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### Diversidad cultural y eficacia de la escuela. Un repertorio de buenas prácticas en centros de educación obligatoria

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## BOOK REVIEW

**Diversidad cultural y eficacia de la escuela. Un repertorio de buenas prácticas en centros de educación obligatoria**, edited by Belén Ballesteros and Inés Gil-Jaurena, Madrid, Ministerio de Educación, Colección Entre Manos no. 3, 2012, 356 pp., ISBN 978-84-369-5116-5

The aim of this excellent work by Grupo Inter is to ‘*make possible schools that offer valuable educational experiences for everyone, regardless of their birthplace, social context, family background or cultural references*’. To this end, its focus lies in an excellent theoretical analysis of what interculturality means, and the challenges that cultural diversity, in its broadest and most complex sense, presents to the school as a formal educational institution. As the research team has shown in its previous work, this diversity always goes hand in hand with equality in education.

The study severely criticises schools that stigmatise, label and undermine diversity, yet its overall tone is one of pedagogical optimism and hope in the utopia that is gradually taking shape. It takes us into the practical domain, into the classrooms, playgrounds and staff meetings to learn first-hand how this school is built, a school of people and shared projects that show that quality and equality can flourish in schools.

All of this is presented in a rigorous theoretically grounded narrative form, yet at the same time agile and familiar in its approach to the school reality through life stories, accounts of experiences and case studies. The book is devised and written for anyone with an interest in educational transformation and who wishes to know how they can contribute to this change. It is particularly aimed at teachers, both those who question and want to improve their own practices, and those who regard themselves as ‘reluctant to change’.

The search for good practices initially lies in collaborative inquiry based on the Delphi technique, revealing what the educational community and experts understand by the concept of achievement and good practices in relation to students, teachers and schools. The process demonstrates the complexity and diversity of this environment when it is examined in a contextualised way.

Indeed, context is essential to discovering and sharing the creative, innovative and consensus-based formulas that the school communities in this case studies develop. We can imagine this through the lens of a video camera: the first sequence, in close-up, tells the story of Antonio, a teacher-poet, whose teaching is based on creativity and freedom. The camera angle widens and we go into his classroom, where we see how he manages and stimulates the class and generates learning. The camera then pans out, placing the school in context, as an organisation, as a network of social and work relationships and educational projects.

Each case study has its own style of narrating and describing its good practices and the people and contexts involved in them, but this diversity of presentation style also mirrors the diversity of realities and voices, of ways of telling and

interpreting the school context studied. Far from being a hotchpotch of styles and accounts, it brings us a polyphony of voices, stories and interweaving paths, rich, challenging, exciting contexts charged with motivation and the social and moral responsibility to deal with the reality in schools and to meet educational challenges. It is a good exercise in introspection and reflection on practice itself. It talks of cooperative learning, participation, art, communication, democratic leadership and plurality of voices in an authentic intercultural dialogue of collaborative writing among university lecturers and infant, primary and secondary school teachers.

This collective work shows how important it is to make educational practices meaningful in their own context and through the voices of their own actors, beyond whether we define them as ‘good practices’ or not. They portray a vibrant school, its work based on the complexity and flexibility that cultural diversity requires, with the horizon of social justice as a backdrop.

This path towards school transformation is not, however, without its contradictory practices and situations of tension, hostility, cooperation and struggle for change all within the same context. Perhaps the aspiration to show us that another school is possible can lead to an excess of dichotomisation: in some spaces we denounce discriminatory and exclusive practices, while in others we showcase good schools and communities committed to inclusion and interculturality. Maybe the main challenge presented by cultural diversity and efficacy in schools is to demonstrate that change is not a linear process, but is plagued with tensions, clashes and cracks that gradually break down institutional resistance and inertia. School communities set out on this often tortuous path because they do not want to stay where they are. The plurality of voices should help to problematise the contexts and the practices that arise in them, and to avoid the temptation to see only the ‘good’, by presenting hybrid scenarios, with many-sided points of view that do not always lead to a harmonious polyphony, but rather to discordant, screeching cacophony, far from what we expected or wanted it to sound like.

This study has plenty that brings us closer to this stimulating, inspiring viewpoint, without falling into the trap of pedagogical naiveté. It urges educational change in all its complexity.

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