

## Participatory and democratic school management for the development of safe and inclusive learning environments in special education services

### La gestión escolar participativa y democrática para el desarrollo de entornos de aprendizaje seguros e inclusivos en los servicios de educación especial

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#### Abstract

Safe and inclusive learning environments represent an option for the attention of children with special needs in education services in accordance with the goals of the 2030 agenda, a proposal ratified by the New Mexican School through participatory and democratic management. Objective: to describe how participatory and democratic school management can influence the achievement of safe and inclusive learning environments in special education services. Methodology: a desk research was conducted as recommended by Uddin (2010), gathered data in bibliographic sources related to participatory and democratic school management, safe and inclusive learning environments and special education services, mainly informative desk research resources were used according to Esmeral (2022); in order to formulate a range of possibilities for the development of safe and inclusive environments in special education services taking into account the objectives of participatory and democratic management. Contribution: a vision of how participatory and democratic school management can favor the development of safe and inclusive learning environments in special education services is presented.

**Participatory and democratic school management, Safe and inclusive learning environments, Special education services**

#### Resumen

Los entornos de aprendizaje seguros e inclusivos representan una opción para la atención de las y los niños con requerimientos de atención de los servicios de educación de acuerdo con las metas de la agenda 2030, propuesta ratificada por la Nueva Escuela Mexicana a través de la gestión participativa y democrática. Objetivo: describir la manera en que la gestión escolar participativa y democrática puede influir en el logro de entornos de aprendizaje seguros e inclusivos en los servicios de educación especial. Metodología: se efectuó una investigación documental como recomienda Uddin (2010), reunieron datos en fuentes bibliográficas relacionados con la gestión escolar participativa y democrática, los entornos de aprendizaje seguros e inclusivos y los servicios de educación especial, se utilizaron sobretodo recursos de investigación documental informativa de acuerdo con Esmeral (2022); a fin de formular un rango de posibilidades para el desarrollo de ambientes seguros e inclusivos en los servicios de educación especial teniendo en cuenta los objetivos de la gestión participativa y democrática. Contribución: se presenta una visión de la manera en la que la gestión escolar participativa y democrática puede favorecer el desarrollo de entornos de aprendizaje seguros e inclusivos en los servicios de educación especial.

**Gestión escolar participativa y democrática, Entornos de aprendizaje seguro e inclusivo, Servicios de educación especial**

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## Introduction

Education is a powerful instrument for improving the quality of life of the population. A commitment voluntarily accepted by the Mexican state, which joins the international proposals that promote its improvement. These proposals are ratified in its educational policies and designed by its actors to offer better learning opportunities to the population that attends, in this case, special education services.

In this regard, safe and inclusive learning environments represent an option for the care of children with special needs in education services in accordance with the goals of the 2030 Agenda. Likewise, the commitment of the staff of special education services is broad as they accept their role to contribute to the improvement of the service provided in line with international and national proposals that seek to improve the quality of educational care for the population with special education care requirements, putting into practice innovative proposals such as participatory and democratic school management in order to create safe and inclusive learning environments, as proposed in the New Mexican School (NEM) project.

## Objective

To describe how participatory and democratic school management can influence the achievement of safe and inclusive learning environments in special education services.

## Theoretical framework

The theoretical support that underpins the situation presented here presents in hierarchical order the information identified as fundamental to the subject matter of this inquiry. In 2015, the objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development for Latin America and the Caribbean were approved. Sanctioned in a general assembly by the 193 member countries of the United Nations (UN), of which Mexico is a member, through the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, pp. 15-16).

There are 17 goals defined for sustainable development associated with this agenda, planned to contribute to the sustained, inclusive and harmonious development of the region.

In relation to the education sector, the goal for sustainable development is: to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Likewise, with the goals that make up this objective, the aim is in relation to special education enrolment:

- To have education facilities that are sensitive to the needs of children and persons with disabilities and gender differences, and that safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments are provided for all.
- Ensure equal access to education and job training for vulnerable people, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations (e.g. street children, those displaced by insecurity, and those with health problems, among other conditions).
- The achievement of relevant and effective learning outcomes.
- Developing skills for employment, decent work and entrepreneurship.
- Significantly increase the supply of qualified teachers.

## The New Mexican School

The NEM is a structure that prioritises attention to disadvantaged populations in order to guarantee equal learning opportunities for all Mexicans. Its proposal guarantees inclusive, equitable and quality education in line with purpose 4 of the 2030 agenda (SEP, 2019, pp. 3, 8, 9). It proposes the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all, visualising the achievement of the above through the integration of the community in the management processes of educational services.

The NEM's conception of education promotes the transformation of society as a democratic mechanism for social transformation and highlights the principle of respect for human dignity, appreciation for individuals, non-violence and the pursuit of the common good.

Thus, under the principle of promoting a culture of peace, it aims to encourage constructive dialogue, the search for agreements and coexistence within a framework of respect for differences at all levels and in all forms of education.

Two pedagogical proposals have so far been promoted for the NEM:

- Participatory and democratic school management.
- Day-to-day educational practice.

### **Participatory and democratic school management**

The NEM promotes a participatory and democratic school management with the effective commitment of all members of the community and also promotes new forms of interaction between the different educational actors, for the achievement of the pedagogical intentionality in and with the active participation of the educational community (SEP, 2019, p. 17-18).

In terms of this pedagogical proposal, 3 main objectives can be seen in order to transform the actions of the educational actors:

- Collaborative work
- Dialogue
- Accompaniment

Collaborative work is conceived in the NEM as the active participation of all educational actors in a constant exchange of knowledge, opinions, experiences and suggestions for the strengthening of the teaching and para-teaching functions; in order to weigh up the tasks that should be maintained, because they are carried out in a recommendable manner, and to determine those that should be modified. The challenge is to make the processes and participation of the actors involved in educational action more dynamic.

It is therefore important to establish the conditions for an active dialogue that allows for permanent questioning and the evaluation of new courses of action.

This in turn implies undertaking reflective processes that lead to concrete actions in the classroom, avoiding the monopolisation of decisions and encouraging the participation of all members of the educational community.

In terms of practical accompaniment, it is suggested to be attentive to changes in school dynamics in daily practice, in order to strengthen the work of teachers and para-teachers. Therefore, the interaction of teachers, para-teachers, technical pedagogical advisors and management staff in feedback processes that motivate them to become decisively involved in teaching and learning is considered fundamental.

In order to achieve the purposes of the pedagogical proposal of the NEM, it is suggested to generate learning communities in which all actors have the same opportunities to be included and to participate by sharing and valuing opinions, experiences and proposals for the improvement of learning and teaching and para-teaching competences and therefore the sustained progress of the school and learning community.

*“A learning community is a collective that is involved in an educational project, in a cooperative and supportive process based on a diagnosis, especially of its strengths in order to improve its weaknesses. It is based on alliances and networks with the inclusion of community referents, professionals, educational agents and different institutions. In order to produce the desired effects, it must have as its starting point the conviction of the school and the staff” (Krichesky, 2006, pp. 30, 37, 48).*

It involves participatory and democratic institutional work (a process of recognition of the educational institution and the community, with shared work) for the benefit of the action of each of the actors involved (educational authorities, teachers, para-teachers, administrative staff, families and students), to complement each other and ensure safe and inclusive care.

## Safe and Inclusive Learning Environments in Special Education

*Rephrasing Carletti (2014) the contributions of participatory and democratic educational management outlines a series of considerations in its various dimensions (pedagogical, administrative, organisational and community) to be taken into account for the development of safe and inclusive learning environments (pp. 1,4,7,8,9).*

Special education services in our country are characterised by the changes in educational principles and practices that, since the 1940s, have been bringing them closer to the creation of welcoming and accepting communities that are gradually approaching the creation of safe and inclusive learning environments.

These spaces constitute a system of values, beliefs and attitudes; with a strong commitment of its actors for the achievement of educational objectives and intentions, with the intention that students learn what they have to learn and teachers develop the competences that allow them to do so, promoting innovation and change in schools, adapting to current educational proposals such as those currently proposed in the 2030 agenda and the NEM, for the development of safe and inclusive learning environments in special education services with the support of participatory and democratic school management.

### Methodology

In order to develop this paper, desk research was conducted as recommended by Uddin (2010) for social research. In view of the objective of this research, data collected from literature sources related to participatory and democratic school management, safe and inclusive learning environments and special education services were gathered.

In such a way that mainly informative documentary research resources were used according to Esmeral (2022); with the intention of deriving a range of possibilities for the development of safe and inclusive environments in special education services taking into account the objectives of participatory and democratic management.

### Procedure

In the procedure followed for the elaboration of this paper, a logic of data reduction and presentation was followed for the extraction and verification of conclusions that allowed us to visualise how the implementation of the objectives of participatory and democratic school management can contribute to safe and inclusive learning environments in special education services.

The definition of the situation to be analysed, the statement of the objective and the elaboration of arguments around the aforementioned theme were the first steps that guided this research.

Once the information had been gathered, it was organised and systematised in order to present the results found, categorising the data found in a coherent and orderly manner with the aim of reaching conclusions that made it possible to propose some possibilities for the promotion of safe and inclusive spaces in special education services, taking into account the objectives of participatory and democratic school management.

### Outcomes

Among other goals of the 2030 agenda, it is necessary to have educational environments that take into account the needs of children and people with disabilities (ECLAC, 2015, pp. 15-16), outstanding abilities and learning disabilities, in order to provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all.

Participatory and democratic school management is the pedagogical approach of the NEM that drives the development of safe and inclusive learning environments in special education services.

The mass of data collected gained meaning by giving it structure in the process of organising it with the intention of describing how the implementation of the aims of participatory and democratic school management influences the achievement of safe and inclusive learning environments in special education to ensure inclusive, equitable and quality education while promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The purposes of participatory and democratic school management are aimed at fostering collaborative spaces for dialogue between the actors of the communities formed in special education services to identify good practices in the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of educational proposals in order to also generate proposals for accompaniment for the achievement of this task.

### Conclusions

The conclusions derived from this research were obtained by visualising the social and economic conditions in which education is provided in our country, the proposals of the NEM and the scope of participatory and democratic school management for the achievement and improvement of safe and inclusive learning environments in special education.

According to ECLAC, Mexico is located in a territory where poverty is not the biggest problem. The greatest difficulty lies in inequality (2015, p. 5).

Likewise, Mexico is a country considered to be very inequitable and unequal, especially in the economic, social and educational conditions experienced by people with few resources, those of indigenous origin, migrants, women, inhabitants of rural regions and the population with disabilities, outstanding skills and any disorder that conditions their learning (Educación Futura, Public Interest Journalism, 2022, paragraph 1).

Therefore, after a careful documentary review, the exploration focused on the objectives that characterise participatory and democratic school management for the achievement of safe and inclusive learning environments in order to base the analysis on the educational requirements detected by international organisations such as ECLAC and the agreements signed and ratified by the Mexican government, despite the socio-economic conditions of our country.

Participatory and democratic school management is a resource that can foster safe and inclusive learning environments in special education services.

Therefore, to manage is to make educational purposes possible by creating the conditions for deep reflection and projecting it in institutional projects (Carletti, 2014, p. 14) from participatory and democratic management so that students with special education requirements receive care in safe and inclusive environments.

### Proposal

This point proposes a range of possibilities for promoting safe and inclusive spaces in special education services, taking into account the theoretical references found:

Guarantee equitable access to special education services for the population with disabilities, outstanding abilities or any disorder that conditions the achievement of learning.

Promote safe and inclusive learning environments in special education services, strengthening their capacity to fully develop the objectives of participatory and democratic school management.

Promote inclusive, democratic and participatory education focused on the potential of learners, with the decisive, differentiated and linked intervention of each member of the educational community (management, teachers, para-teaching staff, administrative staff, students and community representatives).

Ensure that special education care is provided in safe and inclusive environments for both students and staff.

All of the above linking the search for proposals with an investigative stance that allows us to unveil the shaping aspects of each institution, in order to make truly significant changes in school management that allow us to overcome the obstacles and barriers (Carletti, 2014, p.16) that prevent special education services from being safe and inclusive environments.

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