

## RESIGNIFYING PEDAGOGICAL RENEWAL TODAY: PEDAGOGICAL BENCHMARKS AND SINGULARITIES IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Received January 2024

Accepted April 2024

### Abstract

Understanding what is meant by pedagogical renewal today, based on the transformative processes that are being carried out, poses a challenge, one that is even greater if the aim is to elucidate the pedagogical benchmarks and hallmarks of secondary schools. This article, which takes the form of a multiple case study, aims to bring to the fore those unique and defining elements of the selected schools, considered renewal schools, from five Spanish regions. During the fieldwork, semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews and discussion groups were held with members of the management teams, teachers, families and students. The analysed results show that the elements highlighted by the schools linked to pedagogical renewal are unique features of them, with the school project being the tool used to construct the educational meaning of its practices, aiming to ensure that these practices form a coherent whole with its discourse. Thus, for example, it highlights the central role of students in decision-making in their learning process or reflection with the teaching team in improving educational practice. It should be noted that they do not define themselves with the same term, and they add more current and recent pedagogical benchmarks to the classic ones. In short, this study seeks to provide a novel contribution to the study of contemporary pedagogical renewal, given the lack of such studies in secondary school education.

**Keywords** – Pedagogical renewal, Pedagogical benchmarks, Secondary education.

### To cite this article:

de Castro-Calvo, A., Carrete-Marín, N., & Simó-Gil, N. (2024). Resignifying pedagogical renewal today: Pedagogical benchmarks and singularities in secondary schools. *Journal of Technology and Science Education*, 14(3), 720-737. <https://doi.org/10.3926/jotse.2704>

## 1. Introduction

This article is the result of the work carried out by the coordinated subproject *Resituating pedagogical renewal in Spain from a critical perspective: Five case studies in secondary schools in Aragon, Catalonia, Castille and León, Valencian Community and the Basque Country* (PID2019-108138RB-C22). The general objective of the project is to study pedagogical renewal (PR from now on) currently carried out in Spain in secondary schools.

Specifically, the purpose of this article is to identify and reconceptualise the pedagogical benchmarks and hallmarks that underpin the educational practices of the selected schools in order to analyse, from a critical perspective, the meanings of PR today. To do this, we have chosen a critical interpretive critique based on a multiple case study to understand and analyse the pedagogical models that mark the pedagogical philosophy and practice of the participating schools.

One of the main tasks we have set throughout the research project is the (re)conceptualisation of pedagogical renewal as a term that has evolved and changed along with the society. As Carbonell (2001) and Pericacho (2016) point out, PR promotes a comprehensive, critical and emancipatory education that is open to the social environment, democratic and participatory, with a vision that is socially and politically committed and transforming of the educational model.

In this reconceptualisation, we will highlight, thanks to the research conducted by the aforementioned project (Díez-Gutiérrez, Horcas-López, Arregui-Murguiondo & Simó-Gil, 2023), the following characteristics of PR: a) its emancipatory and transformative nature gives education a global character, beyond the classroom, that helps students build their own life project; b) it is socially, ethically and politically committed to building a more just and equitable world, connected to the local to think about the global; c) it is horizontal and democratic, where the educational community is the protagonist and participation and critical thinking are promoted; and d) it is public, understood as a service to the collective that guarantees the right of access to quality education of all and for all.

Thus, as we have previously stated (Beneyto-Seoane, Carrete-Marín, Arregui-Murguiondo & Domingo-Peñafiel, 2023), to reconceptualise PR today we need to analyse the term by establishing relationships with the transformative processes that are occurring in schools. We therefore consider whether these changes are based on reflection and whether the critical vision of the educational and social reality entails profound modifications of schools and aspires to social transformation (Feu & Torrent, 2019). Furthermore, they are in line with an open and critical school, with active methodologies and democratic structures (Pericacho, 2015). It should be noted that there are still no studies that relate PR to educational practices in secondary schools. In this way, this article approaches the educational practices of the secondary schools studied in different places of the Spanish state with the aim of understanding the new conceptual frameworks that they incorporate that are close to PR. It also aims to bring out the pedagogy that underlies and is shared by the educational community based on other ways of thinking, being, feeling, dreaming, teaching and living that make relationships more just and equitable.

In this way, being aware of the multiple meanings of the term educational innovation (García-Gómez & Escudero, 2021), with this declaration of intentions we move away from educational innovation that fails to examine how educational changes can confront social problems derived from capitalism, machoism, productivity at the service of the market, inequality and the deterioration of the planet. Although we are aware that there are:

*...processes of innovation and change that are associated with or may be linked to PR (...) and understand it as a process capable of connecting the pedagogical and the schools to society, democracy, justice and equity in order to integrate and critically consider the what, the why, the for what purpose and the how of education towards a horizon of emancipation and transformation of greater social and ecological justice (Diez-Gutiérrez, et al. 2023: page 44).*

We also differentiate the term PR from the term transformation (Torrent & Feu, 2020) since it has different objectives and impacts on daily school life. This brief conceptual exploration aims to offer a framework for reflection with the selected schools to understand what exemplars they share and how they base their educational practices.

## **2. Design, Methodology and Approach**

Taking into account the study's critical interpretive approach and the research objectives, we have chosen a multiple case study as our research method (Stake, 1998; McMillan & Schumacher, 2011; Creswell & Creswell, 2023), placing emphasis on the internal perspective of the participants (Korthagen, 2007). By

getting to know their points of view, we have identified the pedagogical benchmarks that the schools considered renewing due to their pedagogical tradition and discourse and how they define their educational practices, based on their singularities and philosophy, to reconceptualise pedagogical renewal today from a critical perspective.

Specifically, the selected and analysed cases of secondary education correspond to five schools located in the regions of Aragon, Catalonia, Castilla and León, Valencian Community and the Basque Country (Spain). They were selected because they met eligibility criteria that placed them as renewal schools (Table 1), in addition to being accessible by the research team. The conditions established enabled us to study in depth their approaches and relationships with current pedagogical renewal, thus allowing us to respond to the stated objective.

Table 1 shows the selection criteria for the sample of participating schools:

School selection criteria	Defining characteristics
Accessibility and interest	Once prior contact was established, the schools were easily accessible by one or more members of the research team, who also lived in the same municipality as the school. They also expressed their interest in participating in the research.
Territorial distribution	One school was selected from each of the regions participating in the project.
Link with pedagogical renewal from the school's documents and website	The school presents a clear link with pedagogical renewal in its internal documents and with the information it projects. There is evidence of the teachers' relationship, at some point in their career, with the pedagogical renewal movements of the region.
The length and intensity of the pedagogical renewal project.	Both long-established schools and others that have been converted or newly created based on the foundation of pedagogical renewal are included. The intensity of the educational project is considered in relation to pedagogical renewal.
Orientation of discourse and methodology with pedagogical renewal.	The discourse used and the methodology carried out in the classrooms of the secondary schools show clear references to pedagogical renewal and its benchmarks.

Table 1. Selection criteria for the secondary schools

These criteria became useful scoring elements to assess each of the schools in each region and to select the sample.

## 2.1. Informants of Data Collection Instruments

The people who took on the role of informants in this study were, in each case, secondary school students and teachers, representatives of the families and the school management team. In total, 97 informants were selected. Table 2 summarises the number and distribution of the informants in each case.

Data collection was carried out through a combination of different qualitative information collection techniques according to the role of the informants and with the aim of contrasting and complementing the different perceptions. Specifically, three instruments were designed: semi-structured interviews, in-depth interviews and discussion groups, appropriate to the different informant profile (Table 2). Different conversations were also established with students and teachers in the participant observations carried out in each school.

The in-depth interviews were held with those members of the schools with extensive experience and history related to pedagogical renewal. Teachers, members of the management team, secondary school students and representatives of the families of the students from the respective schools participated in the semi-structured interviews and discussion groups.

Case	Role	Informants	TOTAL
1. Aragon	Teachers	7	20
	Management team	2	
	Students	7	
	Families	4	
2. Castille and León	Teachers	7	19
	Management team	1	
	Students	9	
	Families	2	
3. Catalonia	Teachers	6	22
	Management team	4	
	Students	6	
	Families	6	
4. Valencian Community	Teachers	5	17
	Management team	2	
	Students	5	
	Families	5	
5. Basque Country	Teachers	8	14
	Management team	3	
	Students	5	
	Families	3	
TOTAL			97

Table 2. List of cases and distribution of informants

## 2.2. Procedure

After designing and validating the instruments, the research team planned with the contact persons of the selected schools a series of meetings with each of the members of the educational community. In most cases, the contact persons belonged to the management team of the school and were in charge of contacting the rest of the study participants as informants. The information collection was carried out during the 2021-2022 academic year. Before it began, they were told about the purpose and characteristics of the study and the type of information that was expected to be collected. Once informed consent was obtained, they were asked for authorisation to audio record the meeting. The entire data collection procedure was carried out following the research ethics of the University of Vic - Central University of Catalonia.

## 2.3. Data Analysis

The administration of the instruments during the fieldwork phase entailed the collection of a considerable volume of qualitative data. For this reason, the analysis process consisted of a content analysis assisted by the *Atlas-ti v23* software.

To do this, a systematic review of previous literature (Beneyto-Seoane et al., 2023) was taken into account in order to reduce the information collected in the semi-structured interviews, the discussion groups and the in-depth interviews. The result of this deductive process was the creation of a large number of categories or network of codes and subcodes related to the topics linked to pedagogical renewal considered within the framework of the project. Likewise, this pre-established code system was combined with an inductive process resulting from open, unstructured or *in vivo* coding to record emerging and relevant aspects that were not considered at the start. The total elements of the coding system were 102 categories or units of information organised into 29 codes and 67 structured subcodes, as well as 6 emerging codes.

Of all these codes, only the codes and subcodes directly related to the benchmarks and the renewal approach of the school based on their singularities were taken into consideration for the analysis of the

data used in this article. With these codes we intended to analyse the objective set out in the introduction of the article, which consists of understanding the conceptual frameworks that schools close to PR incorporate and bringing to the fore the pedagogy that underlies and is shared by the teaching teams (Table 3).

#	Selected codes	Selected subcodes	Operational description
04	Self-identifying term	04.1.- Definition innovative school 04.2.- Definition renewal school 04.3.- Definition transformative school	How the school identifies itself. Term adopted by the interviewees when identifying with a specific name the unique character of the school, in the sense of being a school with distinctive elements.
05	Pedagogical benchmarks		Authors recognised by the interviewees as benchmarks of the school's educational projects; pedagogical, psychological, artistic and sociological currents recognised as benchmarks and basis of the educational discourse and practices.
06	Singularities	06.1.- Singularities highlighted by students 06.2- Singularities highlighted by the management team 06.3.- Singularities highlighted by teachers 06.4.- Singularities highlighted by families	Elements linked to pedagogical renewal or any other aspect of the school that the different informants highlight.
07	Philosophy		Values, ideology, objectives, mission, vision, purposes that guide the school's educational practice with a renewal tradition.
15	School's sociopolitical commitment	15.1. School and social struggles 15.2. Teachers and social struggles 15.3. Students and social struggles 15.4. Families and social struggles	Social struggles related to social justice, equality, diversity, inclusivity, sustainability etc. Also, actions carried out related to social transformation and the aforementioned values; political and social platforms the school is associated with; programmes and actions to improve the social environment from a critical perspective; curriculum oriented to social, political and ethical commitment.
16	Defining characteristics		Concept and way in which the school builds community and promotes a sense of belonging among its members.
24	PR movements, organisations and networks		Movements, organisations and networks of pedagogical renewal mentioned by the informants with whom the school is linked. Relationship the schools establish with the Pedagogical Renewal Movements (PRM).

Table 3. Compendium of codes for data analysis

<b>Process followed for data analysis (content)</b>	
1.	Detection and coding of topics (or categories) related to pedagogical renewal and previously established from the literature review (Beneyto-Seoane et al., 2023)
2.	Identification and selection of representative quotes for each of the topics or categories of the study.
3.	Description and interpretation of significant quotes belonging to the registered codes or topics.
<b>Credibility criteria of the resulting information</b>	
1.	High frequency of appearance (or rooting) of the detected codes.
2.	Saturation and representativeness of quotes that justify the interpretation of the content of the anecdotes analysed to respond to the research objectives.
3.	Confirmation and contrast of the descriptions and interpretations made with the findings obtained from other similar studies on today's pedagogical renewal.

Table 4. Systematisation of data analysis

In this way, the content analysis was carried out through the actions of coding, selection of representative quotes and interpretation of results, also taking into account credibility criteria for the selection and obtaining of the most representative results. Table 4 shows a summary of the process and criteria followed.

### 3. Results

Below, we present the main results extracted from our analysis of the different codes analysed. First, reference will be made to the quotes extracted by code in order to then proceed to the results and analysis of the quotes selected for each of the cases of the different regions.

From the analysis of the data with Atlas-ti v23 in the documents analysed, we can appreciate the weight of the different categories according to the number of quotes per code and subcode (Table 5). To begin with, with respect to the self-identifying term, the schools are mainly defined as innovative rather than renewing or transformative, an aspect that will need to be contrasted with the content of the actual quotes. Also notable is the presence of the pedagogical models and elements of the schools' philosophy in their discourse, as well as the singularities highlighted by the families and students compared to those highlighted by the teachers and management team. It should be noted that the teachers' points of view could highlight different perceptions of the schools' renewing nature and of their uniqueness compared to what the students and families think since it may be related to the way they identify and perceive themselves. Finally, the schools' relationships with the Pedagogical Renewal Movements and other institutions or networks linked to pedagogical renewal today and throughout the history and trajectory of the schools also stand out.

	Quotes
04. Self-identifying term	39
041. Definition innovative school	24
042. Definition renewal school	14
043. Definition transformative school	1
05. Pedagogical benchmarks	45
06. Singularities	12
061. Singularities highlighted by students	67
062. Singularities highlighted by management team	24
063. Singularities highlighted by teachers	20
064. Singularities highlighted by families	48
07. Philosophy	103
15. School's sociopolitical commitment	28
151. School and social struggles	15
152. Teachers and social struggles	4
153. Students and social struggles	9
154. Families and social struggles	3
161. Defining characteristics	19
24. PR movements, organisations and networks	20

Table 5. List of codes and quotes extracted from the analysis of the collected documents (Atlas-ti v23)

In the following subsections after the content analysis, all the codes and information are triangulated in order to interpret the categories transversally and respond to the research objectives. This positioning allows us to gain a comprehensive understanding and global treatment of the information.

#### 3.1. Self-Identifying Term and Pedagogical Benchmarks

The content analysis of the documents coincides with the results noted above regarding the predominant self-identifying term. Thus, from the quotes collected it can be seen how most of the schools identify

more with the term innovation than renewing or transformation. In any case, it is necessary to see what they understand by innovation and what aspects they identify with.

In some cases, the schools identify themselves as innovative by introducing elements that they consider distinctive with respect to other schools, such as the creation of a dynamic role for pedagogical innovation that reflects on the meaning of change and educational improvement in the school and is differentiated from the management team:

*One of the characteristics of the ikastolas [cooperative schools in the Basque Country that use Euskera in teaching] in general has always been that we are very, very, very pioneering. Pioneers in pedagogical innovation, not originally in innovation, in education in Euskera and later in innovation in different areas [...] Yes, there is a rather strange post in schools. In other words, it is innovation or innovation management or innovation team. It's not a team that normally exists in schools. And well, we were lucky that our previous head made a commitment to innovation because he appointed an innovation director and together with and bit by bit what he did was create his innovation group with people from different stages. Well, because we see that in reality we need a team that is a little outside the management team so they can think about new methodologies, about educational innovation (Basque Country, management team interview 1, quote 18).*

Nevertheless, other schools do not always understand innovation as the integration of new elements since, as we can see in the following quote, they are fully aware that the methodologies are common to those of other schools or that they have a long trajectory in the history of education:

*I didn't like the term innovation very much. We are calling innovation things that are, I won't say 100 years old but maybe 80. We are calling working by projects innovation: but they were already doing this in the 1930s! I think for some things we should use another term ... (Aragon, management team interview 1, quote 1).*

What gives meaning to change, according to the schools, is the commitment to align educational practice with their pedagogical approaches. The idea of innovating involves finding solutions to solve the educational and social problems faced by the schools themselves or providing something new that improves the learning conditions of the students:

*We understand innovation as solutions, it's about finding solutions for real existing problems. It's about bringing teaching closer to people who perhaps wouldn't reach it otherwise (Castille and León teacher discussion group 1, quote 31 and 32).*

In general, the discourse evokes the idea of introducing changes as a consequence of a constant reflection that guides improvement. There are also schools whose management team identify more with the terms renewal or transformation, treated as synonyms, all of this together with the way in which the school has adapted to the changes at each moment:

*Well, before, perhaps, more transformation or renewal than innovation because innovate is like we're not innovating anything. They are things like in the end there are many schools that are carrying it out or that have been doing it for a long time. Therefore, it's how to adapt to the current situation that exist outside the school as well. In the end the school is part of society, and therefore it should be a reflection of it. If the society is changing, the school should also change (Catalonia, management team interview 1, quote 2).*

Or the term alternative school, because it is considered different from what the other schools of the area do, and is in constant change and movement, evolving:

*An alternative school, I would say [...] Yes, because I think that by having slightly different or special students, then the teachers also try to do things differently to try to engage the students and motivate them; like in other schools where the students already come motivated or the families already support them, you continue with the usual dynamic (Castille and León, teacher interview n°3, quote 3).*

In some situations, they prefer not to identify with any term, eschewing the label. It seems that the pressure that the term itself exerts on what they have to do or how they are seen makes it difficult to move forward freely:

*We are going to say that we don't feel like renewers. Yes, it is true that when you look at the papers and say: we've done things; when you look at the people who have been working here, you do see that there are a lot of people who have modified many things. But to say that we are renewers, well I don't know whether I would hold that flag or not* (Castille and León, management team interview 1, quote 18).

We highlight the case of a school that does not identify with innovation but attributes that term to the one used by the educational administration. In this case, the teaching team identifies with the term active methodologies. Another element that emerges from the discourse is the idea that it is not the school that transforms but rather the teaching team. Thus, the leadership and cohesion of the teaching staff are key to the school's improvement. All of this places the focus on the role not only of the management teams but also of the teachers, with the stability of the teachers and the school's projects linked to pedagogical renewal being important:

*Renew, you renew depending on the teacher. If you share, you force yourself to renew and adapt* (Catalonia, teacher discussion group 1, quote 41).

Aside from the difficulty in agreeing on a specific definition, it can be concluded from the majority of voices that the teachers who are drivers of change are committed to collective team involvement balanced with a personal conviction:

*After more than 25 years teaching, I have come to the conclusion that neither renewal nor innovation – what is needed is heart. And with your heart you reach everywhere. And it doesn't matter to me if there is renewal, if there is not, if there is a digital whiteboard, if there is not. If there is heart, there is education* (Aragon, in-depth interview 3, quote 2).

Finally, from the analysis of the information collected, we can see that the schools, committed to processes of change and considered renewal schools, use the terms innovation and renewal interchangeably, among other similar terms (Esteve, 2016; Feu & Torrent, 2020). In no case do they relate the concept of pedagogical renewal to preceding historical moments (Díez-Gutiérrez et al., 2023).

In addition, with regards to the pedagogical references mentioned, one can see that the references made are names of pedagogy that resonate with and are linked to different pedagogical currents that have existed throughout history. They cite Freinet, Freire, Piaget, Vygotsky or Tonucci, but they themselves recognise that these benchmarks do not provide a living basis for the construction of educational practices in today's secondary schools:

*I think we could talk about Freinet, Piaget...* (Valencian Community, management team interview 1, quote 23).

*Well Freire, perhaps, yes, probably Freire* (Castille and León, management team interview 2, quote 3).

In some schools they present as benchmarks the seven fundamental principles of learning of the OECD inspired by Groff (2012) and UNESCO (Scott, 2015):

*Related to what we said about the current situation, we said that it is good, and through the university you have some pedagogical models, whether Piaget, whether Vygotsky... all these exemplars that, in the end, we would say that we have the foundation ... but it seemed to us that the educational project ... when you see what you are trying to do, which is to be more current and have reference points close to us, although these have also drawn on the classics of pedagogy* (Catalonia, management team interview 1, quote 3).

In different schools they express the need to consider closer models:

*We started speaking with Luis Torrego and well, we did the awareness phase for the book of learning communities in the phases of transformation of the school and of those of us who were there* (Castille and León, management team interview 2, quote 1).

These reference points are the result of projects they have participated in, training that has served to introduce changes in the school's practices or academics or teachers they have had contact with:



*In 2009, the school took a leap forward, and what has been theoretically developed for years, both at Mondragon University and at Arizmendi Ikastola, is where the theoretical contribution condensed by Dr. Rafael Cristóbal has a significant importance. A book entitled “The child and the view of knowledge, a pedagogy of trust” was published. For the first time, this term [pedagogy of trust] appeared. The management team at Arizmendi took a leap forward and started in a few of the school’s Early Childhood Education buildings the experience of transforming early childhood education and what it had been doing until then (Basque Country, management team interview 1, quote 10).*

The relationships with lived pedagogies have pervaded the reflections and improvements of teachers in their own educational career:

*For me, discovering the Waldorf pedagogy for my daughters marked a before and after; and then, what I saw with them I tried to do in my classes and there was like a different perspective and another respect towards the students. I mean, I was always very involved with my students (Aragon, in-depth interview 2, quote 31).*

At the same time, the schools seek to improve collective practice by exchanging experiences that represent examples of educational practices that work. This exchange is crucial to initiate the reflection of change between schools:

*Teachers need to share with other teachers how they do it to empower them to carry out changes in the schools beyond theoretical models or on paper (Valencian Community, management team interview 1, quote 51).*

Thus, the schools tell us about aspects such as: the need to build teaching agreements, from a critical educational perspective, on the best secondary education teaching schedule to create optimal learning conditions for all students; the reorganisation of teaching spaces and times to promote competency-based learning; the commitment to make agreements that stop market pressure in the introduction of digital technologies in the classroom without educational criteria; meaningful involvement of families in the education of their children through participation in learning communities; and the impossibility of reaching agreements in carrying out globalised projects without having first discussed the meaning they have in the schools’ educational project. The participating schools tell us that these situations have been possible thanks to the pedagogical visits or the opportunities they have had to experience other educational realities that have enabled them to learn, from a critical perspective, what educational and social transformations make sense in each context (Esteve, 2016), aspects clearly related to pedagogical renewal.

Finally, it can be seen from the data analysed how, beyond certain classic pedagogical models related to pedagogical renewal (Bolaño, 2015; Ortiz de Santos, Torrego & Santamaría-Cárdaba, 2018), the schools considered renewal schools today are concerned about transforming their practices and teaching model to guarantee the success of their students (Domínguez Rodríguez, 2016). They propose to break their school’s traditional school grammar of schooling (Collet, 2021) by questioning aspects such as: the 55-minute subject schedule, the meeting spaces of class groups / classrooms, and the educational relationships between a class group and the teacher. For this reason, they are interested in the contemporary practices of other schools or in other closer reference points, which allow them to adopt practices that are aligned with the changes they want to introduce in their schools (Beneyto-Seoane et al., 2023).

### **3.2. Singularities Highlighted by the Students and Families**

Although all participating agents highlighted singularities of the schools, in this section we highlight the opinions of the students and families, focusing on their experience of educational practices. Above all, what students value most about the school is the way of teaching, which they consider innovative and different from that of other secondary schools:

*Well, I think that perhaps what I like most is the different and innovative way of teaching, although it is true that at first it seemed quite strange to me because I was used to the traditional way; but I did adapt more or less quickly. And, I don’t know. This is what I most liked (Catalonia, student discussion group 2, quote 3).*

They highlight that they learn:

*I recommend my school because you'll make some very good friends, both teachers and students. You'll learn a lot. They have very good activities and very good excursions. You won't get bored here in the daily activities, nor will you learn nothing. You'll always arrive home with something learned* (Castille and León, student interview 1, quote 35).

They also mention the uniqueness of the values that the school practices:

*Apart from the teachers, I really like the values that they want in the kids, whether critical thinking, respect and others that I think are fundamental to build a healthy society today* (Valencian Community, student discussion group-2, quote 37).

The students also told us about how they experienced learning autonomy, understood as a process of responsibility and decision-making about how to organise themselves to achieve the objectives that each student has agreed upon with the teachers:

*I also think that the way of working here is more autonomous and you decide a lot what you want to do, which doesn't... within certain objectives to achieve. But I also think that this is very good because you know more about what you have to learn* (Catalonia, student discussion group 2, quote 68).

They make it clear that in secondary schools social skills, student participation and teamwork have been key in the active methodologies used:

*What I have been most grateful for is in ESO [compulsory secondary education], especially the other priorities or the completion of projects that I think we learn a lot in and also social skills, above all teamwork, which in other places weren't learnt* (Aragon, student discussion group 2, quote 71).

However, in some cases, a certain concern and fear is expressed that the unique model experienced in these schools during secondary education might affect them negatively in a new school where they will study A Levels with an approach focused on teaching content and not on the student learning process:

*Yes, but the problem is that afterwards the options that we'll have for A Levels will be options to study traditionally. We have been ... well, I have been studying this way for three years and now we'll have to go back to traditional studying* (Catalonia, student discussion group 2, quote 62).

Finally, families also highlight differentiating features of these schools that have been key to choosing them. As a general rule, the main reason they point to is the educational project that they consider innovative and different from others:

*We enrolled well, we enrolled here, basically because it was a small school. It was the first year of secondary school. It seemed to us, due to his characteristics, what the boy was like, he could grow more in a small school than in a big school. And also, although because of how they explained it to us, it was the first batch. In other words, we also had no background on how the work would end up, but well, we were interested in the approach of the school's educational project and that's why we ended up choosing this option* (Catalonia, family discussion group 3, quote 1)

*I chose this school because I saw it as innovative, it has very innovative programmes, a different type of teaching, and I liked it* (Valencian Community, family discussion group 3, quote 1)

The families highlight the unique aspects, calling it an active school by focusing on educational methodologies:

*Well, I think it's an eminently active school, where the centre of education lies in the students and cooperative work. So active methodologies are being used, which I think what they do is involve them much more in their learning and, above all, make it more meaningful, so that what they do lasts. In other words, not just memorise, I get a ten in the exam and that's it. No, but this way of working I think is more engraved in their training* (Aragon, family discussion group 3, quote 5).

They also highlight the capacity of the schools to deal with particular cases and offer personalised attention:

*Another important thing about this school is that it adapts to children with difficulties. That is, they take into account children's difficulties and adapt exams, classes. They adapt everything to them from the first moment* (Valencian Community, family discussion group 3, quote 20).

Clearly related to this aspect, it is also valued positively the fact that they maintain direct contact with the families and that they keep them informed about their children's progress:

*In fact, sometimes it's the other way round, you miss something and they are the ones who call you. I mean, they also spend many hours and they meet up a lot to talk about the students. It's true that, although they are not with the same students all the time in their meetings, they talk a lot about each one: This one seems serious, this one sad or he doesn't laugh so much ... They called me, they called me and I didn't see it, it was them. In this case I am also very happy because I think that in a place where there were more students this would have been missed* (Valencian Community, family discussion group 3, quote 39).

Another aspect that they highlight is the work of critical thinking, as well as fostering their autonomy, which students also highlight:

*Yes, autonomy. I think they each develop their critical thinking much better. They have spaces to share those thoughts because they have freedom. Well, a controlled freedom. I mean, within a framework. But I see that they have confidence. I see them working with confidence* (Basque Country, family discussion group 2, quote 21).

In any case, although they value the methodologies implemented as one of the unique features of these schools, they also question some aspects:

*To manage this type of learning, they have to change the way they learn, adapt. They like using tablets a lot, but they get distracted so we have to redirect that way of learning a little and that is to learn again, to learn. In other words, we go back to point zero and then, when they get the hang of it, fine; but until they get the hang of it well, we're stumbling around a bit* (Aragon, family discussion group 3, quote 6).

On some occasions families doubt the evaluation and express a lack of understanding of the relationship between student learning and educational results. Society has established a cause-effect relationship between learning and memorisation of content reflected in the academic results of students. In this equation, integrated learning of a student understood as relational, communicative, cooperative and interactive learning of subjects with knowledge and phenomena (Ferri, 2021: page 191) is not evaluated. When schools want to carry out a complex evaluation of learning, beyond memorisation, the cause-effect relation is no longer useful and it is difficult to convey to families what their children learn at school.

### 3.3. The Philosophy that Inspires the Schools' Educational Practices

With regards to the philosophy that inspires their projects, we could say that it is marked by different conceptual tools that the vast majority of schools share. The management teams, families and students all highlight concepts like inclusion, globalised projects, autonomy, competencies and cooperative work. But what are their words telling us?

They refer to valuing respect for students, specifically adolescents, taking care of dialogue, exchange, speaking, what you tell me, in order to emancipate both teachers and students. It should be noted that all the schools studied share such a vision. The pedagogy of uncertainty can also be worked this way:

*I don't know which is better or if there is a better, but I think it is already rich to be exposed to different things and just to take that with you and get used to more things, to more types of people, to more types of teachers, to different ways of teaching and learning. Everything prepares you better* (Aragon, teacher discussion group 1, quote 151).

The schools organise the educational activity with the intention that learning is important and seek complicity with the social environment establishing relationships in which education includes both inside and

outside the school. This openness to the social environment offers the possibility of effecting meaningful learning and having, as was mentioned in the in-depth interviews of Catalonia, an evolved education: experiencing school as part of life, looking at learning and personal development, emotional education, learning to know, coexistence and co-teaching; a school in which there is life (Molina-Galván, 2011) and that has learnt to stop and reflect on the educational meaning of where it wants to move forward:

*We were already doing many things open to the social environment, be it the town, entities ... many things. But now I see we are much clearer about where we want to go when we do them. We did everything, but over the years the why has become much more defined* (Catalonia, in-depth interview 2, quote 9).

*For years there was an ideological and pedagogical refinement of what we had done with the approach of the theoretical framework of the pedagogy of trust. It was that we wanted to delve into what cultivation of the person was (...) the model of the person. What person are we talking about?* (Basque Country, management team interview 1, quote 40).

This philosophy also includes horizontal decision-making. In this case, two of the schools investigated are educational cooperatives, and this means that their daily life is governed by the pedagogical principles of cooperativism: equality, democracy, participation, mutual aid and concern for the community. In the case of these two schools, there is the role of pedagogical innovation or educational model, which focuses on thinking about the educational organisation of the school. This model is based on the pedagogy of trust and the model of the person they aim to educate:

*The values that they want to instill in us are critical thinking and respect, values that to me seem fundamental to build a healthy society today* (Valencian Community, student discussion group 2, quote 37).

*The fact of being a cooperative, I think also influences the sense that we feel it (...) as our own. So you want to enrich the project* (Valencian Community, teacher discussion group 1, quote 55).

The school of the Valencian Community places sustainability as the backbone of its philosophy. Its motto is “learn to learn”.

The philosophy that underlies the practices of the participating schools implies a change in the role of students and teachers in the educational process. The conceptualisation of some philosophical principles is accompanied by changes directly related to the different work methodologies in the classroom and the use of teaching materials. Each school chooses, among possible twenty-first century pedagogies (Carbonell, 2015), those that they can carry out and that cohere with the school’s project. Work by projects or areas, interactive groups or learning communities are some examples:

*But we are talking about giving alternative tools to conventional ones, and we are completing and enriching them. Memorising is a learning strategy like any other and we train it as well because we have objective written tests. But then you have others and you have analysis, productions, which is fundamental. A student cannot be creative if he doesn’t produce. If he only takes an exam ... how can you say that this student is very creative, you don’t know. Have you given him a creative test?* (Aragon, management team interview 1, quote 255).

In the different schools they are aware that there is no philosophy on pedagogical renewal that is completely valid; they act on the idea that the way forward is to continue experimenting. Testing and modifying everything that is needed year after year, that is renewing, adapting. For this reason, the teachers want to continue training to adapt to the reconceptualisation they need. One of the schools studied permanently uses self-evaluation as a starting point:

*We have this idea of my subject, I teach my subject, my first evaluation exam of the first year of ESO [compulsory secondary education], and I understand that in the first year of ESO they already have to know how to do this. The mentality of the teacher is that. In the second term I will teach contents, I will do the exam of the second term, and they will have to know how to do it. But not this. If you want students at the end of secondary school to work well in teams, be cooperative, autonomous ... that is taught and they have to learn to self-evaluate themselves* (Aragon, management team interview 1, quote 221).

To sum up, we can say that the schools do not share an idealised concept of pedagogical renewal based on stereotypes from other times. Rather, they choose to maintain some parameters linked to today's educational commitment and not to the genealogy of the concept of PR.

### 3.4. Sociopolitical Commitment of the Schools

Following one of the common threads of the previous section, the Catalonia school relates this commitment to the Sustainable Developmental Goals of the United Nations (hereafter SDGs), the climate emergency and sustainability. All the schools consider that secondary education is the appropriate time in life to work on commitment:

*The initial idea was to provide them with a space for debate. We have a slot at the beginning of the morning that we call "Connect", which was a space where we talked about these topics that you comment on, what is happening in society. [...] we have finally reduced the time and left it to discuss in the assembly [...] it's basically about coeducation, human rights and any problem of social relevance (Catalonia, teacher discussion group n°1, quote 178).*

The management team of the school in the Basque Country also embrace this social commitment to the 17 SDGs. They see that they are the basis for contributing to a better world. In this case, the school focuses on the development of these topics through service-learning, working with organisations and associations.

Gender equality relations, feminism and ecology underlie the view that is built from this commitment. There is also a commitment to mental health, a concept highlighted in the family discussion groups. They do not want to join this or that slogan, this or that strike, but rather they want action. What are *we* going to do? How are *we* going to react? It is not about going to class or not, because the families say that the students associate strikes with a holiday.

The school is charged with the responsibility of working on all these issues, when in reality society is based on other principles that are not at all aligned with the values that the schools intend to work on. In the family discussion group of the Basque Country school, they attest to this. They consider that the weight of issues that affect us all as a society is being borne by the schools, but then outside the classrooms the discourse goes in the opposite direction to the educational work.

The renewal school assumes the responsibility of working on issues that are in the social debate. The participating secondary schools have been committed to the social work of promoting the well-being and full development of students and the community in general. This social work provides students with conceptual tools and opportunities to actively participate in society, developing social, civic and ethical skills in order to become agents of positive change in their surroundings:

*In addition to students in the area where the school we have talked about is located, which is a lower-middle economic situation, let's say, well, we have managed for many years to get them through A levels.*

*They are formed there and continue to be formed. No, no, they don't just drop out after compulsory secondary education, right? Well, we have to continue taking steps. It's clear that we have to continue training, but well, we are working on it (Castille and León, teacher discussion group 1, quote 335).*

Thus, we have seen that the different schools propose inclusion and diversity programmes, either in one day, in seminar format, workshops or activities; at the same time, they accompany the students emotionally so that they have an academic, personal and social life that helps them work on their self-esteem to develop good mental health, taking into account issues such as healthy eating, exercising, preventing diseases and so on.

Another crucial issue is solidarity and volunteering actions and participation in civic or political activities, where awareness of the rights and duties of citizens is raised and there is a commitment to and work on becoming active citizens:

*This school has always been very involved in the issue of improving women's relationships with the social environment. And there are many talks on the topic of gender violence, on the importance of women throughout history itself, which is something that is very recurrent also, especially on social media that have them and well, they also work on other items in terms of languages, exchanges, getting to know other, other realities of other countries and so on, we are involved in. So yes, yes, I see them moving around a lot, making, preparing projects, working hard on them (Castille and León, family interview 1, quote 62).*

At this point it should be noted that the initial training of teachers as a cornerstone in the whole social, political and pedagogical process of the schools is crucial. In the vast majority of cases, sociopolitical commitment is left out of pedagogical actions, at the expense of personal or community criteria of a group of committed teachers:

*Well, I think that fundamentally with training, in teacher training. I think that this is, is, is fundamental. And then the will of the teachers. We're back to the same. In this, the training and the will of each one to want to change is fundamental, because I believe that we have to change, we have to change. To repeat myself, we can't be teaching like they taught five years ago. Things change, society changes, kids change. They are kids that have more and more stimuli and more in schools, like this one, which are very complicated schools (Castille and León, teacher interview 1, quote 141).*

Taking sides in a broad sense of the expression is crucial due to the importance of the teachers' role in the educational system and its role in society. Firstly, teachers cannot ignore the social reality of their daily practice and what local problems affect them, to then think globally and feel aware of their role as agents of change:

*All the most social issues, I mean, we are at a moment in which everything is moving a lot, there's a lot of pressure with the issue of climate emergency, with the whole social issue there are problems, political issues, it's like all the issues are disrupted. The school is in this situation, it tries to take sides in the sense of committing to some elements of these issues, right? Above all, secondary education is perhaps the place where they arise most (Catalonia, management team interview 1, quote 374).*

The faculty is given the task of developing social responsibility. Throughout the entire educational system, education fulfils the function of fighting against social inequality; but it is in secondary education where students are provided with the necessary tools and skills. It is at this stage where personal development needs to be nourished by the critical and analytical capacity of students, encouraging their active participation in society and making informed decisions:

*We have done many workshops. Well, you know, many talks, They come here to give talks about what it is to be a woman, to be a man, to instill values, so to speak. Which, personally, I am not really, really in favour of, because, I said it before, values are instilled more at home. But it is true that it is good because, after all, you can hear many times what other people think and listen to other people's opinions. I think it's good, that it gives you a different vision of things and you can better assess whether you think gender equality exists in the school. In general, gender equality does exist (Castille and León, student interview 3, quote 164).*

Sociopolitical commitment in schools faces the challenge of accepting that education is configured in relation to the social, historical and political context, and it is defined by challenging established power (Moscoso, 2011). In short, in the words of Feu and Torrent (2021), transformation in schools involves, to a greater or lesser extent, challenging, transgressing, disobeying the dominant discourse whether it is based on results that reduce learning to academic performance in line with what Collet (2021) defines as New Public Management with strong economic roots – which presents itself as an opportunity to generate neutral, apolitical schooling, with technical bases and evidence, but which leads to educational inequalities among students – or of those discourses that censure controversy and debate (Huerga & Busquets, 2018) between individual and collective forms of identity and that end up producing collective silences against injustices.

#### 4. Conclusions

The elements discussed and argued in the results section have highlighted the response to the objective that we set for ourselves when writing this article. We have identified and reconceptualised the underlying pedagogical reference points in the different accounts of the schools; we have outlined the hallmarks of identity that underpin their educational practices and how all of this resignifies PR today.

As a first conclusion, the information collected allows us to convey certain singularities of the schools, some shared by the educational community, that allude to elements that can identify these schools as renewal schools, beyond the self-identifying term that they use, in consonance with some of the aspects provided in another recent study (Beneyto-Seoane et al., 2023). Thus, we can talk about schools that propose changes in the implementation of key elements of pedagogical renewal, such as the educational meaning of integrative learning for students today.

As a second conclusion, we can state that all the secondary schools share the importance of student participation in educational action. The schools explain that in their relations with the students they are concerned about the autonomy of each learner and their active participation, the establishment of relationships based on horizontality and the experience of democratic values of the school, and the students tell us about such active participation when asked to highlight what seems to them to be the most unique aspects (Pericacho & Andrés-Candela, 2018; Ortiz de Santos et al., 2018). In the same vein, the schools seek ways to transform fundamental aspects of the grammar of schooling in relation to the way of organising content in a transversal way, resignify the roles of teachers and students and the reorganization of times and spaces that cohere better with this way of understanding education. Such changes affect the hard core of the sustainability of pedagogical renewal.

In their statements, clear lines of reflection emerge regarding educational practices and decisions taken and an idea of constant change and adaptation of the schools with regards to the social moment. That is to say, the changes start from the reflection and critical vision of the educational and social reality, with deep modifications that move between what is valuable to preserve from an educational point of view and what they consider should change in the foundations of pedagogical practice (Feu & Torrent, 2019). All of this also translates into a strong involvement of the faculty and a clear leadership of the management team, as well as a personal conviction of the teachers for the constant improvement and application of these changes, with the balance between individual and collective commitment being key in the implementation of the possible improvements or practices adopted. It should be noted that the schools know that the changes that they want to bring about exist in the midst of a double tension. On the one hand, that of responding to the current, changing, complex and uncertain context that demands reflection and constant adaptation, and at the same time complying with the curricular and bureaucratic provisions of the administrations that demand obedience in processes that often hinder educational changes and improvements of the schools.

As a third conclusion, we highlight that the schools are explicit about the fact that they work for social improvement towards a more equitable and inclusive society. They establish learning practices with the social environment and tell us about the development and promotion of transformative educational methodologies and practices that promote global learning. The uniqueness of these practices compared to other schools in the area is due to this approach of respect for promoting student's ability to learn. This last aspect is related to the active role of the teaching team with a collective perspective to promote renewal and build pedagogical projects that can be stimulating in the face of the needs of the moment, which is why underneath is the idea of reinventing oneself (Domènech, 2015; Febrer & Tort, 2015).

As a fourth conclusion, we would like to highlight the great weight and responsibility that is being given to secondary schools. In some way, they are being asked to work on all the issues that involve intense debate: social and political commitment, social justice, environmentalism, the common good, feminism, social movements, mental health, equality, social transformation etc. An endless list of issues that are socially decontextualised by capitalism, neoliberalism and social immobility.

## 5. Epilogue: What We Have Learned with the Schools

The selected schools have shown us their commitment to educational improvement, and with them we have experienced that the path is not linear, nor is it easy, and above all it requires self-training and shared reflection to be able to accompany the students' learning with educational meaning, because as we stated in Díez-Gutiérrez et al. (2023: page 45):

*PR is a movement, a being in relationship with others, of horizontality, of collective construction; of daily life in the classrooms and methodologies, but also of the educational roles of teachers, students and families, of the organisation and running of the schools, and of the possibility of a radical change in the school, both of fundamental questions of education and of the pedagogical practices that are carried out in the school* (Díez-Gutiérrez et al., 2023: page 45).

In the conversations, we shared with the participants the will to improve in order to create rich and complex learning environments. We see change in what they discuss and, above all, we saw schools that are disconcerted by the enormous effort involved in fighting certain social problems. All these elements make us realise that we cannot leave the teachers alone, starting with their initial training:

*This is what many of the current training models fail to incorporate since they are more focused on promoting training as a business or technical company that offer trainings that respond to the interests of the market rather than to the pedagogical needs expressed by the schools* (De Castro, 2015; Martínez-Bonafé & Rogero, 2021).

Finally, it should be pointed out that, in order to delve deeper into some of the elements analysed as a result of the schools' discourse, identified as typical of pedagogical renewal today and its transformative nature, the educational practices observed in the schools will need to be interpreted in order to establish a dialogue between the daily life of the schools and the discourse analysed. Therefore, this will be one of the future lines of research to be considered in the aforementioned project. In this way, this article and the results obtained will be key to a better understanding of pedagogical renewal in the complex reality of these schools in order to continue delving into the subject in the absence of research focused on secondary education.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the participating schools from the five regions for their availability, openness and acceptance to participate in the research.

## Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## Funding

This work is based on the results of the coordinated research project funded by MINECO entitled "Resituating Pedagogical Renewal in Spain from a Critical Perspective" (PID2019-108138RB-C22/AEI/10.13039/501100011033). Research granted in the call of the Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities, for the year 2019, aid for "R&D&I Projects" within the framework of the State Programme for Knowledge Generation and Scientific and Technological Strengthening of the R+D+I System and of the State Programme of R+D+I Oriented to the Challenges of Society, of the State R+D+I Plan (BOE nº 220, of 13 September 2019). Duration: 3 years (2020-2023).

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Journal of Technology and Science Education, 2024 ([www.jotse.org](http://www.jotse.org))



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