development level), there emerges immediately at least one research project to be shared with the working groups that have been set up in the classroom. These groups should be as heterogeneous as possible. Each group, from their point of view and from their needs, establishes the strategies and procedures that will be required in order to achieve what they intend, which is Vygotsky's (1979) potential development level.

They also make a clear and specific Operations Plan. Between the two levels, the teaching and learning processes occur, in what Vygotsky (1979) called the 'zone of proximal development (ZPD)'. These processes are specifically a way to learn to think

and to learn to live together – Freire's (1993) dialogic encounter, which is central to these processes, strongly encourages teachers and learners to reach a consensus before taking any decision (in line with the Communicative Action theory of Habermas (1987a, 1987b)). Through this way of working, learners become aware of their own thinking processes through reflection and self-correction and they develop logical thinking. They change their thoughts and actions, build their own personal criteria for evaluating what is happening, strengthen their ability to make correct judgments and learn to treat each other in a reasonable and respectful manner.

We start from real life problematic situations. Students learn to approach the identification, description and understanding of the problematic situation by constructing a series of meaningful and relevant ideas about it. Teachers contribute a kind of 'help' to this construction of meaning by the learners ('educational influence'). These exchange processes are the practical means through which learners' ZPD and teachers' intervention interact. The adult support has to be adjusted both in quantity and quality to what the children themselves need and not much more. It is a kind of dynamic help that has to start at the initial level of development of students, and it sets out achievable new challenges beyond the initial level that leads to a potential level, the realization of the project by the students independently (Vygotsky, 1979). This methodology promotes all students' independent learning: they make real decisions and develop 'learning to learn' – strategies such as knowing and understanding the environment, proposing a problem situation and arguing for it, finding information, sharing it in heterogeneous work groups, communicating effectively with colleagues, etc. The principal outcome of the project is not the 'solution' to the identified problematic situation, but the development of young learners' mental pathways and high order thinking processes. Those who participate in a community of inquiry and learning of this type are transformed and enriched, not just cognitively and culturally but also emotionally and behaviourally.

There are certain essential prior requirements to make this cooperative methodology work in the classroom:

1 Classes start by knowing each other
The essence of research-based projects is the common effort to learn with and from each other because it involves the help of others to achieve personal development ZPD). Children cannot learn if they do not know each other. Teaching and learning in our classes are planned to ensure they get to know each other well. From the first day, we build together a 'matrix' of how we think, how we speak, how we feel and how we act. It is a kind of initial diagnostic evaluation where we reveal our personal history, our thoughts, the language (or languages) we use, our emotions and our actions. An important aim is to enable the children to think about such questions as what happens in our mind when we think, when we talk, when we feel, when we act, when we understand others. children therefore start developing their mental tools. They are taught to think in order to act properly and the classroom comes to simulate a 'social brain': learning is much richer if we learn to solve problematic situations cooperatively. The human mind has a social origin: what makes us more cognitively and culturally competent are interactions with others and not the amount of information we have memorized. The use of symbolic mental tools has an exceptional importance: the evolved human mind works with signs and meanings. This is why individual members explaining how they are thinking is so important in the process of getting to know one another in a working/learning group.
2 We learn to think of the classroom as like a brain
Teachers often shape their pedagogy in ways that are influenced by explicit or implicit theories and assumptions about how learning occurs. It is one thing to know something about individual learning and quite another to know how to ensure that *all* students learn. Luria (1974, 1997; Luria et al., 1986) left us the legacy of the 'social brain'. In the Roma Project children build their class like a brain. In the classroom there are a number of areas of development and learning, namely the Thinking Zone (cognition and meta-cognition), the Communication Zone (language), the Love Zone (affective) and the Autonomy Zone (motion/action). In order to develop their research-based project, each group goes on a journey through these areas of development and learning (which are not 'corners'), following the relevant processes: I think–I speak–I feel/love–I do.

3 The rules are agreed among all participants
Students come to know that in school they will learn to think well, that they will learn together one from another and that this requires them to co-exist peacefully. Based on the trust and respect awakened in the early days, we start to build this co-existence in the classroom by establishing rules based on freedom and equity. Everyone agrees norms for the initial assembly of the group and for how it will work. These are not just things that group members may or may not be allowed to do; they are derived from the realization that complying with norms enables values to be lived in the classroom and that breaking the rules impedes values education. We strongly believe that values are not taught, but lived. This way, we will learn to build democracy in our classes because through dissent consensus is reached (Habermas, 1987a, 1987b).

5 The distribution of responsibilities
This way of conceiving of the classroom as a place to learn to think and reflect well based on trust, respect, dialogue and democratic coexistence requires that both learners and teachers take on co-responsibility in the tasks they have decided to carry out in order to find solutions to the problematic situation. Children will carry responsibilities throughout the entire process and will learn to be coordinator, spokesperson, secretary or person in charge of the learning material. Two criteria are set up to take account of the mixed nature of the group: (1) everyone has to take a turn at each of these functions and (2) all children in the classroom have to work at least once one with all other children.

Research-based projects are related to cognitive and cultural planning, that is, to the ability that people have to make plans, to search, to investigate, to experiment and to build. The projects therefore always have two areas: the thinking sphere and the action sphere. There is a logical sequence to their development as follows:

1 Initial assembly
The origin of any project is learners' realization that there is a problematic situation and this requires the participation of all students. We always start from their epistemological curiosity and their world of interests, not that of their teachers (contextualized learning). This is the time when children socialize their previous learning and it awakens the desire to learn. They start by showing what they know about and what they need to know in order to solve the problematic situation, and then, the project is named. To answer the questions, an Action Plan is shaped in heterogeneous groups.

2 Action plan in heterogeneous groups
The plan covers both generic and specific learning. Generic learning is learning that we want all students to benefit from throughout the project; specific learning is what will help each person to improve in an aspect particular to them. Each group constructs something concrete – a mural, a layout, an essay, a story, a magazine, etc. – as a strategy for addressing the needs identified in the initial assembly. They have to plan it in the company of their teacher, following the sequence of processes that identify what they need in terms of thinking and meta-cognition, of language and communication systems, of affectivity (norms and values), and of autonomy. When all the groups have made their action plans they continue their investigation independently.

3 Action
Everything planned has to be done. This is the time of exchanges and interactions in the classroom to achieve a solution to the problematic situation. The teacher follows the work process of each group and offers their support as needed to redirect their thoughts and actions. The teacher always acts on request. Once the artefact that each group has committed itself to has been constructed, the whole group is involved in explaining and showing what they have learned in the project. Finally, they develop a conceptual map as a synthesis of that learning.

4 Final assembly
This stage is the time to evaluate the work process of each of the groups and to propose new projects. The spokesperson of each group explains what they planned to do, what difficulties they met in the process, how they solved them and what answers they found to the questions raised in the initial assembly. They also propose the conceptual map that they developed as a synthesis of their learning. When all groups have finished presenting and discussing their projects, a conceptual map is made that reflects everything the entire class has learned from the work of all the groups. This common map forms a part of the book that every individual learner is gradually building as the year goes on. Based on the questions of all the groups, a new research project is generated and the children therefore continue to research – and to learn. In our classes, the basis of learning is research. There is no learning without inquiry and research.

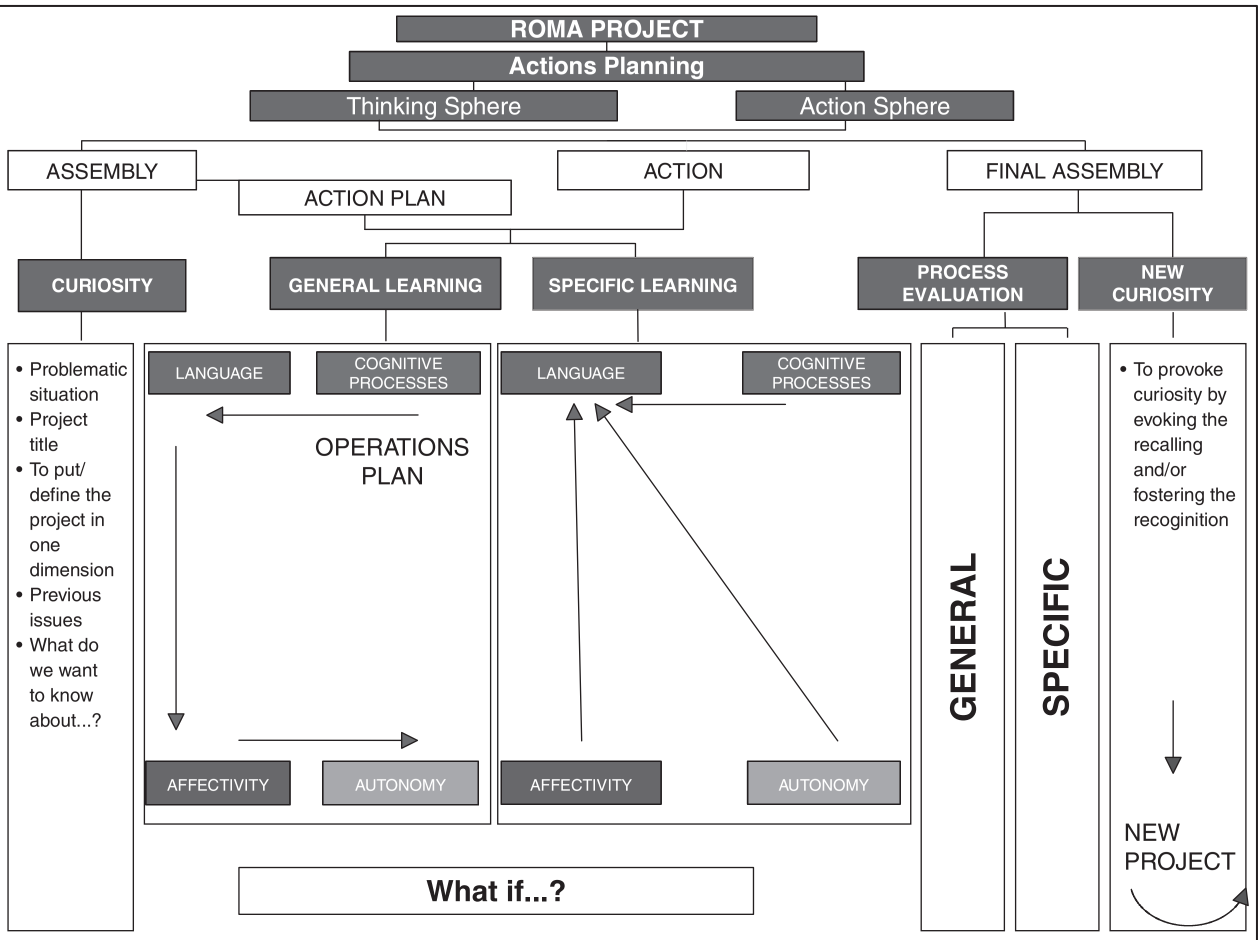

Figure 13.1 Roma Project general scheme

Source: Author's own work

Assessment in the Roma Project

As our purposes are qualitative in nature, it is hard to find tools to evaluate the processes of teaching and learning. How do you assess the processes needed to learn to think and to learn to live? We try to address this difficulty by building a matrix of all participants' thinking processes from the start using the following methods or instruments:

- At the initial assembly: by diagnostic assessment in the first days of the academic year to enable the learners to get to know each other, we find out:
  - how the students and the teachers think (perception, attention, memory, knowledge of space and time, planning, etc.);
  - how they communicate (reading, writing, speaking, use of logical–mathematical or artistic language, etc.);
  - their world of values, emotions, feelings and norms; and
  - their physical, personal, social and moral autonomy.
- Throughout the year, we collect the reflections of the heterogeneous groups using:
  - group folders (portfolios);
  - group interviews;
  - personal archives;
  - a daily class diary; and
  - personal interviews.
- The final assembly of each project (documenting the action plan, the narrative of the action and the conceptual map of the learning of each project).

We acknowledge that this way of understanding how to assess is not the only possible one. Certainly it is open to modification as we continue reflecting on these approaches and give further thought to the best ways of conducting educative assessment embedded in the curriculum which contributes to learning and development in both learners and teachers.

CONCLUSION

Public Schools and Comprehensive Learning

Teaching methods are always a path to enabling students to learn what they should learn, which is chosen a priori. We only know how successful the methods are a posteriori, when we reflect retrospectively on whether the class dynamics have actually allowed all students to achieve what was intended.

What is important in a school that teaches its learners to think and live respectfully is to be able to provide an apprenticeship that is not based upon the accumulation of information, but on reflection and action – that is comprehensive learning. It is a complex process, in which students develop their own particular ways of thinking and acting as they experiment and acquire, and build new knowledge. The understanding and comprehension process has to do with both thought and action; that is, it involves ability to think flexibly about what one knows and experimentation with the as yet unknown. This is not a matter of using a simple algorithmic mind-set and formulaic approaches to 'think' and decide, but one of flexible thinking attuned to complex problematic situations of everyday life and involving dialogue with collaborators. It is therefore very important that teachers reflect on their classroom methodology to ensure that the experiences learners have, do in fact develop the ability to think and participate in dialogue in these ways. Our experience demonstrates that research-based project methodology is helping students to become freer thinkers, more able to participate in learning dialogues, more capable of respecting the ideas of others, more honest, more democratic and more humane.

In the Roma Project we are defenders of the public school as a cultural space, responsible for the construction of an educational model for democratic co-existence, which ensures a quality education, respecting the individuality of each child. In this way, the modern public school endorses the culture of inclusive education and respects Human Rights and the Rights of the Child. It avoids curricular injustice by not pursuing different types of curricula for different pupils in the same classroom (Young, 2011). A school where all learning and teaching activities derive from the principles of inclusive education is

a school that is educating for building a new civilization. The public school needs teachers who are wholly committed to these principles and consider that the most important thing at school is not the teaching of previously developed knowledge (instruction), but knowing how to create a democratic environment for values and principles of socialization and education. In such an environment children learn at school not only cultural content but a harmonious and peaceful way of life – co-existence (Maturana, 1994). If there is respect in a class, children learn to respect; if reflection goes on in a class, the children of that class will be reflective; if there is generosity in class, children learn to be generous; if a class develops democratically, the children learn to be democratic people. We learn what we live.

From our expertise and knowledge, we can suggest that the ultimate purpose of the public school is to awaken in learners a love of wisdom, of knowledge of creativity and of culture in general. To say that the main purpose of public education is to transform learners into persons who love truth, the common good and beauty is the same as saying that it is to ensure that children will 'learn to think and learn to live together'. This is not an unattainable utopia, but a moral project to which we dedicate ourselves in education because public schooling is a universal and fundamental human right, necessary to build a democratic, caring and humane society.

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