



Egalitarian dialogue and student participation in Learning Communities. The case of the Coquimbo Region, Chile

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ABSTRACT

Scientific literature has shown that student participation has been mainly directed and instrumentalized by adults in schools, which implies a passive role for students. However, the research shows the existence of educational processes that encourage student participation through dialogue in Learning Communities. The aim of this article is to demonstrate the positive effects of dialogic learning through egalitarian dialogue on primary student participation in two Learning Communities in the Coquimbo Region. A qualitative case study with communicative methodology was employed. The data were collected using two techniques: communicative daily-life stories and communicative discussion groups. Results indicate that egalitarian dialogue enables students to participate in their learning processes, reach collective agreements, and engage in decision-making. It is concluded that dialogic learning positively affects student participation through egalitarian dialogue in the schools analysed.

1. Introduction

Student participation has become a widely explored field in educational research, however, questions about how to incorporate it culturally and effectively in school contexts, remain (Graham et al., 2018). Internationally, student participation has shown positive effects on the development of individual capacities, democratic skills, and improvement of self-esteem in students (Mager & Nowak, 2012), as well as improvements in school performance, the levels of perceived bullying, and learning of the potential of collective action (Ahlström, 2010; Dymont, 2004; González et al., 2021). However, in Latin America, participation in schools continues to be a challenge, which represents an obstacle to progress towards democratic societies (Ascorra, López, & Urbina, 2016).

The Chilean educational system is characterized by its strong market orientation and by its extreme segregation in socioeconomic and academic terms (Bellei, 2013; San Martín et al., 2015; Valenzuela, 2008). This orientation has encouraged competition between schools and has reduced the curriculum to the goal of achieving better results in standardized tests, having a strong impact on educational communities (Ascorra, López, Núñez, et al., 2016; Assaél et al., 2018; Botella & Ortiz, 2018). For this reason, the promotion of student participation in Chile has been especially difficult in schools, as the academic dimension has been prioritized, leaving participation in a peripheral place in the student's experience (Valdés et al., 2020). However, both processes are not contrary, and schools have the potential to provide opportunities that generate democratic experiences for students (Apple & Beane, 2005; Edelstein, 2011; Fielding, 2012).

In the search for the construction of a democratic school culture, that promotes social cohesion and overcoming educational inequalities, Learning Communities (LCs) emerged in Spain, its primary antecedent being the experience of La Verneda- Sant Martí

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School for Adults (Elboj Saso & Oliver Pérez, 2003; Morlà, 2015; Redondo-Sama, 2015). This educational experience and the research centre CREA have supported the transformation of schools and social and educational settings in 14 countries of Latin America and Europe (Ruiz-Eugenio, Tellado, et al., 2023). In the case of Chile, it is part of the process of transferability of LCs, which began in 2013 (Álvarez, 2015).

Through the implementation of Successful Educational Actions and the principles of dialogic learning (Flecha, 2015, 2019), the educational centres that become Learning Communities promote the participation of students, families, and volunteers, who actively participate in the processes of learning, coexistence, curriculum management and decision making, among others (Domínguez, 2018; Núñez & Murillo, 2021; Ordóñez-Sierra & Ferrón-Gómez, 2022). Thus, spaces are created in the school for students to express their own ideas and listen to others, creating environments of solidarity and greater empathy in which stereotypes are overcome (Díez-Palomar et al., 2020; García et al., 2021; Ruiz-Eugenio, Soler-Gallart, et al., 2023). This participation has generated improvements in self-esteem, interpersonal relationships, and a reduction in absenteeism (García-Carrión et al., 2023; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022).

Based on a qualitative case study in two Learning Communities in the Coquimbo Region, this paper aims to demonstrate the positive effects of dialogic learning on primary student participation through egalitarian dialogue.

2. The challenge of promoting student participation

Student participation has been positioned as a relevant element in education, for example through the Citizen Training Plan Framework (MINEDUC, 2017). However, studies have identified that student participation continues to be poorly encouraged by adults in schools, who do not consider the voices of students, due to the predominance of traditional teaching models and an asymmetric power relationship in favour of adults (Carrasco-Aguilar & Luzón, 2019; Duarte & Pezo, 2021; Prieto, 2005). On the other hand, the students, by not being listened to or considered, have indicated that the methodologies and contents that are presented to them are not very relevant to their abilities and interests, wasting opportunities for collaboration and solidarity (Albornoz et al., 2015).

In their recent research, Urbina et al. (2021) indicate that adults select students with certain profiles to participate, giving only some students greater opportunities. This study also highlighted that management teams and teachers organize workshops and activities for student participation, but without having a major impact on their development. This is what has been identified as token participation (Escobar & Pezo, 2019).

On the other hand, Manghi et al. (2021) have identified, based on the voices of children and young people, the need to have broader school experiences that promote debate, diverse learning environments, and emphasize interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, for Albornoz et al. (2015), students feel part of the school when their peers and teachers treat them with respect and in a friendly way, and they feel listened to when they stop being ashamed for their comments or are not punished for saying what they think.

This is how educational institutions have the potential to transform traditional teaching models, to the extent that they provide opportunities for students to have democratic and participatory experiences (Andersson, 2018; Fielding, 2012). The maximum development of competencies and social skills will be achieved to the extent that schools activate and motivate the participation of all the actors in them, generating a sense of belonging to a community (Edelstein, 2011).

Hess and Mcavoy (2015) explain that schools can be political spaces to the extent that the question of how we should live together is addressed, learning that disagreement and compromise are normal parts and valuable aspects of democratic decision-making. Therefore, democracy at school will necessarily require a vision of children as competent, capable and concretized in the present (Osoro & Zubizarreta, 2017), so that students participate and can have a voice, influence, make decisions and work collaboratively (Graham et al., 2018).

3. Learning Communities and the emergence of diverse voices through egalitarian dialogue

LCs is a project that, focused on learning through social interactions, advocates for the radicalization of democracy in a commitment to the capacity for action and reflection of all people (Elboj & Flecha, 2002; Flecha, 2009). LCs are based on the dialogic learning and the implementation of a set of Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) that seek to build an equal response, so that all students develop their abilities to the maximum in a stimulating learning environment (Flecha, 2015).

Dialogic learning has seven principles that go through all the actions deployed: egalitarian dialogue, cultural intelligence, transformation, instrumental dimension, creation of meaning, solidarity, and equality of differences (Flecha, 2019). The first principle, egalitarian dialogue is based on Habermas's communicative rationality (2003), which state that subjects capable of language and action, use and create rationality to carry out speech acts and argue based on deliberation, presupposing certain validity claims oriented to understanding. In this regard, Gómez and Valls (2022), based on the dialogical learning of Ramon Flecha (2019), indicate that the relationships between all the actors in LCs are mediated by dialogue and consensus, transforming argumentation into a means to make decisions and promoting reflection and egalitarian dialogue. As a consequence, actions based on dialogue increase the agency of all people involved, questioning and transforming the traditional hierarchies of power into egalitarian interactions (García-Carrión et al., 2020).

Those who act communicatively encounter situations in which they build their own interpretations cooperatively and in negotiation with others, thus opening space for the development of interpersonal relationships that reciprocally shape their ideas. In consequence, the actors adopt an attitude of listeners and speakers in which they depend on each other in the interaction, reaching consensus through the intersubjective recognition of validity claims (Habermas, 1998).

Schools become centres where learning is achieved, not only through interactions between students and teachers but also with everyone in the educational community, including family members and volunteers (Gómez & Fernández-Hawrylak, 2022; Valls &

Munté, 2010). LCs entail deep democratization of schools because it is essential to achieve good quality education (Gatt et al., 2011). For this transformation, the role that teachers, technicians, and managers assume, and their appropriation of the project is fundamental as they can act as facilitators and motivators of it or as an obstacle to it (Ferreira, 2011; Gómez et al., 2010).

In this regard, the implementation of Successful Educational Actions have been endorsed by the scientific community through INCLUD-ED: Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe form education, an Integrated Project of the Sixth Framework Program of the European Commission (Flecha, 2015), which identified the actions that have been scientifically shown to be linked to educational success. SEAs are the practices that have shown the best results in diverse contexts, achieving both academic and social impact at individual, group, and community level, involving the community and the available resources in the schools (Aubert et al., 2017; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022). The SEAs that involve student participation through dialogic learning are:

Interactive groups consist of organizing the classroom into small groups of students, each one is supported by volunteers and must complete a task in approximately 20 min and then rotate to the next activity. The organization of the groups is heterogeneous in terms of gender, academic achievements, and background (Flecha, 2015). Dialogic learning is implemented to the extent that students share their knowledge and externalize their ideas in an egalitarian dialogue that generates practices of mutual help and collaboration (Díez-Palomar et al., 2020; García et al., 2021; Ordóñez-Sierra & Ferrón-Gómez, 2022). Thus, interactions based on listening, equal opportunities for participation, and conversations through arguments facilitate the generation of horizontal relationships in the classroom (Núñez & Murillo, 2021). These interactions promote more sociable behaviour, which is transferred to other informal contexts such as recess or extracurricular activities (García-Carrión et al., 2023).

Dialogic Literary Gatherings are characterized by the reading and discussion of classic world literature. During these gatherings, students choose a passage from the reading that has captured their attention and wish to share their thoughts and arguments (Flecha, 2015). While reading interpretations are constructed collectively, dialogic learning is enacted in an egalitarian dialogue that acknowledges all contributions as valuable, regardless of the social position of the participants, recognizing the capabilities of all (García-Carrión et al., 2020; Llopis et al., 2016). This fosters dialogic relationships in other educational and family contexts (Foncillas Beaumont et al., 2020), enhances prosocial behaviours such as solidarity and mutual support (Ruiz-Eugenio, Soler-Gallart, et al., 2023; Villardón-Gallego et al., 2018), and also improves self-image and self-confidence (Díez-Palomar et al., 2020).

Community educational participation entails the involvement of families and other community members through educational, decision-making and evaluative participation (Flecha, 2015; Flecha et al., 2009). In this way, teachers, students, and families are organized into mixed commissions to make decisions regarding the actions to be carried out at the school. Dialogic learning is facilitated through community participatory education, which extends across all areas of the school (De Botton, 2009). This form of participation has been shown to enhance student learning and cultivate positive attitudes towards the school (García et al., 2018; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022; Soler et al., 2019). It encourages the emergence of diverse voices and more supportive relationships through egalitarian dialogue, which allows families and students to learn from each other (Ramis-Salas, 2015; Soler et al., 2019).

Dialogic model of prevention and resolution of conflicts implies the engagement of the community to establish coexistence agreements. It fosters the creation of other spaces for dialogue with the objective of promoting non-violent relationships within the school (Villarejo-Carballido et al., 2019). Egalitarian dialogue among all community actors is central to conflict prevention, as well as the promotion of cooperative activities (Capllonch et al., 2018). The implementation of the model has been shown to reduce conflicts and empower students to take an active role in preventing and reporting violence (Duque et al., 2021; Morlà-Folch et al., 2022; Villarejo-Carballido et al., 2019).

4. Methodology

4.1. Research design

The research question is how does egalitarian dialogue positively affect the participation of primary students in two Learning Communities? To address this question, this research employs a qualitative case study approach, defined by the identification and interpretation of the singularity and complexity of a particular context (Stake, 1999). Communicative methodology was used, which is based on an intersubjective construction of knowledge through dialogue, transforming the traditional interpretative hierarchy of scientific research between “researcher-subject” and “researched-object.” (Gómez et al., 2006).

Recognizing individuals' capacity to communicate, interact, and comprehend the world, communicative methodology places all types of knowledge on an equal epistemological level, allowing the co-creation of knowledge through an egalitarian dialogue between researchers and participants (Gómez et al., 2019). This participation of communities in the research process enables the production of scientific knowledge that has an impact on the transformation of inequalities (Gómez et al., 2019).

The participating schools of this study were selected based on the following criteria:

- a) They began their transformation process in the context of the transferability of Learning Communities to Latin America.
- b) They have been functioning as Learning Communities for a long time so that they are familiar with the project and its implementation.
- c) Its enrolment is made up mainly of students at risk of social exclusion.

Based on the above, contacts were established with other social actors and schools that met these criteria, selecting two Learning Communities for the research. Both schools are in the Coquimbo Region in Chile, a region that is located approximately 470 km from the capital, Santiago.

School 1 has pre-school and primary education, is a free public-private school. Its management is private, it receives both public and private funds, and is free for its students. It is a rural school, and the classrooms are organized by multigrade levels. It has 107 students, and its School Vulnerability Index¹ is 80 %.

School 2 has pre-school and primary education, is public and is administered by the corresponding Local Education Service.² It has 266 students, an enrolment that has been increasing steadily since the implementation of the Learning Communities project, its School Vulnerability Index is 74 %.

Since the implementation of the Learning Communities project, both schools have been steadily improving their results in standardized tests at the national level, going from the category of medium-low performance to medium performance.

4.2. Sample and participant recruitment

A total of 35 students between fourth and eighth grade participated in this research, 19 of them were from School 1 and 16 from school 2, for the selection of cases, diversity in terms of gender was ensured. In addition, 13 adults participated, including 7 teachers from school 1 and 4 teachers and 2 volunteer mothers from school 2.

Furthermore, an advisory panel was formed. In the communicative methodology, these are made up of people who belong to the groups that participate in the research and work based on egalitarian dialogue, allowing the participants to contribute their arguments to contrast them with the statements and analyses made by the researchers (Flecha & Tellado, 2015). Five students between 5th and 7th grade participated in three meetings, the first with the aim of presenting the research and reviewing the interview guidelines, and then two meetings in which the results presented here were discussed. The meetings were held in person and online.

4.3. Data collection

The fieldwork was carried out between March and June 2022, which corresponds to the first curricular semester of the Chilean educational system. Both schools were returning to face-to-face, after two years in virtual and hybrid classes due to the COVID-19 pandemic. All data collection was done in schools through communicative daily life stories and communicative discussion groups (see Table 1).

In the first stage, communicative daily life stories (CDLS) were made. CDLS is defined as a conversation between the researcher and the participant generating a dialogue between the academic knowledge, provided by the researcher, and the daily participant's experience about the research topic (Gómez et al., 2006). A total of twenty-three communicative daily life stories were made with a group of students ranging from fourth to eighth grade in primary education (12 boys and 11 girls) across both schools. The duration of each session ranged from 25 to 50 min.

In the second stage, to triangulate the information (Tracy, 2010), communicative discussion groups were carried out. It is defined as a conversation between interconnected individuals who participate in daily interactions. In contrast to traditional discussion groups, communicative discussion groups involve the researcher and participants assuming the roles of listeners and speakers, engaging in a dialogue concerning the research topic (Gómez et al., 2006). The primary objective is to reach agreements through argumentation and consensus. In this research, a dialogue around quotes from the interviews carried out in the first stage, the scientific knowledge accumulated around the research objective and the participant's interpretations took place. Four communicative groups (CG) were held, with students and adults in each school, lasting approximately 1 h.

The research followed the guidelines of the Ethics in Social Science and Humanities (European Commission, 2021) and the standards suggested by the Chilean Ministry of Education for conducting research with children (MINEDUC, 2018). All participating students were authorized by their parents to participate in the research through informed consent and signed an assent. Interested students, received the transcript of their stories. The participating adults also consented to their participation. All the data collection was recorded in audio format and later transcribed.

4.4. Analysis

A deductive analysis was conducted by systematically examining how egalitarian dialogue is promoted and practiced across the school in the following dimensions:

- a) Participation in the classroom and learning spaces: participation of different agents in all classrooms and learning spaces, including participation in Dialogic Literary Gatherings (Flecha et al., 2009).
- b) Participation in the processes of reaching agreements: participation in process of collective dialogue and consensus presupposing certain validity claims (Flecha, 2019; Habermas, 2003). The focus of this dimension is on how students solve tasks and reach agreements in the school, including participation in Interactive Groups and Community Participation.

¹ The School Vulnerability Index is an indicator that measures the risk of school dropout, through a socioeconomic evaluation of its students.

² Chile is in a transition process that transfers the administration of public education from the councils to the Local Education Services, which are institutions that administer larger territories.

Table 1

Data collection techniques and participants by school.

| Techniques | No. | School 1 | School 2 |
|----------------------------------|-----|------------------------------------|---|
| Communicative daily life stories | 23 | 13 students | 10 students |
| Communicative discussion groups | 4 | CG1: 6 students CG2: 7 teachers | CG3: 6 students CG4: 4 teachers 2 mothers |

- c) Participation in the decision-making process: participation in the decision-making of the school life such as learning process allowing the involvement and the construction of a collective project (Flecha et al., 2009). The focus of this dimension is on who participates in the decision-making process, including Community Participation.

In line with the communicative analysis of the information, in each of the previously defined dimensions, the exclusionary and transformative dimensions were identified (Gómez et al., 2006). The first represents those barriers that prevent transformation, contributing to the reproduction of social inequalities. On the other hand, the second are those that allow inequalities to be overcome (Gómez et al., 2006).

Thus, the exclusionary dimensions represent the barriers to egalitarian dialogue that hinder student participation. Conversely, the transformative dimensions are those that promote egalitarian dialogue, thereby fostering student participation and overcoming previous barriers.

5. Results

5.1. Participation in the classroom and learning spaces: participation as a right for all

Participation in the classroom and learning spaces is understood by students as the right to give their opinion and be heard and considered. This right to participate must be exercised by everyone, regardless of their characteristics such as age, gender, or disability.

The students highlight the importance of listening to diverse opinions, pointing out that each one can make a different contribution based on their individuality in all school learning spaces. In this way, through egalitarian dialogue, they have learned to listen and accept different opinions and different people, developing experiences in which they learn to value diversity. Similarly, students refer to adults as one more actor within the school, indicating that there are no differences in power regarding what each one can contribute.

Furthermore, through egalitarian dialogue, the students have been learning to let go of the fear of participating, indicating that they have lost their shame and fear of being wrong, in a process that is also about having fun. Some acknowledge that shyness and what their peers think limit their participation, although they also indicate that they have been learning to participate more actively. For example, one student reported feeling embarrassed initially about participating in Dialogical Literacy Gatherings, but she later gained confidence to do so:

“I think it's entertaining because at the beginning (...) it was always embarrassing to be the first to raise your hand. And the fact that more people participate kind of gives you the confidence to say ‘Oh, I want too’.”

Story 23, female, school 2

The stories also demonstrate how teachers promote participation and egalitarian dialogue in all school activities, beyond the practice of Successful Educational Actions:

“Since I came to school in fourth grade, I realized that teachers help a lot to people who don't talk much, (...) who don't participate in activities. And I realized that because of this, many people also began to participate and have more confidence.”

GC1, Student, male, school 2

Egalitarian dialogue in these schools is understood as a right for all students, regardless of their background, to express themselves, thus facilitating participation in the classroom and learning spaces. In this context, peers and adults help students learn to express their opinions, overcome the fear of participating or being wrong, and appreciate the contributions everyone can make.

5.2. Achievement of agreements: the dialogue to reach them

Regarding how the students reach agreements, they indicate that this is achieved in most cases through dialogue, allowing everyone to express themselves, and recognizing the richness that this process has for the emergence of opinions, ideas, or activities that had not been originally considered. Participation in drawing up agreements is voluntary, and the students stress the importance of no one being forced to participate. Thus, when students were asked about how they reach agreements between themselves, in regular classes, they indicated the following:

“With the whole class. Thus, they give their opinion, then after that opinion, it can be formed like a balloon like this [makes the gesture of a balloon that is inflating] then, well, someone says, ‘Oh, that's going to help me.’ Because, for example, I say an opinion and that opinion may be useful to another classmate and another idea may come up.”

Story 3, female, school 1

The process in which all the students gather to express their opinions and arguments, leading to the emergence of new ideas, is the predominant method for reaching agreements in both schools. They usually apply this process to all their agreements, such as classroom organization and the definition of extracurricular activities.

Egalitarian dialogue is practiced in making decisions about actions and activities to be carried out as a class, as well as in SEAs such as interactive groups, as noted by a mother who volunteers:

“there are children who thought they knew what they were seeing, but another classmate arrives with a different point of view and they realize that they were indeed wrong and perhaps the means or the way my classmate explained it, is even more accurate than they thought, so the fact of being able to appreciate the opinion of the other makes them feel, or realize that the point of view one has, is not always the correct one.”

GC2, Mother 1, school 2

Through egalitarian dialogue between students, they have been generating learnings, such as being understanding, listening, and respecting different opinions. Likewise, they recognize that they have developed their autonomy to reach agreements without the accompaniment of adults. This process is not exempt from difficulties, as it also entails learning to compromise and to be self-critical. As the following student points out while describing a situation in which the class discusses an agreement:

“You have to be patient because there are students who start to complain because we didn't do what they wanted (...) You have to have tolerance, we have to be more willing to do things that we don't like, but not make so much of a show because of it.”

Story 8, female, school 2

Once the students have incorporated these practices, they manage to feel valued and considered, by their peers and by adults. Thus, in both schools, students are encouraged to reach their agreements through egalitarian dialogue, arguing their opinions, deliberating, and constructing agreements intersubjectively, developing capacities that allow them to be more autonomous.

5.3. Participation in decision-making: democratizing the process

In both cases studied, students have had opportunities to participate in mixed commissions and implement improvements in their schools. They highlight this as a positive and distinctive aspect of their educational institutions:

“It seems good to me [to be part of the decision-making], because the idea is not that a single person chooses and that all the others remain like [he makes a sad face] (...) it would be boring if a person decided for me, it is like going over that person because I also have the right to express an opinion.”

Story 15, male, school 1

This student describes how egalitarian dialogue works in terms of considering all actors in the school to have the opportunity to express their opinions on equal terms. In the process of decision-making, students recognize the learning experience of making decisions with people who do not think like them, which allows them to “*live together*”. They also recognize the importance that this has in feeling part of the establishment, committing themselves, and enjoy more the school experience.

Teachers and mothers also emphasize the importance of students having a space for self-determination in the school. This enables students to make conscious decisions understand their own will, take responsibility, and become more actively engaged. In this way, students have developed proposals that they then present to adults to form mixed committees to implement them. As the following student points out:

“We wanted to play games against another school. We asked the director, and Professor Pedro,³ if we could do them and they said yes, and the sporting events were well organized and...it was very nice. (...) We gave the idea, and they made the contacts, but at all times we, at all times we had participation in the main idea and the different steps.”

Story 4, male, school 1

Likewise, students participate daily in decision-making on matters of their learning in regular classes, showing how egalitarian dialogue is promoted across the school, transforming power relations into egalitarian ones, as indicated by a teacher:

“[The students] had to bring a format of a comic and I gave them homework, so one of them says, ‘Miss, could you give us a grade or give a few tenths to whoever brings it?’ And I said: ‘good idea. Now, let's see, what do the students think?’ And one tells me, ‘No because you are the teacher, you are the one who decides, and we do what you tell us’. And I told him ‘No because here we are all going to have an opinion, so we all must reach agreements, we reach consensus. Are you ok with it?’”

CG4, teacher 6, school 1

However, some students point out that they have not been considered on some occasions. This is how a student who participated in the School Council described it:

³ Fictitious name.

“They didn't take us much into consideration. Although we still expressed our opinion, and they also found it logical, they also talked among themselves [adults] and I think they made decisions among themselves, more than with us.”

Story 22, female, school 2

The perception of students about their participation in decision-making highlights the need to continue moving forward to promote it and consider their contributions to practice egalitarian dialogue in all school areas. They describe that they would like to be part of the decisions that are made about the school, but these spaces are usually more oriented towards adults. At the same time, they indicate the potential that it would have to incorporate them. In contrast, they identify as a disadvantage that adults close in on themselves.

The teachers also recognize that further progress can be made in this regard, describing that more emphasis has been placed on promoting the participation of parents in the SEA of Community Participation. This is described by a teacher:

“I think that we need to make a little progress on the issue of the democratic participation of students, that is, I believe that the issue of parents, the fact of the participation that they have here in the school and all the instances with which Successful Educational Actions that the project has is fine (...) Now, in my opinion, I could be wrong, there are some instances where students could have greater democratic participation, such as in the part of school coexistence.”

GC2, Teacher 4, School 2

In this way, teachers and students point out that student participation in decision-making still requires improvements. While there are many spaces for students to make decisions daily and promote egalitarian dialogue, especially within their classes, it is acknowledged that greater student participation could be encouraged in other areas as well.

6. Discussion

From the analysis, it is possible to identify that egalitarian dialogue has foremost, enabled the students at the investigated schools to recognize participation as a fundamental right for everyone. Thus, participation takes place in a process of speaking and listening, providing all students with equal opportunities for participation and fostering horizontal relationships (Flecha, 2019; Núñez & Murillo, 2021). Through these relationships, students have been shedding their shame and fear of making mistakes in a climate of mutual support and collaboration that increases their self-confidence, thereby promoting active participation (Díez-Palomar et al., 2020; García et al., 2021; Ruiz-Eugenio, Soler-Gallart, et al., 2023).

Adults seek to facilitate student participation processes, understanding childhood as competent, capable and concerted in the present (Ferreyra, 2011; Gómez et al., 2010; Osoro & Zubizarreta, 2017), which allows students not to depend on adult figures to reach agreements and make decisions. Through egalitarian dialogue, students often reach agreements using argumentation as a means to make decisions and interacting based on the claims of validity that guide their understanding (Gómez & Valls, 2022; Habermas, 2003). In this sense, students, mothers, and teachers described how dialogic learning is enacted when new ideas emerged through dialogue, transforming their own, and facilitating an intersubjective construction that recognises all capabilities (García-Carrión et al., 2020; Llopi et al., 2016). Thus, the students have learned to deliberate on the issues that affect them, incorporating the understanding that disagreement is a natural part of the decision-making process, in line with Hess and Mcavoy (2015).

However, both, students and teachers, realized the need to continue deepening the promotion of students participation in decision-making, to prevent the generation of an asymmetric relationship or token participation that favours adults (Carrasco-Aguilar & Luzón, 2019; Escobar & Pezo, 2019; Urbina et al., 2021). The difficulty in promoting student participation in decision-making may be related to the social context that assumes teachers as the actors who decide what must be done in schools, which is expected to be transformed in Learning Communities (Díez-Palomar et al., 2020). Even so, in both schools spaces are generated daily for students to be part of decision-making, realizing extensive participation experiences in which they can debate and express themselves through egalitarian dialogue, increasing their agency (García-Carrión et al., 2020).

Egalitarian dialogue between students and between students and adults, transform the traditional hierarchical relation within schools in which only adults have power, to make the students assume the leading roles, promoting their participation (Flecha, 2019; García-Carrión et al., 2020). Students participation enhances their school experience by fostering positive attitudes towards the school, such as a sense of belonging, commitment, and joy (Morlà-Folch et al., 2022; Soler et al., 2019). The effects of this daily participation also coincide with previous Chilean research that has found that students feel part of their schools when they are treated with respect, listened to, and lose the shame and fear of saying what they think (Albornoz et al., 2015; Manghi et al., 2021; Valdés et al., 2020).

The participation of students in both Learning Communities in this study demonstrates a school environment that provides them with the opportunity to learn through the deepening of democracy within their schools, while recognizing the capacity for action and reflection in all students (Elboj & Flecha, 2002; Flecha, 2009). This promotes a participatory education that takes place in all areas of the school (De Botton, 2009) and coincide with what Escobar and Pezo (2019) have defined as participation that is characterized by its daily, diverse and transformative nature.

7. Conclusions

In the Chilean context, this research was proposed to address the experience of two Learning Communities in the Coquimbo region to demonstrate the positive effects of dialogic learning on primary student participation through egalitarian dialogue. The results indicate that the students have a broad perspective of participation that recognises and considers all voices in processes of learning, generation of agreements, and decision-making in the two schools investigated. Egalitarian dialogue manifests itself in schools through

the implementation of Successful Educational Actions, but it goes beyond these boundaries as it begins to permeate all relationships within the school, including regular classes and school actions.

Overall, it is concluded that in both schools examined in this study, the egalitarian dialogue of dialogic learning is manifested through the daily relationships that develop within the school, leading to positive effects on the participation of primary school students.

Egalitarian dialogue has created opportunities for all students to participate equally, recognizing their capabilities. This participation is encouraged by both students and teachers, fostering a collaborative environment that seeks to generate dialogue and collective consensus. Therefore, egalitarian dialogue enhances students' ability to express their ideas, listen, reach agreements, and make decisions. This facilitates their participation and transforms traditional hierarchical power relationships within schools into egalitarian ones.

This study contributes to the evidence already demonstrated by the literature that even in adverse educational contexts it is possible to think of transformational possibilities that recognize students as concrete actors in the present, democratizing school relations through egalitarian dialogue. The experiences of the two schools in the Coquimbo Region contribute to the growing body of evidence regarding the transformative potential of the Learning Communities transferability project in Chile, aligning with international findings in various contexts. However, it is important to note that due to its nature as a case study, this research has limitations that prevent the generalization of its results.

Future research could explore the experiences of student participation in Learning Communities across different educational levels in the country. Additionally, investigating the role of interculturality or inclusion in student participation would provide valuable insights into understanding how the dialogue fostered and practiced in LCs contributes to this regard.

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Declaration of competing interest

The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

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