

Nomadic knowledge in emerging pedagogical contexts: Ethnographic experience in two secondary schools in Málaga, Spain

Pablo Cortés-González

José Ignacio Rivas-Flores

Didactics and School management Department, University of Málaga, Málaga, Spain

Corresponding author: Pablo Cortés-González. pcortes@uma.es

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This paper presents a research experience in secondary schools that develop educational projects of a participatory and transformative nature. From a theoretical perspective, this contribution arises from the new educational needs emanating from augmented society and multiple literacies, that transform communication and the circulation of knowledge, challenging conventional educational methods. An ethnography was carried out in two secondary schools, one in a rural environment and the other in a metropolitan area. The results are organized around three relevant axes: the notion of community, the management processes and shared leadership, and the transformative pedagogical processes that are being developed. We conclude that Spanish secondary school context is still based on practices centred on content and masterly methodologies; this leads us to understand that the contributions of the mentioned schools are understood as disruptive experiences, as they promote a change towards a curriculum centred on the participation and interests of the students; horizontal and cooperative management practices; a strong sense of community; among others.

Keywords: secondary education; disruptive practices; educational community; democratic management.

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Introduction.

The profound social, educational, cultural, and technological changes taking place in an increasingly globalised world are putting formal education systems at the centre of the debate about their capacity to respond to new ways of learning that are increasingly complex, intersectional, and delocalised. As the boundaries of formal education are

being pushed by new ways of learning, communicating, and engaging with others (Martínez & Rodríguez, 2018), there is a need to reflect on how these changes take place and how formal education can be transformed.

Fernández Enguita (2016) argues that these transformations are rapidly taking place across generations. This is a fundamental change in the new social structures, under pressure to constantly produce creative concepts which generate innovative processes in a globalised and uncertain world. We take the concept of "Disruptive Innovation" (Christensen et al., 2016; Dyer, et al., 2019) or "Disruptive Practices" (Montes, et al., 2021), to refer to these fundamental changes necessary for relevant educational change. We could define it as those practices that seek an innovative rupture that places the subjects, especially the students, at the center of the pedagogical interests of the educational contexts, with the aim of generating training and evaluation processes that are more in line with their needs.

In the case of Spain, it is not only a question of normative issues, where we can find great advances in this respect. So, the Organic Law 2/2006, of 3 May, on Education (LOE), proposes to provide a quality education capable of adapting to different needs, promoting that all citizens achieve; also, it alludes to the need to collaborate with the educational community to achieve this purpose from the effort and shared responsibility between teachers, families, students, educational administrations and society as a whole.

This implies the need to make a cultural break with the still conventional practices of secondary education based on a rigid curriculum, learning systems based on memorization, closed school itineraries, among others. In this regard, how school and social practices place interpersonal relationships at the core of educational activity, generating relevant learning conditions next to the school community interests; this

involves questioning the methodological, epistemological and ontological logics of school reality (Montes, Fernández & Massó, 2021).

Disruptive innovation emerges from the social demands towards education and is generated within the “gaps” or “windows” of opportunity that different education agents (administration, authorities, education community or the industry itself) can take advantage of, but which are outside of the prevailing views on the teaching-learning process (Valverde, et al., 2023). Therefore, they move at the limits of the cultural system, linked to the perspective of expanded education and the concept of learning ecologies (Martínez & Fernández, 2018, Cobo & Moravec, 2011).

Largely, the changes present in these new educational practices derive, in part, of the conditions created by the advance of communication through ICTs and the changes in the conception of knowledge and its social value. Making a description of the ‘knowmadic’ society, it progresses around the shared construction of knowledge, for example, in the form of “makers communities”, in which each subject shares what they know while at the same time nourishing themselves with what others know, without a prior teaching structure or with a defined intentionality. Multiple contexts are created, providing opportunities for spontaneous, serendipitous, situated and dialogical learning (Valverde & Fernández, 2018), in which subjects interact both with other subjects and with the objects of learning. The various contexts are connected, and each in turn involves a configuration of activities, resources, materials, conditions, relationships, and interactions. Knowledge is characterized by its situated, provisional, paradoxical, and perplexed nature. This context, which in our opinion can generate strong problems such as the lack of more collective and situated citizen projects, the decline of a critical view and analysis of reality, information saturation and fake news, among other issues, requires a continued commitment to the school. Nevertheless, there is a need to rethink

educational institutions to break with the standardization that characterizes them and the resulting detachment of young people, which participates decisively in this ‘knowmadic’ model in which traditional school knowledge becomes irrelevant, or at the very least, not very meaningful.

In Spain, most teaching practices are still based on a standardized curricula, with encapsulated knowledge that has little or nothing to do with the lives of students (Cortés, Rivas & Leite, 2023). Also, their excesses linked to assessment contribute to generating a formal system, with no impact on the vital needs of young people. This perspective is becoming hegemonic due to a strong neo-conservative and centralist advance, which calls into question local knowledge, or that which students produce in their own interactions with the world. The concept of disrupt practices arises, therefore, linked to technological advances as a radically different response to current conventional practices (Downes, 2017). Therefore, the ways of understanding educational action, the role of the teacher or the organizational processes of the school change, entering the logic of networked collaboration and relations with the community as relevant characteristics.

This study aims to explore how secondary education systems are transforming their educational practices in response to the challenges of what is known as the ‘knowmadic society’ (Cobo, 2016; Movarec, 2008). Our goal in the mentioned project is to identify the current social processes and phenomena encountered by educational agents and link them to the educational processes being implemented. As Acaso (2018) points out, there are few teaching-learning practices and methodologies that students find engaging and challenging. To this end, we present the findings of an ethnographic study carried out in two secondary schools in Málaga—southern Spain—, both of which are learning communities (Leite, Márquez & Rivas, 2018), with two objectives for this

paper: (1) to learn about the ethnographic experience carried out and (2) to analyse the disruptive elements that are constituted in both schools.

Theoretical framework and the current situation.

This contribution arises from the new educational needs emanating from what is called the ‘knowmad and augmented society’ and ‘multiple literacies’ (Cobo, 2016). The concept of knowmadic society can be metaphorically applied to refer to flexible and dynamic pedagogical approaches, which do not adhere to a single place (physical and virtual), teaching method or conceptions of knowledge but adapt to the changing needs of the subjects. We observe how new ways of learning, communicating, and relating are pushing the boundaries of formal education. This is forcing us to rethink both the curriculum and the teaching methods, and it is particularly important in secondary education, where conventional cultural and social systems are constantly being challenged by new ideas, as detailed below (Rivas, 2019).

Firstly, it must be born in mind that people communicate and interact differently today due to hyperconnectivity, as well as new technological and virtual platforms (Reig and Vílchez, 2013). This situation is transforming how we learn, work, and share knowledge, allowing individuals and groups to draw on their different cultures through varied multisensory formats (Cortés et al. 2023), and develop new citizenship practices.

Secondly, it must also be remembered that the way knowledge circulates has changed, moving towards a society in which knowledge is shared. According to Burbules (2014), this has created three movements in the education system: (1) a decentralisation of books and schools; (2) the delocalisation/de-temporalisation of knowledge, which changes where and when knowledge can be accessed; and (3)

knowledge dissemination through social experience and experimentation (Downes, 2017).

In the sense, teaching methods in schools are a legacy of modern organisational design. This leads to a fragmentation of knowledge and methodologies (Díaz and Freire, 2012), which is in direct conflict with this constantly changing knowledge (Wesh, 2009; Downes, 2017).

Thirdly, it is important to consider how socially vulnerable people (Cortés, Rivas and Leite, 2016; Fernández Enguita, 2016) are undergoing new forms of social exclusion. This situation is the result of new demands in terms of access to the labour market, diversity, and lack of civic participation, which affect all generations and individuals. Educational institutions are not equipped with the mechanisms to respond to these demands, partly due to the gap between classical school formats and new learning ecologies (Martínez and Fernández, 2018), as well as the skills required in today's global society.

It is therefore necessary to rethink teaching and working systems, especially at secondary level, to embrace the new realities of relationships and communication, and to create teaching methods that are attractive, stimulating, challenging, inspiring, and creative not only for students (Acaso, Manzanera and Piscitelli, 2015), but also for other educational workers. All this is in response to the new skills required for 21st century citizenship, with particular emphasis on: flexible learning methods linked to lifelong learning; the use of ICT and new literacies; the development of thinking skills in multiple and changing contexts; experimentation, observation, and peer exchange; and the incorporation of more effective network-based community models (Buckingham, 2010; Adell and Castañeda, 2013; Martín Barbero, 2015).

Studies on disruptive teaching practices (Christensen, Raynor and McDonald, 2016; Cobo, 2016) show there is a need to rethink and rework the constraints imposed on formal educational institutions, which turn them into systems that standardise, fragment, and homogenise both experience and knowledge. The aim is to encourage educational systems to consider knowledge as something interdependent and distributed in a network (Siemens, 2005); also, to use new formats and alternative supports based on multisensoriality (Cortés et al., op. cit.) and with an ethic for diversity (Bilbeny, 2002).

To date, there are few—but nevertheless valuable—initiatives (Montes et al., 2021; Fernández et al., 2017) in secondary education which have opted for learning models based on epistemological and organisational approaches that are receptive to new communication systems. These experiences take a critical approach towards school traditions and cultures and seek to reconstruct their role and functioning (Wesch, 2009) by creating learning environments that both rethink and transform the organisation and methodologies of teaching and learning. In secondary education the importance of these experiences lies in the boundaries of conventional cultural and social systems are being constantly pushed aside by new informal learning that motivates and stimulates personal interest, curiosity, experimentation, and the exchange of ideas (Anguita and Ruiz, 2018).

In short, disruptive initiatives in formal education organisations include: (1) organisational strategies that use personal experience, new technologies and other formats as resources to promote new ways of learning, and (2) a rethinking of vertical learning processes together with a shift towards horizontal and circular teaching methods that are more accessible and motivating for students. The two schools chosen for this project have, to a large extent, responded to these transformative demands.

Context

The ethnographic process has been carried out in two Secondary Schools with particular and differentiated situations. Therefore, it is necessary to present some contextual questions that allow us to understand the processes and conditioning factors that each School has, focused on understanding two disruptive pedagogical scenarios.

It is interesting to note that we chose these two schools because the first is a purely rural Learning Community and one of the pioneers in the region of Andalusia. The second, because it is a particular project that was born with a transformative and participatory character from its very creation, in which the school community was involved from the design of the spaces to the educational approaches and projects.

On the one hand, the Sierra de Yeguas Secondary School (SY) is in Sierra de Yeguas, a small village in the province of Málaga, Spain, far from the big cities and with a popular culture deeply rooted in rural life and with its economic base in agriculture and commerce. According to the 2021 census, it had a population of 3,386 and the socio-economic status of the population was considered medium and medium-low.

The school is considered small, and the students come mainly from Sierra de Yeguas and the nearby hamlet of Navahermosa. There are approximately 15-20 students per class, which allows for more individual and personalised work. From the first to the third year of compulsory secondary education (ESO), about 150 students are taught in two groups per year, and there is one group for fourth year students.

Regarding the students' families, a large percentage of parents have only completed compulsory education. A small number have a university degree or higher. Parents generally attend meetings, one-to-one tutorials and other activities that involve

them. The school has a parents' association (San Bartolomé) that works closely with the school in organising activities for the students. It has other participatory bodies: a school of families, the joint committee, the management committee, the school council, and the board of family delegates.

The Cartima, on the other hand, is a secondary school located in Cártama Estación, one of the two main towns in the municipality of Cártama. It belongs to the metropolitan area of Málaga, which has led to a considerable increase in the number of inhabitants with its population doubling over the last 20 years. It is one of the oldest municipalities in the province with origins that date back to Phoenician times. Cártama Estación is located outside the town centre. Despite being a village, due to the territorial expansion of the capital, it has connections and resources more like the urban logic. According to the 2022 census, it had a population of 14,478 and the socio-economic level of the population can therefore be described as medium and medium-high.

Cartima Secondary School was founded nine years ago and has 43 teachers and 510 students. It is a large, well-established Centre with many students. It is the result of '*Proyecto Cártama*'—an educational project that was implemented when the school was founded and is based on active methodologies, especially project-based learning (PBL), community relations and the use of ICTs, which does away with the use of textbooks. It has a parents' association (El Nogal) that is closely involved with the school. Most of the students live in the area, although some come from further away because of their interest in the educational project.

In this scenario, it is interesting to consider, first, the volatility of rural areas with respect to the proximity or remoteness of large cities, and more specifically in the province of Malaga, being a territory with a coastline that brings together much of the economic movement of the same and, therefore, has a strong impact both on territorial

policies and on the employment and economic opportunities of the surrounding villages. Second, to understand how the two educational projects impact or are constituted. In this regard, as we will see below, the SY generates a pedagogical project from the *inside out*, that is, social transfer to the immediate environment; and, for its part, the Cartima from the *outside in*, that is, how the school is able to develop as an ecology that attracts agents and organizations to collaborate and contribute to it, beyond the immediate context.

Methodology

Our ethnographic approach focuses not only on existing cultural patterns or structures, but also on subjective aspects of the culture. In this sense, we follow Geertz's (1990) approaches to cultural mediation and his inter- and self-subjective interpretation (Díaz de Rada, 2011; Hammersley, 2018) as key elements to understand the complexity of reality. This leads us to integrate multimodal forms of communication and interaction (Gewerc and Vázquez-Calvo, 2020), using a variety of strategies in different formats that included interviews, experiential and biographical accounts, participant observation, collective debates, audio-visual media, workshops, etc.

The fieldwork was carried out between December 2021 and February 2023 in two secondary schools: Cartima and SY. The ethnographic process was conducted using a collaborative logic approach based on the research negotiation process. This argues that there are ways of understanding reality that constantly complement and overlap, creating a complexity that makes new spaces visible (Leite et al., 2012). Hernández, et al. (2020) see it in terms of commitment and involvement, which in our case is evident both in the processing of information and in the results. These results were discussed with the participants from the institutions involved, thus establishing a dialogical and

more horizontal approach to the research. Issues such as dissemination, authorship, and research impact were also discussed.

Our aim is to have a comprehensive understanding of these two realities in the schools by looking at the diverse views and behaviours that emerge from the actors, devices, and programmes that are being developed (Hammersley, 2018). The interest is to analyse the basic elements in the development of these experiences from the perspective of the disruptive teaching methods that are being implemented—that is, emerging participatory, knowmadic, and transformative educational projects.

The following table summarises the agents involved, and the methodological strategies developed.

Agents involved	Methodological strategies	SY Records	Cartima Records
Teachers and management team	Interviews Reflection groups Observations (audiovisual recordings)	12 4 25 hours	11 2 30 hours
Students	Individual and group interviews Reflection groups Observation (audiovisual recordings) Reflective workshops	10 2 30 hours 4	4 4 5
Families	Interviews Reflection groups	2 1	4 2
Other social agents: specialists, trainees, associations involved, etc.	Interviews	3 8 hours of recordings	2
School project, regulations, specialty	Documentary analysis	25 documents	

programmes, annual reports, school guide			
Joint committees (representatives of teachers, students, families, municipal agents, and/or volunteers)	Participant observation	6 (8 hours recorded)	
PROA+ meetings (representatives of teachers, students, and families)	Participant observation		4 10 hours Field notes

Table 1. Methodological strategies.

These strategies have been developed in different ways in each school. On the one hand, as SY is a smaller school, it was possible to work with the whole school community, except for the families—we conducted an in-depth interview with one mother and held a reflection group meeting with nine family members. On the other hand, at the Cartima, the work was more focused on specific people selected for this purpose. In any case, all records of the data collection strategies were made on video and audio, using high-resolution tablets.

It is worth noting that the emerging topics were placed in the following categories (for more information, see Authors, in press): the importance of interpersonal relationships in the school and with the community; teaching pedagogical choices, professional identity; the impact of learning communities, educational and social projects; the use of ICT and professional knowledge; the school's policy project; among others.

Additionally, following the good practice guidelines of CSIC, participants were informed about anonymity, the possibility of reviewing the information, and the purpose of the research. A specific agreement was also signed with each participating entity

detailing the aims, objectives, strategies, and research processes, as well as the commitments of both parties.

Results

We develop three areas of focus that shed light on aspects that allow us to understand what considered disruptive practices consist of. They are axes that come from the emerging topics mentioned above and coincide in both experiences. Firstly, a sense of community that changes the established axes of power and the boundaries of educational practices; secondly, there is a shift in school management towards more horizontal, participatory, and democratic models, while maintaining strong pedagogical leadership; and thirdly, a strong interest in generating 'other' pedagogies that go beyond conventional ways of both learning and teaching.

In this sense, it is important to point out that disruptive practices show an ongoing process and not a point of arrival. The changes are the result of a consensus that is slowly being developed, with the participation of the entire educational community (teachers, students, and families).

Every little bit helps: the sense of community.

The work done by these secondary schools to strengthen a community-centred pedagogical project is an important cornerstone that has changed both the pedagogical sense of educational action and the pedagogical sense of teaching as an ongoing, shared project:

A learning community (...) initially takes you out of your comfort zone because, traditionally, you are in the classroom with the children, and the relationship you have

with the parents is just to provide them with information, but (now) you break that bond to create different bonds. (...) parents or grandparents come to participate, and you see that they are more actively involved. (Teacher, skills coordinator, SY)

The sense of community has different implications and characteristics that vary from case to case. Basically, we can differentiate between two ways of generating this relationship between community and school, closely related to the origin and characteristics of each one, and the demand for educational change that leads to its pedagogical proposal.

In the case of Cartima, we find a proposal that emerges from the need of a group of teachers to put into practice educational principles and proposals with which they felt identified, but that they did not find the possibility of developing them in their work Centres. Specifically, the head of the school tells us:

That group of teachers who had in common that we wrote in a blog the things we did and the conclusions we drew, [...], from there, strategies with a clear intention to change the school did emerge, didn't they? And, in fact, it is very interesting how many of us ended up in the management of schools because we concluded that there is a concrete ceiling that you can't go above if you are not the headmaster of the school.

Based on this initial proposal, a group of teachers offered a project to the educational administration to take charge of a new secondary school. Thus, 10 years ago, they began their journey, based on two basic pillars: interdisciplinary projects and relations with the community. In this sense, what we can call a *centrifugal process* takes place, from the inside out, which projects an alternative and different pedagogical proposal towards the community in which it is located. This community is the one that corresponds to the location of the school, and which is linked to the pedagogical project

by virtue of its administrative affiliation. However, once the project is underway, there is an "intentional" arrival of families who seek out the school because of its project and not only because of its geographical and administrative affiliation.

Thus, the backbone of the Cartima project is the idea of community: “*With the help of the families, we have woven this basket that is Cartima*” (Head of school, Cartima). This involvement has proved to be not only important, but essential to take the project forward. This perspective is especially important in an educational system, such as the Spanish one, in which the participation of families in school is formal and often merely decorative, despite what is legally established. From the outset, efforts were made to ensure that everyone felt the school belonged to the whole community, and not only to the teachers. As such, the community is an integral part of the educational project, and not just a resource to be called upon at certain moments in the activities of the school.

Projects are limited without a tight-knit educational community that shares the school's goals and philosophy. At the end of the day, it is also a way for families to give education the level of priority that we believe it should have at a social level (Head of school, Cartima)

From SY's point of view, the process is different, as the link between school and community would have a *centripetal* character. That is, from the outside in. In this case, in addition to a disruptive educational project, the fact of being in a particular setting, with specific social, cultural, and economic conditions, is a determining factor in the development of the project, which makes it move forward in a context-mediated sense. In short, the SY school has a project that is closely linked to the rural environment, becoming part of it, and committed to its reality and its possibility of development. As we observed, the school has become key to the revitalisation of the village and its

inhabitants, not only in terms of material resources or infrastructure, but also in terms of educational projects involving the community. This is the case, for example, with service-learning projects that go beyond the traditional boundaries of the school:

It takes a whole village to educate a child. (...) education must be taken out into the wider environment. And even more so with the service-learning projects (...) in fact, the Ocho de Marzo Square was renovated by the students. They repaired the benches and rebuilt the square. The same with the water trough in Carril Zalejo (teacher, SY)

Accordingly, the SY project cannot be understood without this link with the local area, which allows it to reconstruct its curriculum, the educational actions it proposes, its organization and management, and the relationships. This involvement changes the pupils' viewpoint in such a way that the school enters their universe of interests, moving forward in the sense that we stated in the introduction, of seeking their complicity and for education to acquire meaning for their reality, for their lives and for their future.

In both cases, horizontality is an essential factor that can be found in other aspects of school management. Families and students also take part in the decision-making process regarding the school's policy, in every sense of the word, breaking with the professionalizing logic of school management. Also, the concern for children's education is shared by all stakeholders, so it is important that relationships are far removed from the authoritarian attitudes that generally prevail in education. In Cartima, for example, the school tries to involve the families in their children's learning. It is not just about reporting grades, but about sharing the work done and its results. At the end of the school year, the students give their families a public presentation of the work they have done during the year, so that they can understand the procedure followed, the meaning behind the project, the work their children are doing, etc. This has also

contributed to families becoming more involved and ‘complicit’ in the project, which they were initially reluctant to support.

In both schools, working together to create a community is an important element as it allows for the sharing of efforts, resources, opportunities, and interests. In many cases, this collaboration can also involve other social actors: *“I belong to an association in Sierra de Yeguas that promotes alternative leisure activities, and we played traditional board games here during the break (...). This worked well, and the children loved it”* (mother, SY). In the case of Cartima, parents have drawn on their professional activities to hold workshops, collaborate in the teaching of certain subjects, together with other training activities for students, teachers, and other families.

This extends the boundaries of educational action beyond the walls of the classroom and inter-subjective relations. Retrieving the observation records, we can add to this:

We perceive a strong commitment of all the agents involved in the LC; every day that we arrive there is someone collaborating or proposing actions: the grandparents who participate with the teenagers in the gatherings, associations that carry out activities both for the pupils or for the village... There is an atmosphere of closeness (Observation, SY).

In short, the potential of the community is incorporated as a social, economic, or political element that involves all educational actors, understanding that education is a matter of shared responsibility. In the two cases studied, the community is part of the educational decisions and practice, and not only as an external support element.

Referring to the Spanish context mentioned above, this becomes disruptive as it raises other social and cultural forms that imply a more democratic, situated and engaged vision of education in daily practices.

With your ability and my will, we can make it happen: shared management and leadership.

The management and leadership systems in these schools are based on democratic procedures, emerging management bodies, and collegiate decision-making. A clear example is the joint committees (teachers, students, families, and external agents), found in both schools and in which issues such as the management of resources and spaces, pedagogical choices, educational approaches, and objectives, etc., are decided. Even the research team was given the possibility to actively participate in the meetings, which invited us to become more involved in the dynamics of the centres (participant observation, SY and Cartima research). In other words, it is a kind of assembly-based management.

The joint committees were new to me. (...) I liked the idea because I can see that there is a connection and a relationship between students, teachers, people from outside, families, and you from the university. We all have a say; the students have a say and I think it's a really good idea. (teacher, SY)

Furthermore, both projects create their own spaces based on cooperation, support and finding partnerships to carry out initiatives that are not necessarily dependent on the management team. The SY school have an education coordination team: *"We collect information, which is then passed on to the heads of department. Then each head of department passes it on to the teachers. It's a way of channelling information so that it doesn't get lost. And then there are the teachers' meetings in which we all participate"* (teacher, SY)

As Cartima is a project-based school, these somewhat 'informal' coordination spaces tend to multiply. They are created either by a member of the teaching staff who acts as a coordinator, or emerge during the planning sessions, or throughout the school

year when needed. The teachers involved in these projects work independently, as we were able to record in the observations. Coordination, therefore, takes considerable time and effort.

Many project coordination meetings have been held during the breaks this year. A project coordinator is appointed—they are either the person that devised the project, or the person who came up with the idea and is very clear about what they want to do. Then, a month before the project starts, we meet up once a week during the break to plan the project (teacher, Cartima)

All educational initiatives can be used to channel information, demands, and needs. There is an awareness of the need to create spaces where educational relationships and the concerns, needs, and demands of groups or individuals can be discussed, and it is their approach to shared management. As we could observe, the focus was constantly placed on collecting and processing information to channel it to the community; even through informal but more effective strategies, such as talks about issues of interest between corridors or at the end of the school day: "a group of teachers and children are organising the planning of traditional games for the subjects of physical education and language to then transfer the proposal to the classroom" (SY). It reshapes both the model of the educational organisation and the community, imbuing them with values in which the individual takes precedence: "*In the relationship with the students, we are first people and then students. In this school, I have an academic family and this family supports and helps me.*" (member of the service personnel staff, SY). "*Apart from exceptional cases, the families work with us in our quest to educate the children.*" (head of school, SY)

An important issue is the increase in teacher workload. Teachers are no longer limited to teaching their subject in class. Instead, their activities are more varied. "*What*

you have to appreciate about this school is that people work a lot harder here than anywhere else,” says a teacher at Cartima. This is not a problem for those who are invested in the project and have a both personal and professional commitment to it, but they feel that this comes at a significant personal cost. As another Cartima teacher explains:

The commitment to the project and the fact that you know everyone in the community and in the village makes you a teacher 24/7. If you are out shopping and you see a child doing something, you are still their teacher. And I see this as a positive thing because education is not just a school project—it concerns everyone. (SY teacher in a reflection group)

For some teachers at Cartima, this means that their commitment to the project wanes and *“in the end, it’s the students who suffer”* (teacher, Cartima). This can make it challenging to keep the projects going, or even for some teachers to remain at the school. As one mother points out, *“Teachers must be fully invested. So, what happens? Some teachers come here and leave after a year, because they can't handle the workload and the fact that they must be so involved.”* (mother, Cartima). The head teacher adds: *“If you are not willing to rethink your teaching methods, or to understand that this is an educational project with very specific guidelines and very specific objectives, then it makes sense for you to leave.”* In contrast, because the SY has fewer students, this commitment comes more naturally and is seen as part of the nature of the school. Only one teacher said that, because she was from the village, she felt she had to separate her teaching role from her private life (record of observation).

The sustainability of the project depends primarily on the relationships that are built up, participation as an educational key to transformation, and an understanding that the project benefits both students and society. In short, both schools provide

teachers with an important professional development opportunity that goes beyond teaching their subjects and offers them other kinds of rewards, commitments, and leadership roles.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step: pedagogical choices.

The pedagogical approach involves the whole school practice, including its conflicts, limitations, and challenges. This represents a departure from older education models based solely on efficiency and organisational and curricular efficacy, and instead adopts a more complex, socially useful, and educationally meaningful system. Some of the most interesting aspects are outlined below.

In terms of teaching objectives, the focus of education is found to be on both personal and professional development. Students are expected to use their skills and equip themselves for future success, while appreciating the educational value of what they learn in the classroom: *“Students learn skills and curriculum content and can then choose to prepare for a future career through vocational training or continue their secondary education”*. (head of school, SY)

The students’ objectives are essential to achieving success in their education. The skills, content, and knowledge they acquire are not only practically useful, but also help them to better understand the world they live in. In the Cartima initiatives, for example, the first step is to *“see what the students are interested in”* (teacher, Cartima) and relate this interest to the learning objectives. According to the same teacher, this approach *“requires thinking more and thinking about everything, but it leads to a much more logical way of learning.”* This student-centred approach is key to understanding the educational projects of these schools. As one teacher at Cartima put it, *“you have to listen to everything the students say because, even if what they say is nonsense, there is*

a reason for it.” This means shifting the focus from the curriculum to the students and families changing the power dynamics in the educational relationship. It does not mean that anything goes, but rather that it implies a different commitment to the students within a framework of critical reflection by all.

Some teachers believe that education should have a transcendent purpose and that what happens in schools should enable social change.

My profession would be worthless if there was no desire for transcendence. I want to make a difference and leave my mark wherever I go. Even if I can't make a big impact, I can at least try to leave things a little better than I found them. (teacher, SY)

When planning my lessons, I create a programme with specific materials and ask my students to put away their books. I also create programmes for those who want to learn about nature, health, plants, and animals. As a teacher, I believe that we should be something else for our students, and not just teach from a book. (teacher, SY)

Providing students with personalised attention can be a challenge, as some teachers have pointed out the lack of administrative support for tutoring despite being part of a learning community. Several teachers feel that not all students receive the necessary attention in the right way and at the right time: *“So, when you go into a 60-minute class, and you have so much diversity in the class, sometimes you don't have time to do everything (...). And that's when the tutor should step in, to deal with any problems”*. (teacher, academic secretary, SY). This led many teachers to bring these situations to the attention of the whole team and to consider how to support the various needs, regardless of the subjects involved, at the educational level. *“Sometimes spontaneously and based on trust, they made changes in daily planning to address what really mattered. For example, (...) there was a conflict, and they devoted the mathematics class to do some strategies to solve it”* (Observation, SY).

Another teacher describes how the institutional format affects them and the challenges it presents in achieving the objectives, implementing the educational project, and attending to the students. This highlights the difficulties they encounter in making more radical breaks in their teaching practices:

What does the institution give us? Well, a Seneca programme, with a student body numbered from one to thirty, in alphabetical order. We must give grades from one to ten, although we would prefer to give qualitative grades (...), but at the end of term we have to give a number. The content of the curriculum is divided into teaching modules, and we are not happy about this. (teacher, Cartima)

For many teachers, the obvious solution is for tutoring to take place daily, without the need for a specific time and place. Teachers feel that tutoring should be a more holistic exercise, embedded in the teaching process. *“So, when I’m teaching language, I’m tutoring. And when I teach any subject, I am tutoring. Even when I am not tutoring, I am also dealing with cross-cutting topics like values, emotional intelligence, love for people and culture” (teacher, SY)*

Pedagogically speaking, both educational projects are unanimously understood to be within the framework of active teaching methods. Although each has its own characteristics, both projects move away from a transmissive, segmented, and repetitive model of teaching towards one that is a holistic, active, and participative. Furthermore, it is a collective project that involves everyone, transforming time, space, and content to achieve an educational experience that is socially and culturally relevant. Individual actions are subordinated to the more important collective project.

One of my second-year students, Curro, told me today: “Do you mind missing class? I had a class with them.” Well, the truth is that I don’t, because I work at a different pace

with them. I mean, whatever they learn, they learn it well, and they see its usefulness.

(teacher, SY)

This involves a change in the meaning of students' work and the way classes are conducted. It is no longer about 'delivering' content, of worrying about finishing the syllabus, or maintaining order in the classroom. The key is for students to be actively engaged in projects that are interesting to them and to work together cooperatively. *"We think it's important that students do things in class, that they apply knowledge, interact with each other and that there is interactive group work. This is achieved through active methodologies. If you spend most of the class time lecturing, not much else will happen"* (head of school, Cartima)

The methodology or specific curricular content in themselves do not shape the disruptive sense of both experiences. Rather, it is a tool used to implement a project that involves a different way of perceiving students and the work of teachers, of understanding the meaning of content and knowledge, and of relationships with the context and families. The work of both teachers and students is based on a collaborative approach.

"You have to coordinate with other teachers beforehand." *"So, when are you going to teach this?"* *"Come on then, let's get started. I'll send you the website and we'll see how we can coordinate."* *"Let me know what you're going to teach so I can also talk about it and we can work on it together."* (teacher, Cartima)

One of the key educational pillars of the projects is deemed to be the teachers' approach to their students, around which the whole school project is structured. Existing

power relations are abandoned in favour of participation on an equal footing with the students.

I think it's important that we have a meal together, just as we have a training day. I think it relieves some of the tension that one brings to a new centre. We all know each other very well, we welcome newcomers with open arms, no matter what job they do, and I think you can sense that. (head teacher, SY)

The idea is that education and professional practice should be based on a relationship with others and their interests, questions, and concerns. There is a hope that the project, the people, and the atmosphere created in the school, will draw people in and make them stay.

Discussion and conclusions

Disruptive pedagogies are being the subject of debate in education in recent years. As Fullan (1987) suggests, disruptive practices require a change in existing practice towards a new or revised practice (potentially involving one of three elements: materials, teaching, beliefs) to achieve certain desired outcomes in student learning, encouraging active student participation, critical thinking, and creativity. While their application has been more common in urban settings and elite schools, they can also have a significant impact in rural secondary schools, as these often face unique challenges in fostering a more student-centred approach and local context (González, Cortés and Leite, 2020).

Understanding these learning ecologies (Martínez and Fernández, 2018) through the experience presented, requires approaches that consider disruptive pedagogies as community actions and creative transformers (Christensen et al., 2016). Therefore,

because of our ethnographic analytical work, some interesting aspects of the following four axes can be outlined:

(A) *Participation*. We believe that the ideas of critical pedagogy are relevant on this point as they suggest that school success is based on constitutive, participatory, and inclusive processes involving all social and school agents, rather than on a static sequence of curricular content that excludes the possibilities of social and school structuring (Kincheloe, 2008). This participatory dimension offers an opportunity for educational experimentation, a collaborative culture, and the search for shared meanings in the school experience, as we have expressed above. In fact, this dimension creates opportunities not only in the two schools studied, but also in other schools that reflect the practices that have been implemented, and that have had positive results for the school community. In this sense, participating in and of the community, leads us as researchers to create different "ways of thinking about common problems and ways to solve them" (Beach, 2023, 347), as stated in the results.

(B) *Active learning*. Following Christensen, Raynor and McDonald (2016) regarding interactive and disruptive educational practices, we endorse the idea of extracting meaning from the everyday when addressing educational processes and the curriculum. This epistemological dimension, which sees knowledge as something in constant motion, leads to more open and flexible methodological possibilities. It is worth remembering that, in Spain, despite the significant changes taking place, secondary education is still very static and anchored in predetermined curricula, textbooks, and lecture-based learning. As we have stated in a previous paper, a disruptive approach involves "*making an*

ideological break with a passive and transmissive education model and developing more open and flexible educational initiatives. This means linking the curriculum to daily and meaningful experiences, encouraging the practical application of learning, and rallying the educational community to prioritise actions involving the students, among other factors” (Cortés et al., 2020, p. 2374). According to Gajardo and Torrego (2023), it is necessary to generate collaborative educational strategies with students in order to promote a transformation based on the freedom and autonomy of school subjects.

(C) *The role of teachers.* One important similarity in both ethnographies is that these projects led teachers to rethink their professional roles and working practices. There has been a shift from lecture-based teaching to focusing on relationships with students and other educational agents, such as families, to promote broader, unique, context-specific proposals. This coincides with the work of Grove & Fisher (2006), in which they express the importance of interpersonal relationships in the collaborative teaching culture; the teacher has become a mediator of knowledge to construct a pedagogical project (Echeverría, 2015; Downes, 2017),

(D) *Management systems.* Finally, there was a shift in school management and governance models towards democratic values and participation based on creating opportunities for shared leadership. As observed in the results of the ethnographic experience, these schools have tried to move away from vertical management models centred on the management team and teaching staff, towards promoting collaborative initiatives with the community that include shared decision-making (Cortés et al, 2023). An educational and social project also becomes a democratic political project (Bilbeny, 2002) that generates new

organisational possibilities and micropolitical cultures (Forkby & Batsleer, 2020).

From the axes presented, we understand that educational ethnography becomes a resource of great interest to record and contribute to educational action a profound reflection of everyday life and, in turn, focusing on the two contexts studied, to make visible and give meaning to the processes of democratization of the school organizations involved. The incorporation of disruptive pedagogical approaches in ethnographic research in rural secondary schools enriches our understanding of educational dynamics and its socio-cultural implications, as it makes visible the epistemological and organizational positions that are permeable to the new communicational systems of today's society (Lave, 2011), which have a critical and transformative view of school traditions and cultures. Also, from this perspective, research must generate commitments with the subjects of study (Vigo-Arrazola, 2023), and build collaborative spaces in the research processes.

In conclusion, we understand that disruptive educational practices are based on a transformative sense (Cortés, Rivas, Márquez and González, 2020) that ideologically break with a passive and transmitting education; develop more open and flexible educational proposals; relate the curriculum to the daily and significant experiences of the educational community; encourage the practical application of learning; and mobilize the educational community by prioritizing actions on the students. In short, today's school requires environments in which teaching and learning processes are carried out in a mobile, adaptable, versatile, and democratic way.

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