Research Paper

The Learning Communities Project in School Transformation with the Contributions of Social Education

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ABSTRACT: *The 'Learning Community' (LC) is considered a project/strategy for the sociocultural transformation of the school and the surrounding community environment, with its organizational model aiming to prevent school and coexistence problems, provide answers and promote measures to improve student performance and performance, develop learning with the involvement of interactive groups (families, associations, social entities, volunteers and socio-educational partners of the school, etc.), articulated with the municipal education policy. LC implementation is only possible with the contribution of social education and based on dialogical learning based on the learning theories of Vygotsky, Bruner, Appel, Habermas, P. Freire and critical pedagogy. LC favours 'successful' activities and participation of interactive groups and, simultaneously, the inclusion and sustainable development of the local community. We start from a hermeneutic analysis of literature/bibliography from basic to thematic, with conceptual clarification and having the following objectives: Understanding LC as a school transformation project and local/community development, integral and integrative that implies the dialogical participation of participants; Identify its methodological aspects in the LC model; Know LC in its integral and systemic vision of education and learning in satisfying educational needs, sharing knowledge and experiences for a new culture in tune with the formation of citizens; Determine the role of social education in socio-educational intervention within LCs; Reflect LC's contributions to the integration of school and non-school education to improve learning practices and overcome school failure and dropout. Despite the good results obtained by LC, there are some criticisms made of it, but the benefit of communication dialogue as a pillar of its model, the interaction and participation of the various participants, greater attention to the 'Teacher-Student' and 'Teacher-Student' relationships must be recognized. School-Family-Community', improving coexistence and contributions to reducing conflicts and school failure.*
KEYWORDS: *Learning Communities; School; Dialogic pedagogy; Social Education; Local development.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Since the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the European Commission has promoted greater social and territorial cohesion and inclusion in Europe, considering the desire to develop in a sustainable, intelligent and inclusive way, the inadequate levels of literacy (including digital) in member countries, the problem of educational exclusion and school failure and dropout, with successful education as a central element in improving the quality and well-being of European citizenship. In this sense, the 2020 and 2030 Strategies subsequently emerged, which prioritized the development of students' skills for active citizenship, for an inclusive Europe based on a knowledge economy that transforms the lives of citizens, people of different cultures/religions and the local transformation of counties [1]. Gradually, the Learning Community (from now on LC) emerges, considered as a project for socio-cultural transformation of the school and an organizational model that aims to prevent coexistence problems, provide answers and promote measures to improve student performance and performance, develop learning in students, with the involvement of interactive groups (families, associations, social entities, volunteers and socio-educational partners of the school), articulated with the municipal education policy - Strategic Education Plan of the

Municipality. Now this action of the LCs is only possible through social education (based on a school social pedagogy), based on the dialogical communicative model of learning (cemented in the epistemological foundations of Bruner, Vygotsky, Appel, Habermas, P. Freire, etc.) [1].

The LCs help the inclusion of students, overcoming their learning difficulties, situations of indiscipline and sociocultural inequalities through the committed and responsible participation of educational actors in the community, in which everyone is available to understand the school and the desired education. for the students and this causes an educational and social transformation of the school, changing the way of understanding the educational system and local educational policy – on the basis of the 'School-Community' relationship [1]. The main purpose of LC is to change educational practice, class organization, interpersonal relationships and school organization. Now LC is this sociocultural and educational transformation of schools with the intention of achieving quality education for all people, opening up spaces and promoting educational processes for the participation of the entire community, including intergenerational. Now we know pedagogically that classes and educational spaces surrounding teaching-learning allow students to reflect, acquire knowledge and develop skills (including generative virtual intelligence) based on their practices and perceptions, with LC being an educational contribution to modifying these teaching practices. in order to favour social change and reduce inequalities [1].

Effectively, LC, being a bet on an educational model inserted in the information society, is oriented towards the social and cultural transformation of the school and its surrounding environment, as its objective is to provide effective responses to socio-educational and economic inequalities. , aggravated today with cultural diversity, as it attempts to solve the problems of school failure and dropout, segregation and school conflicts, in such a way that it presents itself as a complement to educational and social inclusion [1]. They are guided by a participatory dimension that promotes the quality of education, enabling the opening to all spaces of the social/cultural environment of the local community, in addition to promoting the democratization process through dialogue between different educational actors, who may be from different cultures and religions [1]. It is, therefore, an opening of the 'School' to the local community, with the intention of improving education, allowing the expansion of knowledge and providing access to opportunities for all students, based on the community vision of education, that is, LC builds a positive model of education [i]. The participation of actors is one of these central axes of LC, its basis of operation, since the (democratic) ways in which this participation and dialogical learning take place depend on the context of each community and its needs and response priorities [ii].

This article is based on the idea of reflecting the educational need and the participation of educational and social agents, of socio-educational projects in the implementation of LC, through dialogic learning, inclusion and coexistence between cultures in the school context, in an interdisciplinarity of contributions, in theoretical terms, from different areas of educational sciences and experiences already had in European Commission Programs, for example 'INCLUD-DE' (Strategies for inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe from Education – between 2006-2011) and others in overcoming school failure, especially in the most vulnerable social groups (cultural minorities, immigrants, people with disabilities, young people, etc.). We cannot ignore the role of local actors, as active agents in the transformation of the territory, promoting different actions, as the term 'community' acts through commitment and responsibility, exercising rights/duties with the intention of improving the quality of life of citizens [iii].

We use the hermeneutic methodology in analysing the literature or basic bibliography on LC and related concepts that relate it, establishing the following objectives of the study: Understanding LC as a school transformation project and local/community, integral and integrative development that implies participation dialogic of the participants; Identify its methodological aspects in the CA model; Know LC in its integral and systemic vision of education and learning in satisfying educational needs, sharing knowledge and experiences for a new culture in tune with the formation of citizens; Determine the role of social education in socio-educational intervention within LCs; Reflect LC's contributions to the integration of school and non-school education to improve learning practices and overcome school failure and dropout. We can admit that LC is related to (municipal) educational policy, in a strategy for the sustainable development of the territory and in socio-educational and cultural transformation, based on the protagonist of educational and social agents and citizens in general [iv].

II. EDUCATION IN THE PRACTICAL CONTEXT OF LEARNING

Learning is a phenomenon influenced by the sharing of knowledge and experiences, in which the contexts, environment and interactions with others serve as scaffolding for its construction [i] (FERNANDES et al., 2016). The fundamental thing is the construction of knowledge and not its reproduction and, therefore, the processes that students put into practice and the use they make of them are central to the construction of new knowledge and its understanding. The greater the individual's connection to the context in which they learn, the better their learning will be acquired and, therefore, communities of practice function as a process that promotes

this type of situated learning and respective involvement in the social practice in which we learn. Wenger et al.'s social learning theory (in 2002), based on the principles of constructivist theory and learning contexts, based on our experiences and our social participation in the community. Now learning is a matter of participating and contributing to the practices in which we are involved.

According to this social learning theory, learning is situated in practice and the social groups in which this learning occurs are defined as communities of practice. In this way, practice is defined in the spontaneous/improvised way in which tasks are carried out, responding to a change, in a situational environment guided by tacit or networked knowledge [i]. In this sense, the term 'Community of Practice' proposed by Wenger et al. (2002, p. 4) considering them as "[…] groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis." In these communities, social participation is voluntary and open to interested people, in a learning process inserted in the pillars of interaction: the meaning attributed to life and the world (capacity for individual/collective change, the domain=group); sense of practice (experimenting in action); the community (common sharing, sociocultural configurations); and identity (local attachment) [i]. The technologies themselves, with their dimensions, require the community of practice to integrate: the social structuring of knowledge; knowledge sharing processes – interactions with the need to interact meanings; situational learning, teaching and non-formal education contexts with specific learning activities and group/team work; management of the learner's attention, motivating and supporting their synchronous interactions, with perceptive moments of attention. A notable example of the success in terms of innovation is the work of the 'Centro IDEA-UMinho' at the University of Minho/Braga, which encourages and develops the creation of 'Communities of Practice', in particular the following: 'Communities of Audience Response Systems '- ARS (since 2017); 'Community of Team-Based Learning' - TBL-Now (since 2019); 'Gamification Community' (since 2021).

Effectively, apprentices and apprentices in a community of practice are also a 'Learning Community' (LC). Hence, the community of practice emerges into a learning community that transforms the school and will involve non-formal and informal spaces and the community sociocultural environment, in an interaction carried out by the participants, which implies learning knowledge, incorporating experiences, sharing of everyday actions and social and school coexistence [i]. It is a fact that the concept 'Learning Community' was disseminated with various meanings, which gave rise to socio-educational policies and programs in several countries, initially in the USA, for example: James Comer's School Development Program - University from Yale; Success Project for All by Robert Levin -Univ. by John Hopkins; the Henry Levin Accelerated Schools -Univ. from Stanford; etc. [i]. These programs with intervention in areas and environments of marginalization, with people at risk of social exclusion, with students from vulnerable families, minorities or ethnicities, with behavioral problems and conflicts, associated with teachers' discouragement and lack of motivation, had the capacity to overcome failure and school dropout in certain schools, based on the richness of cultural diversity and the participatory and community work of educational and social agents, collaboration, consensus in decisions taken together and in solving problems accepting responsibility [i]. These projects for social and cultural transformation of the school, in the face of educational problems and needs and inequalities in access to opportunities, make us reflect that the school must interact more with the environment and the community, in an egalitarian dialogue to achieve a society based on learning, in participatory education that fills and involves all spaces for learning, from the classroom and school to the community and local territory, in order to improve the quality of teaching, regardless of social and cultural level [i].

III. THE LEARNING COMMUNITY AS A TRANSFORMATIVE ELEMENT OF SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY

In fact, LC is therefore: a community educational proposal with a solidarity dimension delivered to the local (municipal) community; a project for the social and cultural transformation of the school with repercussions and involvement of the community for sustainable development; a proposal for a school model that considers educational practices as ways of overcoming failure and school dropout; a premise of a human community with agents, institutions, resources and learning networks, which involves the school, families, streets/neighbourhoods, spaces (public, private), libraries and museums, material and immaterial heritage and respective culture, the means of communication, the arts and all expressions that articulate school and extracurricular activities; a premise of participation and joint effort between 'Family-School-Community; organizational project that prioritizes learning more than education; project that encourages the search for and respect for diversity, in the construction and experimentation of intergenerational and multicultural involvement; project that develops systems and ways of learning based on cooperation and solidarity and providing local political (municipal) and territorial changes and strategies [i].

In recent decades, the trend in Europe has been based on promoting greater training and social cohesion, which overcomes the rates of school dropout and failure and, simultaneously, enabling greater flexibility

(curricular, pedagogical differentiation, use of new technologies, access educational opportunities and training completion) and more learning, which implies development (local/municipal), better quality of life, coexistence and combating social inequality in the territory and at school [i]. The LC are a community model for preventing and resolving conflicts and socio-educational problems generated in schools, but with their origin and extension in the community, which implies an inclusive school model for all [i].

The LC project, being a process of transformation of the school and its surroundings, based on the intervention of educational actions that favour the participation of the local community, allows improving student results and coexistence (objectives: effectiveness, equity and social cohesion) on the basis : transformation of school structure and culture, as the school is an agent of change; dialogical perspective of learning (standards and decisions by consensus, enhancing pragmatic and technical theoretical-practical training); implementation of activities and actions (gatherings, library with tutorials, training of family members, interactive groups of students with adult support in carrying out activities, mediation model -dialogic conflict resolution, teacher training, inclusion of generative artificial intelligence in disciplinary areas , the educational participation of the local community), which can improve student performance and performance [i]. Basically, schools/educational institutions that transform their educational environment and environment (social and cultural) into learning (formal, non-formal and informal) for everyone without distinction [i].

It is obvious that a school like LC is still a learning-cantered school, where all educational participants work together with the aim of fostering a culture of participation and collaboration, in the effective improvement of performance and academic performance, valuing distributed leadership in an openness to learning from others in the school community and from community spaces and the surrounding environment. In other words, it is a social participation that involves sharing ideas, strategies, resources in mutual support in the educational process of students and, if possible, with connection with other LCs, to enrich knowledge and practices (networks of good -practices), relations with the local community involving socio-educational partners of schools and the municipality in building the capacity for continuous improvement (valuation of personal, social and professional capital). One of the characteristics of LC is positive expectations as it focuses on developing the capabilities and possibilities of all participants and contributing to the sustainable development of the community [i].

Its main objective is quality education (integrated and participatory) and socio-educational coexistence, based on the renewal of organizational change, giving greater protagonist to students and families, to social and educational agents in the community and to educational services in the municipality and the community. in general, with democratic criteria and dialogue in the diversity of interactions and flexibility of educational practice and means of access to information [i]. The CA implementation phases are limited to the following: Initiation and awareness phase – main lines of the project and its planning and context analysis (for example diagnostic analysis or Swot) with information work sessions and debate with educational agents surroundings; training of teachers and education technicians, families and students, volunteers and municipal education services to carry out the project; Decision-making phase in commitment and co-responsibility in the development of the project, through meetings and involvement of educational agents; Phase of emergence of reflected ideas arising from meetings and proposal for a school model and interaction with the community (articulation with Pedagogical Project and Municipal Strategic Education Plan) and contextualization of the guiding principles and generators of LC from the school to the local community; Priority selection phase for project execution, taking into account the material and human resources involved in planning; Action phase with diversified activities and interactions between groups, which implies the consolidation of the LC execution process and people training; Phase of evaluation and joint reflection between participating social and educational agents.

In fact, the LC, being a form of inclusion, requires interactive groups that can promote: ethical and civic values of coexistence, valuing diversity; the dialogical model of conflict resolution to build positive relationships and democratic dialogue; commitment to the action/intervention project involving all the school's educational actors in line with the municipality's Strategic Education Plan; improving students' academic performance and performance with a reduction in failure and school dropout; development of social and interpersonal skills for a healthy educational and social coexistence, based on dialogue and quality education in training processes. Building a LC implies reviewing the distinction between 'School-Community', 'Practical Community and Learning Community', 'Educating City and Learning Spaces', between 'Formal, Non-formal and Informal Education', etc., in conceptions and ways of seeing all these conceptual and epistemological links. The important thing is to build educational and sustainable development plans, since community-school-municipality are not separate entities, in the formation, well-being and quality of life of people and citizens [i].

Therefore, in LC's all involved participants learn, help each other, share and develop knowledge and experiences and in the case of students, they foster self-esteem, recognition of 'successful' or successful activities in their performance and enhance cooperation and coexistence [i].

IV. ROLE OF SOCIAL EDUCATION IN THE LEARNING COMMUNIT

Currently, the school, where the various educational agents perform their functions, presents clear challenges to which it must respond, for example [i]: fulfilling an education aimed at the formation of active citizenship; promote coexistence as a bulwark of relationships; integrate demands from society and the job market into the schooling process; generate autonomy with essential socio-educational actions; articulate interculturality with learning values; produce social cohesion as an axis of the educational community; foster identity and a sense of community; develop participatory learning that is open to the worldview and ways of life; convert education as inclusive and for all. Social education, based on socio-educational intervention in the school context, triggers a pedagogy cantered on inclusion, community and social equity, and must accompany changes in the (inclusive) school and be associated with the development of the socialization process, new relationships coexistence and communication, taking care of the social in harmony with the educational and collaborating with 'Family-School'.

In LCs, the social educator can organize a seminar with family members who want to learn new knowledge (new technologies), with the participation of other people, as well as organizing the library with tutoring for students and families, contributing with their transformative intervention to the objectives of the LC. Therefore, we consider the role of the social educator to be crucial, as their profession has a social and pedagogical dimension that generates educational contexts, mediating actions and conflict resolution, training interventions and enabling the incorporation of students into the diversity of social networks – development of sociability and social relations, in sociocultural promotion in an openness to new possibilities for acquiring knowledge, goods and culture, guiding them towards participation and social coexistence [i].

Evidently, the changes generated by the current digital society and globalization have changed the forms of interaction in schools and relationships, making social education a necessity in responses and intervention measures to new problems generated in spaces and in the school context, which they are from outside – community. The functions of the social educator are immense, from detecting, preventing, analysing social problems and their causes; mediate school, relational, integration and coexistence conflicts through dialogue; participate in the organization of daily school life; promote and stimulate socio-educational and/or socio-cultural activities; prevent behaviours that harm the learning process [i]. Thus, the role of social education, being the practical dimension of social pedagogy, is to intervene in new contexts and situations that arise at school, in conjunction with the LC model in the social, educational and cultural improvement of all students, teachers and families [i].

In fact, LCs give new opportunities to the tasks of social education based on a new internal organization and a different way of establishing the relationship between education in school spaces and in external community spaces, in a coordination and enhancement of the community's socio-educational resources. and in line with municipal educational services [i]. For example, a CA in a suburban area or a barrio, the task of the social educator consists of intervening in absenteeism and school dropout and lack of motivation for school, interacting through dialogue with the students' families, analyzing their disparate problems and their surrounding environment, converting its intervention between the school and the community [i]. In this sense, its actions are coordinated with municipal educational and social services, with representatives of the local community, with school support technicians and teachers, in order to mediate conflicts, help overcome integration and learning difficulties, promote social and school coexistence [i].

We think that social education contributes to the sustainability of LC. Participation (dialogical), at all levels of organization, decision-making, planning and activities, constitutes the fundamental element in LC, as teaching is not only for teachers, but also for other education professionals, families, volunteers and community educational agents [i]. Thus, social educators, in their joint work with other professionals, can give new impetus to the task of transforming the circumstances that limit people's social integration and, simultaneously, promote the improvement of the community. The functions of educational agents, inside and outside the school space and, consequently carrying out tasks within the scope of LC's, drive the transformation of reality around the school towards inclusion (educational and social), with more dialogue and communication, more values (respect, solidarity) and participatory democracy, more reflection and critical vision, more knowledge and community development [i]. In this sense, the task of social education is to ensure the inclusion of those people, especially students, who are at risk and/or socially excluded, with inequalities in access and integration into the school and community environment. [i].

Therefore, according to the perspective of Sáez ([i], social education has a pedagogical and social space in the school (and community) context, guiding its socio-educational interventions, the objectives and activities to be developed to meet the needs of the educational community, encompassing these contexts innovative educational experiences centered on real learning and incorporating students and participants in CA into the diversity of social networks and cultural and social promotion.

V. RETHINKING LEARNING COMMUNITIE S WITHIN SCHOOLS AND THE COMMUNITY

We said previously that LC's constitute an experience of a school transformation project (social, cultural), whether in a rural territory or in a simple suburban neighbourhood, in a reorganization of resources to overcome school failure, conflicts and improve the quality of education and, consequently, people's lives at the local level [ii]. Its commitment is based on community participation and dialogical learning (egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, instrumental dimension, learning through interactions, equality of differences, etc.), through leadership in the prioritization of actions, interactive groups, collaborative work, in mobilizing citizenship, exchanging knowledge, improving coexistence and promoting solidarity [ii].

It is based on the active participation of social agents, the school and the community itself in different socio-educational and/or socio-cultural spaces and decision-making in transformation, for example: through the joint action of teachers, students, education technicians, families and others agents and/or identities and collectives in creating learning conditions, with the introduction of the social and family context in the classroom, with appropriate objectives and resources. Therefore, CL is understood as a pedagogical strategy, inserted in the socio-constructivist vision and critical and dialogic pedagogy, integrating a range of specific and complementary approaches and measures that favour co-learning [ii]. Its implementation depends on 'successful' activities and interactive groups of people who come together around learning, in a dynamic of dialogue to learn together, resolve conflicts and educational problems that concern them and build a common project with repercussions on the sustainable development of society. Community [ii].

With a pedagogical perspective, LC is concerned with responding to the 'how' and 'why' of strategies and means to achieve a new way of operating at the school, promoting the planning and implementation of the pedagogical process based on principles of the social construction of knowledge. This pedagogical nature seeks to create conditions for a dialogical relationship (the basis of education) motivating complementarity, reciprocity, mutual enrichment, commitment and collective responsibility [ii]. The sociological perspective guides the LC towards concerns about community (municipal) development and improving the quality of people's livelihoods and the local community. This view responds to social and environmental problems (poverty, social isolation, exclusion, behavioural conflicts, devitalization of the social fabric, inequalities) creates a community spirit of organizing a way of life, in the construction of identity processes, feelings of belonging, in the acquisition of useful cultural knowledge, in order to achieve social transformations and changes [ii].

It is said that what begins at school must go beyond its walls to the neighbourhood, to the streets/squares, to public/private spaces, to the associative fabric, to health, to culture and heritage, etc., converting these areas and spaces in true contexts of social coexistence, generating processes of community participation that promote active citizenship and local development [ii]. This transformation of the school into a LC, with the participation of educational agents and the incorporation of socio-educational actions and community involvement, requires coordinated action by education agents with municipal education services and with local social actors themselves [ii]. Thus, we move towards an educational municipality, territory and source of learning, which articulates broad, transversal and innovative educational actions, with the reinforcement of powers and resources, from the school, originating an urban pedagogy that encourages (permanent) training and inclusion, based on coexistence. This leading role of municipalities in educational development and coordinated with CAs promotes the active participation of citizens through dialogical pedagogy [ii]. Simultaneously, this transformation produces changes in the territory and/or in the community and in the participating people, in order to overcome exclusion and social inequalities, through education and formal, non-formal and informal learning [ii].

It is a fact that the criticisms that have been made towards the implementation of LC's (designation of utopianism, idealism, lack of resources, need for a large number of people willing to teach), despite the results achieved in several European and Latin American countries. It must be recognized that there is more than one solution to solve the problems of educational complexity and the needs that LC intends to fulfil, based on pedagogical idealism, as there are other project models that can achieve results to these increasingly contingent and context-dependent problems. and surrounding community. The actual contextualization itself (school, sociocultural and/or socio-educational and community) and the educational (school) matrix of complexity is what determines the model and form of application of the measures to be established in solving educational problems and this contextual diversity and the experiences and evidence obtained do not allow us to generalize the LC model strategy as an effective solution. In other words, it is from the pluralism of each context that we find the best response to this same pluralism with more viable and effective solutions with the combination of strategies or models and LC is one of these applications of school transformation [ii].

Effectively, we have moved from a constructivist paradigm to a conversational one, guided from a sociological and pedagogical point of view, but there are more strategies to transform a context and one of them is dialogic learning, but it is not the only one, nor the most effective for other school situations. and contexts and, therefore, LC's are one of these effective and viable solutions. It is obvious that dialogical learning presents a

crucial idea, among others, due to the importance of social interactions and their quality in the progress of learning, with other factors that also ensure this quality [ii]. This quality of social interaction has many methodological factors, but internal factors also arise in the teaching-learning process that are crucial and cannot be achieved with a certain voluntarism of conversational interaction [ii].

In short, we must recognize, given the experiences carried out in several LC countries (in particular, the USA, Spain, Brazil, Argentina, etc.), the great benefit is communicational dialogue as a pillar of the process of this model, which if well organized and managed can achieve greater interaction and participation of the various participants and educational agents (shared responsibility) and better attention to the 'Teacher-Student' (placing the student at the centre of learning objectives) and 'School-Family' (active participation related to the community and environment) relationships), to everyone's access to learning under equal conditions, with everyone participating in the active and collaborative process.

We know that learning constitutes a dynamic process of a social nature, which requires dialogue and pedagogical interaction (relational sense) in a communicational and practical relationship, as subjects of education, community and environment where we develop our abilities and develop skills to intervene intentionally in the context in which we live. Now learning in learning communities requires participation, collaboration and involvement in a collective/community purpose, through its praxis, in a commitment to social inclusion among all participants in LC at the community level and in conjunction with education strategies at the local level, municipal or territorial.

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