Chapter 7
It Takes a Village to Overcome School Failure and Dropout: Innovative Educational Practices Promoting Children's Educational Rights in Portugal

Joana Lúcio and Fátima Antunes

Abstract As part of a wider research project analysing practices, voices, and pathways of inclusive education, this chapter discusses factors supporting the construction of inclusive educational practices that interrupt the school failure-dropout cycle and favour educational remobilisation. In order to understand these practices, a framework discussing barriers to access and participation in education provides conceptual tools to explore some analytical dimensions. The empirical basis for this chapter is a multi-case study analysing intervention on school failure and dropout, by mapping the points of view of actors engaged in ten different contexts (in the framework of two nation-wide programs) across the Portuguese territory. These actors contribute to the understanding of the processes, rationales and partnerships that support such practices. This contribution seeks to further the discussion about children's right to education, specifically the role education has in fostering equality with identity, valuing the child's socio-economic background and their position within a community (Article 29 of the UNCRC). As we focus on the local dimension of inclusive educational practices, we discuss the community's role in developing, implementing and evaluating said practices. In addition, we address how these practices negotiate children's community and cultural identity, while also exposing them to different cultures and values.

Keywords Inclusive education · Socio-educational practices · School failure · School dropout · Children's rights

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Introduction

School failure and dropout have become educational and socio-political problems in almost every country, impacting many children and young people over an increasingly longer period of the life cycle (Ramirez & Boli, 1987; Perrenoud, 2000; Macedo et al., 2015), and in contexts where the school was instituted as the primary instance of socialisation (Candeias, 2009). The European Union (EU), in the Education and Training 2010 Program (Council of the European Union, 2002), has set as a goal that no more than 10% of young people leave school before the completion of compulsory education. School failure[1] and dropout have, therefore, acquired higher priority, visibility, and centrality (socio-politically, academically, scientifically, and educationally), across EU member states, although modified by each country's historical and institutional pathways and resources. Portugal is one of the EU Member States with the highest rates of early school leaving, but is also one that has significantly reduced these rates over the last decades (Eurostat, 2019). Social cohesion, democratisation, and educational inclusion (i.e., participation in school and learning) are parameters that guide socio-educational policies and practices aimed at overcoming school failure and dropout. Nevertheless, scientific, academic, and educational knowledge and debate open up the space and challenge researchers to question the theoretical and empirical basis of these policies and practices, and to discuss their contribution to the understanding of the educational processes involved.

Project *EDUPLACES/Educating places: practices, voices and pathways of inclusive education* highlights the points of view of the actors engaged in successful socio-educational practices, and proposes to answer two research questions: (1) which processes, factors, and actors contribute the most, from the subjects' perspective, to overcome school failure and dropout, and (2) what processes and factors support the disruption of the school failure-dropout downward spiral, and promote the remobilisation of young people towards learning and educational success? In this sense, this project also proposes a discussion on how these so-called successful practices contribute to the empowerment and inclusion of marginalised groups, which is, after all, a discussion about education as an instrument of social justice (Singh, 2015) and equity (Balsera et al., 2016).

We are interested in understanding relationships between individuals and institutional and cultural contexts, like schools, families and communities, as well as how these contexts shape (and are shaped by) relationships of power, identity, and agency. In this sense, we look for articulating issues proposed by critical and socio-cultural theories in order to discuss how, in micro-level interactions, people can build, reproduce, and challenge structural relationships of meaning and power.

[1] According to Psacharopoulos (2007), school failure "may mean that a school system is failing to provide services conducing to learning, or that a student is failing to advance to the next grade and eventually becomes a drop out" (p. 4). For *EDUPLACES*' intents and purposes, the definition of school failure was more strictly connected with that of "[g]rade repetition or retention, also known as flunking" (Psacharopoulos, 2007, p. 5)

We conceive schools as sites of action, negotiation, and conflict, where inequality and difference are built day after day around “cultural tools, resources, and identities (both within and across communities)” (Lewis & Moje, 2003, p. 1992); where social justice remains at stake through socio-educational practices that contribute to maintain or to overcome institutional, dispositional and situational barriers to children and youth participating in learning and school. These theoretical and methodological orientations integrate a perspective about seeing “the world through the eyes of the dispossessed and act against the ideological and institutional processes and forms that reproduce oppressive conditions”. The project underscores the aim of contributing “to challenge existing educational and social inequalities and to create curricula and teaching that are more socially just” (Apple, 2018, pp. 688, 686).

Because socio-educational practices that are aimed at overcoming school failure and dropout can be argued to contribute to social justice and inclusion (educational and otherwise), this chapter takes on the challenge of analysing them through the lens of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989) and, more specifically, that of the right to education/educational success. Inclusive socio-educational practices will subsequently promote children’s educational rights, should they be successful in overcoming school failure and dropout. While the research project’s goals were wider (as alluded in the methodology section below), the focus of this chapter is mostly to discuss some concepts emerging from data analysis that hope to provide a frame for evidencing the impacts these inclusive practices have on school participation. We begin by presenting the theoretical and epistemological framework supporting this research on socio-educational practices aimed at overcoming school failure and dropout, focusing on what types of barriers to participation in education and learning are identified in the literature. We will then briefly address project *EDUPLACES*’ methodological pathway, followed by some findings and participants’ voices.

A School of One’s Own: A Framework on Overcoming Barriers to Participation in Education and Learning

Appropriating the same questioning proposed by Sverdlick (2019), we ask: what meanings does the right to education take on in socio-educational practices aimed at overcoming barriers to participation in learning and school? In 2018 in Portugal, the real school enrolment rate of young people aged 15–17 was 79.3%, while early school leaving affected around 12% of young people (less than 10% of girls) between 18 and 24 years old (Eurostat, 2019). In this context, the obvious and strongest sense linking the practices studied with the right to education is precisely because they address and challenge its *effectiveness*. The socio-educational practices analysed by project *EDUPLACES* seek to “produce meaningful and valuable learning experiences for all” (Sverdlick, 2019, p. 6), given that a fundamental human right cannot be partially fulfilled, and therefore school failure and dropout

are a manifestation of its *unfulfillment*. Since research clearly points out that school failure and dropout begin as school disengagement does, at an early point of school pathways, and are fuelled and reinforced by institutional day-to-day routines and relationships. Overcoming them begins with policies and practices that build a school of one's own, and commits a village (all of society) with the wellbeing of any one and all children (Dale, 2010; Baroutsis et al., 2016; Gillett-Swan & Sargeant, 2018). In its 2014 report regarding the Portuguese situation, the Committee on the Rights of the Child noted that "the recession and the current financial and economic crisis are taking their toll on families and on public social investment, including on the prospects of implementing the Convention [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, or the UNCRC]", by "increasing the risk of children being exposed to poverty and affecting the enjoyment of many of the rights contained in the Convention, including health, education and social protection" (United Nations, 2014, p. 3).

According to available research, socio-educational practices developed in territory-based initiatives can be oriented in many ways – from a palliative intervention to the promotion of equal opportunities, from a "more education" based strategy to a pedagogy that "allow[s] connections to be made between pupil's experience and the curriculum (…) articulating the connections and disconnections between home and school" (Power, 2008, p. 34). We share the same understanding as De Witte et al. (2013, p. 15), that school dropout constitutes "an indication and origin of fundamental inequities", mobilising attention to participation in school and learning "as a right of citizens that is to be safeguarded in any democracy" (Smeyers & Depaepe, 2006; Dorn, 1996).

The conceptualisation of a problem in terms of *barriers* to participation in education has been developed, with some exceptions (Booth & Ainscow, 2002; Arnaiz Sánchez et al., 2019), especially in analyses of sectors and audiences that are distinct from those in compulsory education. Concerning the *participation* category, and following ongoing discussions, we adopt Booth and Ainscow's proposal (2002, p. 3): "Participation means learning together with others and collaborating with them on shared learning experiences. It requires active commitment to learning and having a say in how education is experienced. More deeply, it's about being recognized, accepted and valued for yourself". In this perspective, our understanding of "inclusive education" closely follows that recently proposed by Messiou (2017, p. 148) when she argues that it concerns "all children's presence, participation and achievement". However, the quality of the educational experience and of learning processes has been given a relative political priority and thus very uneven achievements and outcomes for the various audiences involved (Haug, 2017).

One of the first, if not the first, formulations of the problem of barriers to participation and learning/cultural transmission in the education system is proposed by Ruth Ekstrom (1972) in *Barriers to Women's Participation in Post-Secondary Education. A Review of the Literature*. Here, Ekstrom (1972, p.1) suggests *barriers* consist of "factors that work to exclude", and identifies three categories:

institutional (internal to institutions, such as admission practices, educational provision, or staff attitudes); *situational* (specific life situations including social expectations and pressures, or family responsibilities); *dispositional* (constructed by social experience, from fear of failure to attitude towards intellectual work or appreciation of educational goals, academic aspirations and expectations).

Decades later, Long and Mejia (2016) discuss a broader version of the *institutional barriers* category of this typology. In the context of a debate on the diversity of target audiences in education, inclusion and participation of under-represented population groups in engineering courses, the authors consider the following triad as central: socio-cultural deficit perspective, low expectations, and impoverished learning and stimulation (Long & Mejia, 2016, p. 3). Also a problem is *Restrictive* (selective) curricula – that is, those that assume that students have acquired a pattern of learning prerequisites that is far from being the norm and heavily penalises those with weaker prior academic learning, many times coincidental with underrepresented or newcomer segments. Insufficiently diverse institutional (and societal) *models*, the erasure (in the textbooks and reference texts) of the history and contribution of the various collectives to society constitute other institutional barriers to the identification of underrepresented groups with learning proposals. To adapt, these subjects "must appear to accept existing norms and not openly resist or challenge them" (Tonso, 1996, p. 224), and identifying with an unfamiliar context and activities is much more difficult for underrepresented students (Mejia et al., 2015).

Debating the complex relationship between school and social justice and its contradictory position in relation to socio-educational inequalities, Power argues that successive "generations" of education policies (redistribution, recognition, and representation) have fallen short of expectations in reducing inequalities and social injustices, either because the causes are insufficiently recognised, or because the interventions directed at them neglect the socio-educational processes that may challenge them. In this sense, while refusing that "unequal educational outcomes can be explained only in terms of the misrecognition" (Power & Frandji, 2010, p. 394), the author argues that certain compensatory-oriented educational policies cannot only fail but aggravate forms of inequality and cultural discrimination: "From this perspective, it is not that the redistribution was insufficient, but rather that it is premised on a deficit view of inner-city families and their communities. Indeed, from this angle, a politics of redistribution constitutes in itself a form of cultural injustice" (Power, 2012, p. 480). It is not simply a matter of recognising, but of facing the circumstances, which, from the author's perspective, involves developing pedagogical proposals and practices oriented towards contextualising the curriculum. This course of action implies establishing strong connections between academic knowledge and common, everyday experience, changing learning activities and pathways without changing its goals (Power, 2008, p. 35; Morais & Neves, 2009).

Building a sense for academic work, as well as the competent exercise of the student craft (Perrenoud, 1995) and calibrated adherence to the student role (Apple & King, 1977), are necessary and not guaranteed at the outset. These conditions and experiences are hampered in the case of audiences who are socio-economically and

educationally disadvantaged by the lack of opportunities to discuss and grasp the relevance of activities, and to build a connection with their values, cultures, practices and daily lives. According to Mejia et al. (2015), successful permanence in school for underrepresented groups requires that teachers and educators favour a positive perception of their ability to succeed and a perspective on their role as students and graduates in a way that does not clash with their cultural identity. Members of underrepresented groups can experience isolation, anxiety, alienation, and reduced performance when the disadvantages they experience remain hidden. Institutional modes of functioning remain oblivious to the disadvantages and asymmetries of cultural and emotional knowledge, conditions, and resources among audiences in understanding, interacting with, negotiating and appropriately responding to institutional expectations.

It was equally central – to the study of socio-educational practices aimed at overcoming barriers to participation in learning and school – to problematise the school-family-community relationship as a relationship between cultures, which involves the individual/collective and academic/non-academic aspects, and constitutes a "power relation" that "can contribute to reinforce, maintain or mitigate social inequalities and cultural differences" (Silva, 2010, p. 450).

Methodology

Project *EDUPLACES/Educating places: practices, voices and pathways of inclusive education* (PTDC/MHC-CED/3775/2014), ongoing between June 2016 and November 2019, was a multi-case study of ten socio-educational practices, involving 18 researchers associated with four Portuguese research centres and universities. The ten socio-educational practices took place in as many different contexts, located in four Portuguese municipalities (three in the north and one in the south of the country). Each practice was developed within one of two national government programs (one school-based and one community-based) aimed at overcoming school failure and dropout.

The selection of the programs that frame the practices under study was the first step of the investigative process. These are the most enduring national government programs focused on intervention against school failure and dropout (both in force, at the start of project *EDUPLACES*, for over 15 years), located in territories with vulnerable and disadvantaged populations, and both presuppose interactions between the school and the community. Two criteria governed the selection of projects (within which the practices under study are developed): accessibility (namely, availability of information) and outcomes. These outcomes – that is, the impact of the projects on the populations, according to intervention objectives – were measured in two ways:

1. For the community-based program, each of the selected projects placed in the upper tier for the program's 2016–2018 funding application (35.6% approval rate): four of the five projects have been in place since 2010 and had been selected for a third round of funding. The fifth one had initiated a year prior and placed first in said application round. Three projects had a 'global rate of school success' higher than the program's average (74%), while the fourth scored 73%;
2. For the school-based program, each of the six selected projects had, according to the program's report for 2014–2015, received the following formal assessment: 'in 2014–15, [name of school group] successfully Reached/Exceeded the general goals.'

Following contact with the teams responsible for the projects in question and their agreement to collaborate with project *EDUPLACES*, 11 socio-educational practices were identified as successful by the institutional leaders of the projects that framed them. The process of indicating one practice was not linear: in some cases, those responsible did not find it difficult to elect a particular practice (a certain aspect or dimension of the intervention carried out by the project) as the one that most contributed to overcoming the potential failure and/or dropout of disadvantaged children and young people. In other cases, selection proved to be more problematic, eventually falling on an articulated set of dimensions, which was given an aggregating designation.

The practice selection process was supported by semi-directive interviews with institutional leaders of the promoting projects and by documentary analysis of the information available about the contexts, projects, target audiences, and practices, but also about the framing government programs, in an effort to triangulate data. This stage of the investigative process, which led to the constitution of a Portfolio of Practices (definition of the set of practices under study and collection and processing of data characterising them), was supported by two fundamental instruments of data aggregation and analysis: the *Descriptive Note* and the *Selection Criteria Grid*.

In early 2018, one of the projects promoted by the national school-based program terminated its collaboration protocol with project *EDUPLACES* due to institutional constraints. For this reason, from the second year of research onwards (2017–2018), the project contemplates ten practices. The second year of the project was aimed at the development of Practice Monographs which included (in addition to previously collected data) a broad set of information on the views of actors directly involved in the practices under study: teachers/professionals, parents/families, children/young people, and institutional partners. This data was collected through semi-directive interviews (10), focus groups (37), questionnaires (82) and observation. As highlighted in the following section, this chapter draws exclusively upon data stemming from the focus groups, and particularly those involving children and young people.

In the third and final year (2018–2019), the focus was on characterising atypical academic pathways and exploring innovative dimensions of the practices. For the first objective, a panel of 15 young people (participating in semi-directive biographical interviews) was constituted, featuring subjects who had a history of interaction

with seven of the practices being studied, and who had been identified by the institutional leaders as having, at some point, experienced failure and/or dropout, and were completing (or had completed) successful school pathways. For the second objective, teachers and professionals involved in three of the practices being studied participated in focus groups to explore whether/to what extent these practices constitute Learning Communities/Communities of Practice, by reference to their professional exercise and development.

Overcoming School Failure and Dropout: Inclusion and Children's Rights in Education, in Their Own Words

The year 2019 marked the 30th anniversary of the UNCRC. At the time of publication, all UN member countries except the USA subscribe to the UNCRC. In its current form, the UNCRC (United Nations, 1989) contains 54 articles relating to the specific needs and rights of children, including the right to life, a name and an identity, to be raised within a family or cultural group, and to participate fully in family, cultural, and social life.

Two UNCRC articles emerge as particularly pertinent for thinking about the "right to education" issues and, in this sense, the research objectives proposed by project *EDUPLACES*: Article 28, entitled 'Provision of Education', and Article 29, entitled 'Aims of Education'. The first invokes (among other things) the importance of organising different education systems, which should be public and accessible to all children, and the importance of fostering regular school attendance and reducing dropout rates. From the point of view of providing education, the UNCRC defines the role of the state as ensuring accessibility, diversity, and adequacy of socio-educational offerings, as well as the promotion of schooling. The second of these two articles defines the importance of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for the family, cultural identity and values of the child's origin, and the importance of preparing for the assumption of the responsibilities inherent to life in society. From the point of view of the 'aims of education', the UNCRC defines that education is intended to promote the development and personality of the child, preparing them for an active adult life in society, and inculcating respect for their parents, their identity, their language and cultural values, as well as the cultures and values of the Other (i.e. "that/those who is/are different from myself and/or my community").

The challenge framing this chapter is to explore how the practices under study (a) reflect diverse and accessible forms of organisation of education, and (b) value the cultures and beliefs of origin of the children and young people who are their target audience, simultaneously exposing them to cultures and values different from their own. For the discussion of the first aspect, we recall the definition of "social innovation" (Moulaert et al., 2013, p. 1): data from the first year of research showed that, as an intention, the innovation dimension of these socio-educational practices has yet to be fulfilled, especially as regards the participation of families, but also of

children and young people themselves, in the context of the practices under study. Regarding social relations, these practices seemed to have a positive effect at the organisational level (internal dynamics and relations with other organisations), but not so much at the community level, as they seemed to foster the creation of spaces and/or times and procedures for interaction. Even so, there were no specific mentions to either participation in educational decisions or the encouragement of joint work.

With regard to the second aspect, which refers to the 'local' dimension of these inclusive socio-educational practices, community participation seemed to be based more on a governance logic, in which the decision-maker consults some more or less strategic partners – still very far from effective co-construction (Klein et al., 2013), involving various local actors with the ability to decide and influence.

The 47 sources that constitute the core *corpus* of this research, (37 focus groups and ten interviews with teachers/professionals, parents/families, children/young people, and institutional partners) were subjected to content analysis using the NVivo 12 software and an *a priori* category grid (or tree), consisting of 22 items: five categories/dimensions and 17 subcategories. The basis of this category tree was the conceptual framework and the research question framing the project's second year: which factors, processes, rationales and partnerships most contribute to overcoming (institutional/socio-cultural, situational, and dispositional) barriers to participation in school and learning, and promote change (Ekstrom, 1972; Lynch & O'Riordan, 1998; Roosmaa & Saar, 2017).

Considering the overall data, the most frequently mentioned "processes contributing to overcome barriers" are related to *Pedagogy, Curriculum, and Evaluation* (297 references in 37 sources), *Interactions between Schools, Families and Communities* (216 references in 38 sources) and *Stability of intervention teams – Strong and continuous relationships* (103 references in 23 sources).

When we consider the various types of voices heard separately, interesting contrasts emerge. Teachers/professionals follow the global trend with regard to the "processes contributing to overcome barriers" to learning and school participation that they value most, and most often identify with the practices in which they participate. In turn, parents seem to value the impact of practices at the *school-family-community interactions* level (91 references) rather than at the level of *pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation* (45). This seems to suggest that these actors recognise the practices in which they are involved as making a significant contribution to communication, translation and negotiation with the school (and in some cases other relevant local entities). The surveyed institutional partners tend to highlight the contribution of *partnerships* (34 references) to overcoming barriers to educational success. This seems to indicate that they recognise themselves in their institutional role, as having knowledge, input and commitment to practice. They also highlight "processes" related to *school-family-community interactions* (27) and *pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation* (22). Finally, children/young people most often refer to "processes" related to *pedagogy, curriculum and evaluation* (64 references), *learning the student craft* (35) and *student participation* (27). This seems to indicate that, in some cases, they see the practices in which they participate as showing a certain

concern with the creation of spaces, times, activities and procedures that promote their participation in the decision-making process regarding learning contents, themes, activities, performance and rules. Participants in one of the focus groups for one community-based practice were asked about the type of support they received from the practice's staff. One child said they were advised "to behave better in school and study more". Another child stated that the conversations with, and support from, the practice's staff had been an incentive to improve their results: "I had more negatives [scores bellow the passing grade] before, I had five negatives. In the first term I had five negatives, then Ursula [member of staff] talked to me…and now I had two negatives". When asked about how they had started their engagement with the practice, one boy participating in one school-based practice stated that the initiative had been his, as he wished to "improve my attitude, my work and everything, and my life in this school".

In two mediation practices developed within community-based projects and located in the north (N_CB_1 and N_CB_2), the voices of teachers and professionals, parents, and partners aligned in terms of the dimensions of the intervention that are seen as contributing the most to overcoming school failure and dropout. In both practices, it is the voices of children and young people that "clash". Participants in N_CB_1 value the practice's contribution in learning the student craft. Participants in N_CB_2 recognise the importance of the stability of intervention teams, and how this fosters strong and sustained relationships that enhance educational success. One participant in the children/young people's focus group for N_CB_1 spoke of the impact the practice has had on their overall conduct: "This is like, we came here to distract [ourselves], if this was to end, we would have nothing to do, we would always be out there screwing up, and here we are fine." When asked about how their experience in school differed from their experience in the practice, participants in the children/young people's focus group for N_CB_2 said: "Here they give us affection and it's easy to be together and in school no, everyone turns their faces away from us", with another participant adding, "[They respect us] and we respect them".

The practices where *school-family-community interactions* emerge as the most relevant (most frequently mentioned) "process contributing to overcome barriers" to educational success – such as the two mediation practices mentioned above – seemed to focus their intervention on the "distance" or the relationship between (the cultures of) school-families-communities (Silva, 2010). The orientation to mobilise institutional resources to support the exercise of the student craft and the student role, to diversify proposals, and to monitor learning progress, or to expand times and spaces of communication and negotiation between the school and families contributes to reinforcing elements of *institutional habitus* (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970; Reay et al., 2001; Araneda-Guirriman et al., 2017) – organisational practices, academic expectations, conceptions of educational success, and academic performance rules – that favour the lengthening of young people's educational pathways and the mitigation of the effects of barriers to their participation in education (Tarabini et al., 2015). Children and young people engaging in N_CB_1 reported that teachers treat them differently and that some are racist. The practice had

improved their relationship with the school, teachers and peers, as well as school performance. All of them attached great importance to the project in which the practice is being developed, describing it as a space of friendship, occupation of free time and as "a second home". Children and young people participating in N_CB_2 reported many difficulties in complying with the demands imposed by the school, identifying discriminatory attitudes, and valuing the proximity work and adjustment effort developed by the practice.

Closing Remarks

Seeking to articulate some queries offered by educational socio-cultural and critical theories, this research project aimed to emphasize perspectives from disadvantaged children and young people, parents and families, their teachers, and other professionals. The information gathered from this wide range of actors – who hold various statuses, interests, and motivations – seems to highlight on the one hand, the focus of the intervention in overcoming barriers (of different natures and origins) to children and young people's participation in learning and school. On the other hand, while these actors acknowledge that these practices contribute to overcoming barriers that hinder children and young people's schooling, the question remains whether these practices have broken down some, or any, of these barriers.

In certain practices, procedures or devices are tested that alter professional relationships and exercises, or interfere with power relations between school and family and/or community cultures. They negotiate, for example, certain class/subject attendance rules for girls, or response to evaluation requirements, but also because the interaction between institutional agents and parents and families is intensified. To this extent, these practices challenge the *institutional habitus* (Tarabini et al., 2015). In this sense, these practices seem to alter the effects of certain barriers that influence the school paths of the children/young people they reach. They thus hold a certain potential for contextualised and localised challenge, but also for creating a repertoire of institutional practices favourable to overcoming barriers to the participation of all children and young people in learning and school.

So, the research discussed in this chapter suggests that practices of Study Support, Mediation, Student Grouping, and Pedagogical Differentiation can generate repertoires of organised collective pedagogical action that:

- create integrative and ambivalent educational contexts (e.g. more time to learn and to progress with individual activities and goals or group projects, in the class they belong to, in a special class that is "our own", in a group and support room, sometimes with good involvement of parents and families);
- support empowering pedagogical relationships (which generate confidence and autonomy, expand options and horizons of action, and support decisions by young people and their families);

- interfere in power relationships (build trust, open spaces for the neighbourhood to be present at the school and the school in the neighbourhood, and facilitate communication and negotiation between professionals, parents and communities).

We return to the two questions framing this chapter – to discuss whether the socio-educational practices aimed at overcoming school failure and dropout analysed by project *EDUPLACES* (a) reflect diverse and accessible forms of organisation education, and (b) value the cultures and beliefs of the children and young people who are their target audience while exposing them to other cultures and values. The tentative and hypothetical answer to the first question, suggested by the compiled data, is that these practices interfere with institutional functioning, for example, by responding to *pedagogical deficits* or promoting learning opportunities that favour the competent exercise of the *student craft* and the *student role.* In this sense, they influence the overcoming of these barriers, regarding the educational pathways of the children and young people that participate in them. As for the second question, data seems to confirm how (some of) these practices contribute to fulfilling the 'aims of education' established in the UNCRC (and particularly Article 29). They not only seek to help children and young people respond to the demands of the school, but they adopt an integrative and ecological approach to their development, undertaking a crucial task of socio-educational mediation in promoting children and young people's educational rights. In terms of participation, data analysis offers some insights into whether or not these inclusive practices are preparing children and young people for a responsible life in a democratic society. While in some practices, participation is mostly engagement – that is, children and young people's voluntary enrolment in the proposed activities – in others, the impact is somewhat deeper. At the individual level, both parents and families, and children and young people report on the practices' impact on the students' willingness to learn, their persistence, their ability to delay gratification, their self-confidence, and their overall sense of responsibility towards school and learning. At the group level, and particularly for Mediation practices (mainly N_CB_1 and N_CB_2), there are some accounts of the practices' impacts in terms of a shift in parents' and families' perceived value of education and schooling. There is a growing interest in their children's academic pathways and outcomes, and also daily activities, with an increasing proactivity to overcome underqualification and unemployment. The picture presented by this research endeavour, however narrow, is certainly promising.

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