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School administrators' perceptions of democratic coexistence in Catalan schools: An analytical study

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In democratic societies, education should help build a participative, critical and responsible citizenry and therefore promote the role of schools as settings where students learn democratic coexistence. With the study reported on here we aimed to analyse how coexistence is fostered in classrooms and schools, as well as the possible synergy between schools' efforts to educate in democratic coexistence, and the children's social participation in their setting. To do so, we focused on the perspective of 476 school administrators at schools in Catalonia (Spain) based on an ad-hoc questionnaire comprised of 22 items on a Likert scale. The results reflect settings that value democratic coexistence at school and in society, although when we delved a bit deeper, we found aspects that still required more work. Actions that should be the focal point in the immediate future include developing more innovative educational strategies, training the administrators and enlisting students' participation in running the schools.

Keywords: Catalonia; citizenship; democratic coexistence; perception; school administrators; schools

Introduction

In today's societies, there is an unquestionable educational interest in building democratic schools and training citizens in the competences on which democracy is grounded (Veugelers & De Groot, 2019; Zaitegi, 2010). Taking the United Nations' call for the development of a fair, sustainable world (UN, n.d.) as referent, we observed that both goal 4 on education and goal 16 on peace, justice and strong institutions are concerned with proactively including the youngest members of society. Likewise, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO hereafter) adopted its *Education Strategy 2014–2021* (UNESCO, 2014b), which states that conflictive environments have a severe effect on educational opportunities and that "education can empower learners of all ages and equip them with values, knowledge and skills that are based on and instil respect for democracy, human rights, social justice, cultural diversity, gender equality and environmental sustainability" (UNESCO, 2014b:14). At the time that those goals were formulated, the objective was also to prevent different forms of violence – bullying, sexism, racism, marginalisation – and the burgeoning radicalisation – extremism, fundamentalism, terrorism – at school (Aiello, Puigverd & Schubert, 2018; Generalitat de Catalunya, Departament d'Ensenyament, 2016; Nordbruch & Sieckelinck, 2018). Now, due to the pandemic, which is affecting everyone, the need to develop positive coexistence connects the macro level with the micro level, given that interpersonal relations in the family, at school and in the world have drastically changed and are indeterminate, and what to teach in this regard is unknown (Jackson, 2019). The results of the study that Yao, Rao, Jiang and Xiong (2020) conducted in schools in China comparing the impact of two online teaching methods, namely recorded video versus live broadcasting, show that teachers should not limit themselves to conveying knowledge but that communicating with and mentoring students are essential to their academic success. This sheds light on the importance of keeping the bonds of coexistence alive in the new teaching scenarios.

In recent years, school coexistence has come to the forefront not only with the enactment of a host of educational regulations (García-Raga, Alguacil & Boqué Torremorell, 2019), but also with an unusual crop of initiatives which have revealed the importance of nurturing democracy by fostering the teaching of coexistence as an essential feature of citizenship. This teaching, which encompasses being a person, coexisting alongside others and inhabiting the world, has both a curricular component and an experiential component (UNESCO, 2014a). Thus, with this study we aimed to analyse how coexistence was fostered in classrooms and schools, as well as the possible synergy between schools' efforts to educate in democratic coexistence and children's social participation in their environment.

Review of the Literature

Educational reforms in the majority of countries have become increasingly open to introducing democratic coexistence as a prime referent. In Spain numerous initiatives at promoting measures to foster the improvement of coexistence in educational centres have been emerging (Ministry of Education, Culture and Sport [MECD], 2020; Observatorio Estatal de la Convivencia Escolar, 2011). However, more progress has been made with regard to those initiatives focused on school violence than those that seek to build a culture of democratic coexistence in a more comprehensive way. Likewise, we cannot forget that access to information and communication

technologies has extended the sphere of coexistence to virtual spaces, including types of violence that should not be ignored at school (Avilés Martínez, 2019; Ortega-Ruiz, Del Rey Alamillo & Casas Bolaños, 2015).

In order to overcome this negative and narrowed vision of coexistence focused on a single element of analysis, such as students' behaviour and aggressive relations, we adopted a more global and positive vision. This notion of school coexistence is decisive in shaping democratic coexistence. If schools are turned into positive relational spaces, this can lay the groundwork for a responsible, active, and critical citizenry capable of forging united, cohesive societies (Sinclair, 2004).

With this objective in mind, we focused on the perceptions of school administrators, namely the principals of primary and secondary schools because their perceptions link what happens inside schools with what is happening in society. The subjects' perceptions allowed indirect access to the phenomenon under study through inferences made from objective data and were important because they incorporate the way of observing reality, highlighting the cognitive dynamics of the subject-environment relationship and the ability of the subject as creator (Arias Castilla, 2006).

We specifically set our sights on the educational context in Catalonia because this region was particularly interesting. Since late 2017 civil society has stepped up its struggle for self-determination by calling for a democratic referendum, which has not yet been approved by the government, although it has tested coexistence within families, schools and society at large (Cetrà, Casanas-Adam & Tàrrega, 2018; Turp, Caspersen, Ovortrup & Welp, 2017). As we have already mentioned, the goal was to analyse the coexistence actions undertaken in both classrooms and schools, as well as their needs and connection with the environs, in order to ascertain whether education can foster the construction of a democratic school and society by teaching coexistence.

Even though there is a vast range of studies and instruments in the field of coexistence to either measure the climate and level of conflict at school (Del Rey, Casas & Ortega Ruiz, 2017; Díaz-Aguado, Martínez Arias & Martín Babarro, 2010; Opere, Kamere & Wawire, 2019; Reyes-Angona, Gudiño Paredes & Fernández-Cárdenas, 2018) or assess specific strategies (Iriarte Redín, Ibarrola-García & Aznárez-Sanado, 2020; Moolman, Essop, Makoe, Swartz & Solomon 2020; Torrego Seijo & Galán González, 2008), the same does not hold true when assessing schools' efforts to promote positive coexistence globally. Consequently, there is a dearth of studies that provide valuable information on how coexistence is constructed at schools (Fierro-Evans & Carbajal-Padilla, 2019). This shift in approach from detecting the climate and conflict at schools

(reactive perspective) towards focusing on the way a good climate is constructed (proactive perspective) can be both worthwhile and innovative.

Theoretical Framework

To begin with, democracy and education should go hand by hand in schools. For Dewey (1916) there is no democracy without education, and it is not possible to talk of education without democracy. Similarly, in the pedagogical invariable number 27, Freinet (1996) affirms that we bring democracy tomorrow by bringing democracy to school, because an authoritarian regime at school will not create democratic citizens. More recently, the Council of Europe (2015), in the document entitled "Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education", demand respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

As Estellés and Romero (2016) advocate, the concept of democracy itself should be extended beyond the boundaries of the nation state to include global perspectives and participation on multiple governance levels. Similarly, Moreno Fernández and García-Pérez (2013) remark on the importance of thinking in terms of global citizenship and democracy in schools, and Banks (2017) advances a classification of four typologies of citizenship being promoted at schools: failed, recognised, participatory and transformative. Moreover, we do not understand democracy only as a key element of education but as social justice (Fraser, 2008; Young, 2011).

From this comprehensive perspective (Carter, 2020; Espelage & Hong, 2019; Fierro-Evans & Carbajal-Padilla, 2019; Moreno Fernández & García-Pérez, 2013; Pagès i Blanch, 2019; Santisteban-Fernández, 2019), a democratic school is an educational community where everyone comprising it seeks spaces and times for dialogue and interaction, reaches common cooperation commitments and focuses on working on transformative projects that are emancipatory for the individuals and beneficial for the common good.

In this sense, we view coexistence as a complex concept referring to a collective, dynamic construction encompassing all the human relations among the actors in the educational community both within the school and in the environs, within the framework of rights and duties, whose influence radiates out beyond the boundaries of the school space (García-Raga & López Martín, 2010). Accordingly, democratic coexistence is recognised as a goal of education in and of itself, as well as teachers' obligation (Valdés-Morales, López & Jiménez-Vargas, 2019). Therefore, the main goal is to make the school a setting that equips students with the competences they need to know how to live and

interact with others democratically, meeting the demands that society increasingly demand.

From a deliberative perspective (Gutman, 1987), what matters most is to respect the principles of non-repression and non-discrimination that make it possible to coexist in plural societies, so the key element is dialogue. Agreeing with Mouffe (2016), true democracies fight ideas, not people, hence both reasoning and emotions are necessary to get along with opponents. In this light, Biesta and Boqué Torremorell (2018) and Ruitenberg (2009) indicate that beyond cognitive skills, emotional learning is essential because democratic coexistence is always conflictual. Moreover, authors such as Biesta (2010) and Rancièrè (2007), representing an emancipatory point of view that we fully subscribe to, stress the significance of creating subjectivities that adhere to democratic coexistence, which means to be and to act as equals within an unequal society by experiencing freedom, equality and solidarity. Then, the process that leads to democratic coexistence holds more value than the mere content itself.

That being said, schools can take a negative and reactive attitude to democratic coexistence – based on the concept of retributive justice that focuses on conflict avoidance and relies upon punishment as the tool to keep an appropriate school climate – or a positive and proactive attitude in the light of restorative justice principles that we have already examined in previous studies (Boqué Torremorell, 2020). Participation, active responsibility, compassion, inclusivity and respect are vital to build safe and healthy schools and communities, as well as to address harm by providing the opportunity to make amends. This constructive approach to coexistence is highlighted by different authors (Boqué, 2017; Ibarrola-García & Iriarte Redín, 2012; Perales Franco, 2018; Pineda-Alfonso & García-Pérez, 2016; Uruñuela, 2016; Zaitegi, 2010) who encourage the engagement of everyone in building caring relational environments.

According to Martínez Bonafé (2008), the essential question here is not how democracy or coexistence work, but how they are lived. That is, in what way does student subjectivity engage in projects of public interest and in affectionate relationships. Thus, the school must not only promote social competences aimed at living together in democracy but must also constitute an experiential laboratory where the exercise of these ideals is consolidated, because as Pagès i Blanch (2019:6) states, “the coherence between the experience and the discourse is key if we want to train our students in the principles of democratic citizenship.” Consequently, a school that promotes democratic coexistence cannot ground its teaching solely on values and competences to live together and inhabit the planet but must also apply practices and programmes aimed at improving coexistence, as well as the organisation and democratic

management of shared life and even the projection of the lessons learned to other contexts and through community initiatives. Among the most effective teaching and learning methodologies of equipping students with skills to democratically live with others, Omodan (2019) too points at experiential learning, disruptive caring pedagogy, problem-based learning and dialogical processes. It seems clear that to build an experience of democratic coexistence it would be necessary to be part and take part of what is currently happening in the school and in the community and, as Davies, Hampden-Thomson, Jeffes, Lord, Sundaran and Tsouroufli (2013) conclude, schools could do more to create a sense of community within the schools themselves and help pupils to engage with their neighbourhoods and communities.

To ensure democratic coexistence inside and outside the school, principals and school administrators in general hold the key. According to Lunenburg (2010), school administrators carry out four basic functions: planning, organising, leading, and monitoring. Their goal is to ensure high performance of students and faculty, and to be effective, they need to engage both in managerial tasks (policies, rules, procedures, authority relationships) and in building cultural linkages (symbols, rituals, norms). But, as Knight Abowitz (2022) highlights, when revisiting John Dewey's ideas on democracy, community, and citizenship, the narrow view of the principal's role today must evolve and position school administrators as community leaders. Within this framework, the role of school administrators is essential, since any effort may be futile without a clear drive for democratic coexistence by those who lead the school (Lopez Delgado, 2014; López Ramírez, García Hernández & Martínez Íñiguez, 2019; Pažur & Kovač, 2019). Consequently, as Campos Alves and Barros Barbosa state, “democratic school administration is the crux of the formation of education for democracy under a socially conscious, integrative perspective” (Campos Alves & Barros Barbosa, 2020:2). However, the passage from authoritarian management to transformational leadership cannot be done hastily, since authority exercised as a positive influence on others is necessary for the maintenance of an atmosphere of positive coexistence and requires a deep understanding, on the part of school principals, of participatory engagement, consultation and collective decision-making (Davids & Waghid, 2019).

In sum, taking into consideration the review of the literature and the theoretical framework, we based the study on two central concepts: democracy and coexistence. Then, we established the relationship between both and adopted a comprehensive approach to democratic coexistence. Afterwards, we considered two different ways of promoting democratic coexistence in schools: a

positive and proactive way in contrast with a negative and reactive approach. Here, we defended curricular and experiential input as necessary, which explains our interest in the development of students' competencies, the actions and programmes promoted by the school and the democratic functioning of the school to reflect. Next, we included the community as a real context for practising democratic coexistence and bringing opportunities for genuine participation. Finally, we paid particular attention to the figure of the school administrator who, as representative and leader of the educational institution, can encourage a democratic system of coexistence in the school and the community.

The overall objective of this study was to review the role of the school in training students in democratic coexistence based on the perspective of the administrators of schools catering for students between the ages of 3 and 16. This general objective can be broken down into the following specific objectives:

- a) To analyse the participating schools' involvement in developing competences for democratic coexistence.
- b) To identify the coexistence actions promoted by the schools.
- c) To ascertain how the schools manage coexistence in their own operations.
- d) To detect the schools' needs in terms of training students for democratic coexistence.
- e) To explore the schools' participation in community projects.
- f) To study whether there are factors that affect the school's involvement in school coexistence.

Methodology

This was a non-experimental post-hoc study in which we used a quantitative methodology and

conducted a descriptive-inferential analysis of the results.

Instrument

The instrument used is the questionnaire was developed ad hoc based on a previous study (Boqué Torremorell, García-Raga & Alguacil de Nicolás, 2021), as well as a literature review of the subject (Del Rey et al., 2017; Díaz-Aguado et al., 2010; Ibarrola-García & Iriarte Redín, 2012; MECD, 2017; Pineda-Alfonso & García-Pérez, 2016; Sinclair, 2004; UNESCO, 2014a). The questionnaire is structured in four categories to elicit how schools approach coexistence as competences to teach, experiences to live, school management and, also, to identify their present and future commitment to democratic coexistence.

To guarantee content validity, the questionnaire was assessed according to the criteria of sufficiency, clarity, coherence and relevance by 16 experts. The concordance was calculated using Kendall's *W*-coefficient, and no significant differences were found in the judges' responses. Therefore, several statements were reworded based on their suggestions, but no items were eliminated.

Next, we checked the reliability of the questionnaire in a pilot test with 136 randomly chosen school administrators using the Cronbach's alpha internal consistency coefficient. An optimal reliability of 0.93 was found. Thus, the definitive questionnaire, as shown in Table 1, had 22 questions grouped into four categories with responses on a four-choice Likert scale (Not at all, A bit, Considerably and A lot): training (six items), actions and programmes (four items), operations: managing coexistence at the school (six items) and future plans and detecting needs (six items).

Table 1 Study dimensions

Category	Item	Purpose
1) Training	Classroom rules Group cohesion Social-emotional skills Dialogue-based conflict management Preventing bullying	To identify the main competences related to learning how to live together developed at school
2) Practices	Peer assistance system Conflict mediation system Restorative practices Social-emotional education	To identify specific programmes and actions that provide experiences about learning to live together
3) Operations	School rules Coexistence plan Teaching plan General annual programming Management plan Coexistence committee	To identify in which areas and documents of school management related to coexistence pupils have a say and can effectively participate
4) Projection	Teachers' training Enough time in the schedule Promotion of specific activities and programmes School leaders' support Resources for including diversity Willingness to partner with projects in the neighbourhood or town where the children advise, make proposals, take decisions or evaluate policies	To identify the school's commitment to coexistence on the one hand and detecting needs on the other

Participants

The target population of the study was the administrators of 2,983 schools that educate students between the ages of 3 and 16 in Catalonia, which included public, private and publicly-subsidised private schools. The representative sample was initially estimated at 341 administrators, with a confidence level of 95%, admitting a maximum error of 5%. Finally, a total of 476 representative responses were obtained from a random sampling procedure.

It was detected that 77.1% of the participants were affiliated with public schools and 22.3% with private or publicly-subsidised private schools. Likewise, 56.7% worked in schools catering for children between 3 and 12 years old (early childhood and primary), 22.1% in schools for children between 12 and 16 (secondary) and 21.2% in schools for children aged 6 to 16 (primary and secondary) or ages 3 to 16 (early childhood, primary and secondary). Furthermore, 32.6% were males and 66.8% females, while 0.6% preferred not to state their gender. In terms of age, 0.4% were under the age of 30, 11.6% were between 31 and 40 years old, 33.6% were between 41 and 50 and 54.4% were over the age of 50. Three-quarters of the participants stated that they had received training in coexistence issues (75.45%) as in-service training (55%) and in administrator training (31.4%). Finally, it became clear that training in coexistence has traditionally been absent from teachers' pre-

service training (11.0%).

Information Analysis Procedure

Version 26 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) was used to analyse the information via a descriptive-inferential analysis of the data collected. Descriptive statistics were used, and once it was confirmed that the samples did not show normal distribution, non-parametric tests were performed to detect statistically significant differences between independent samples: the Mann-Whitney *U* test to compare two groups and the Kruskal Wallis test to compare more than two groups.

Results

The results are outlined below, arranged according to the two kinds of analysis undertaken: descriptive and inferential.

Descriptive Analysis

Data obtained from the questionnaire are presented according to the categories into which the questionnaire is divided. With regard to the first category, "Training: Development of competences to learn how to live together", which includes six items, we found that the majority of schools spent a considerable amount of time training in coexistence, with a total mean of 3.41. The mean scores and their standard deviations are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 Training – Development of competences to learn how to live together

Category “Training: Development of competences to learn how to live together”			
<i>At our school, we spend time working on:</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Classroom rules	476	3.36	.59
Group cohesion	476	3.53	.54
Social-emotional skills	476	3.29	.66
Dialogue-based conflict management	476	3.54	.58
Preventing bullying	476	3.12	.69
Coexistence values: respect, dialogue, cooperation, peace	476	3.62	.55

As illustrated in the table, of all the actions taken, the one with the highest score was related to values, with a mean of 3.62. Dialogue-based conflict management (3.54) and group cohesion (3.53) also returned high scores. In contrast, the least popular response was preventing bullying (3.12), although its score was fairly high as well.

Analysing the second category, “Practices: Programmes and actions to learn how to live together”, which has four items, we found that the majority of schools undertook actions that contributed to school coexistence, since all the means were high. Specifically, emotional education was the practice implemented the most often and restorative practices the least, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Practices – Programmes and actions to learn how to live together

Category “Practices: Programmes and actions to learn how to live together”			
<i>The actions and programmes that contribute to good coexistence at our school are:</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
The peer assistance system (tutoring, student helpers, mentoring, etc.)	436	3.24	.75
The conflict mediation service	409	3.00	.88
Restorative practices	393	2.81	.88
Social-emotional education	457	3.31	.73

Note. The *N* is different in each case due to the choice “we do not implement this practice.”

With regard to the category, “Operations: Managing coexistence in the school’s operations”, which comprises six items, the descriptive data are shown in Table 4. Here several low scores were returned, such as the one associated with developing rules in conjunction with the students (1.88) and designing the coexistence plan with the students (1.93). However, the scores were high on including objectives to improve coexistence in the management plan (3.22) and general annual programming (3.23).

Table 4 Managing coexistence in the school’s operations

Category “Operations: Managing coexistence in the school’s operations”			
<i>At our school:</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
We develop school rules in conjunction with the students	476	1.88	.85
We design a coexistence plan in conjunction with the students	476	1.93	.80
The teaching plan includes actions to improve coexistence	476	3.14	.75
The general annual programming includes objectives to improve coexistence	476	3.23	.69
The management plan includes objectives to improve coexistence	476	3.22	.71
The coexistence committee has the mission of promoting coexistence (not only punishing)	476	2.94	.89

If we look at the scores in the category “Projection: School’s commitment to coexistence and detecting needs” (Table 5), which has six items, we found that they were somewhat lower than the other items. Only around half the schools had the time to spearhead initiatives (mean of 2.10) and had

received training (mean of 2.46) in this regard. However, many of the schools were willing to cooperate in neighbourhood or town projects where the students advised, made proposals, took decisions or evaluated social policies.

Table 5 Results of the category “Projection: School’s commitment to coexistence and detecting needs”

Category “Projection: School’s commitment to coexistence and detecting needs”			
<i>To promote coexistence at our centre:</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
We have received training	476	2.46	.77
We have the amount of time we need	476	2.10	.61
We promote specific activities and programmes	476	2.71	.74
Our school’s leaders make it possible	476	2.78	.69
We have the resources to include diversity	476	2.56	.70
We are willing to partner with projects in the neighbourhood or town where the children advise, make proposals, take decisions or evaluate policies	476	3.14	.76

Finally, Table 6 and Figure 1 show the scores in each category, calculated from the means of the items comprising them. Lower scores were returned

in the category related to projection and the school’s commitment to coexistence and detecting needs (2.63), followed by the category related to managing

coexistence at school (2.72). On the other hand, the highest scores were in the category associated with training in competences to learn how to live together

(3.41) and the category related to practices, programmes and actions to learn how to live together (3.12).

Table 6 Means of the democratic coexistence categories

Democratic coexistence categories	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Training: Development of competences to learn how to live together	476	3.41	.43
Practices: Programmes and actions to learn how to live together	475	3.12	.58
Operations: Managing coexistence in the school's operations	476	2.72	.51
Projection: School's commitment to coexistence and detecting needs	476	2.63	.43

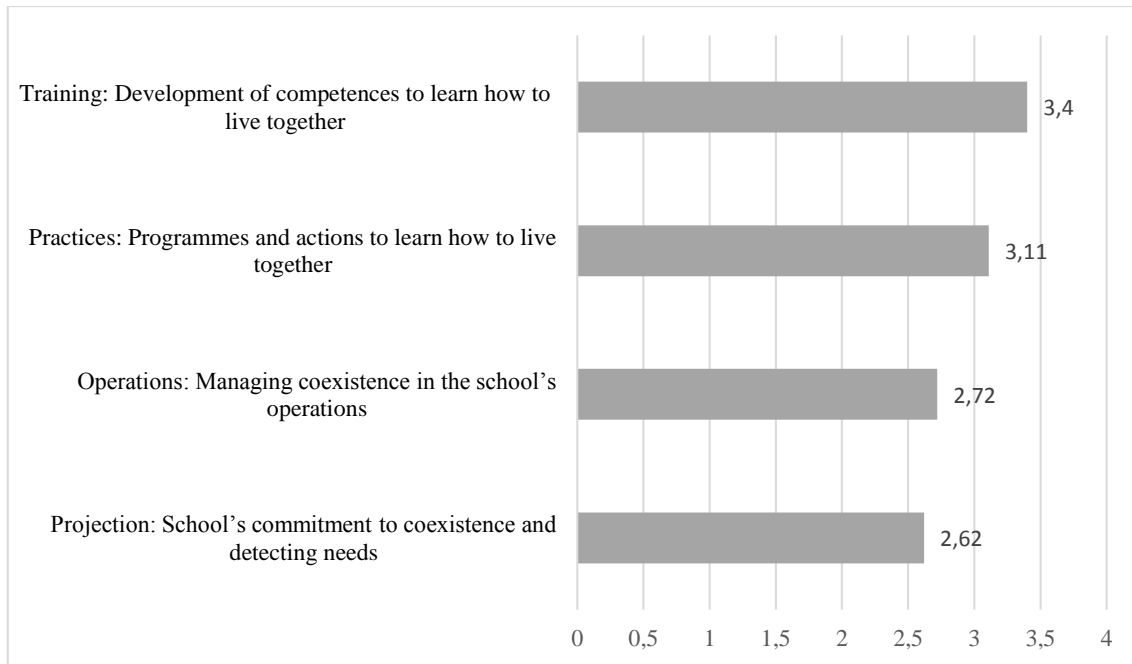


Figure 1 Means of the democratic coexistence categories

Inferential Study

The results of the analysis of the differences between the groups of participants are presented below. Here, we explored whether there were factors that affected the involvement of the schools when educating in democratic coexistence.

Firstly, checking the socio-demographic variables, we detected that there were only statistically significant differences in the “educational options” variable for the categories “Training: development of competences to learn how to live together” and “Operations: Managing coexistence at school”, as shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Contrast study according to socio-demographic variables

Categories	Kruskal-Wallis test	Kruskal-Wallis test	Kruskal-Wallis test	Kruskal-Wallis test	Mann-Whitney U test
	Ownership	Type of school	Educational options	Total number of students	Number of inhabitants
	Asymp. sig.	Asymp. sig.	Asymp. sig.	Asymp. sig.	Asymp. sig.
Training: Development of competences to learn how to live together	0.636	0.089	0.008*	0.529	0.246
Practices: Programmes and actions to learn how to live together	0.128	0.357	0.08	0.794	0.871
Operations: Managing coexistence in the school's operations	0.571	0.601	0.014**	0.096	0.288
Projection: School's commitment to coexistence and detecting needs	0.731	0.217	0.645	0.611	0.389

Note. * p -value ≤ 0.01 . ** p -value ≤ 0.05 .

To further explore the differences detected, Figure 2 shows the means for each group,

considering the variable of the school's educational options.

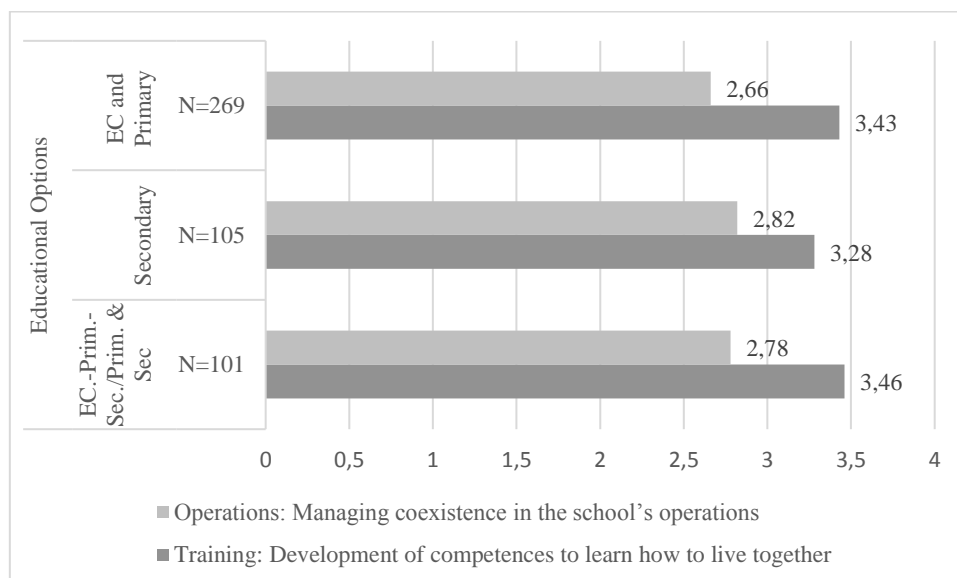


Figure 2 Comparison of means of school administrators according to educational options

Figure 2 shows that the highest level of training in competences was among the administrators working in early childhood, primary and secondary schools (ages 3–16) or primary and secondary schools (ages 6–16). However, the highest level in terms of operations was found among the administrators in schools only offering secondary education (ages 12–16).

In terms of the variables more closely associated with the personal and professional

aspects of the school administrators, the differences found are shown in Table 8. Specifically, differences were found in gender, age, years of experience in administration and training in coexistence. To further explore the differences in gender, the means on this variable for each group are shown in Figure 3, not including those who chose not to answer (three). It shows that female administrators had a higher level of training and practices.

Table 8 Contrast study according to the school administrators’ personal and professional variables

Categories	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> test	Kruskal-Wallis test	Kruskal-Wallis test	Kruskal-Wallis test	Mann-Whitney <i>U</i> test
	Gender	Age	Years worked at the school	Years of experience in admin	Training received
	Asymp. sig.	Asymp. sig.	Asymp. sig.	Asymp. sig.	Asymp. sig.
Training: Development of competences to learn how to live together	0	0.11	0.18	0.001*	0.001*
Practices: Programmes and actions to learn how to live together	0.019**	0.04**	0.974	0.011*	0.093
Operations: Managing coexistence in the school’s operations	0.119	0.147	0.628	0.01*	.000*
Projection: School’s commitment to coexistence and detecting needs	0.422	0.585	0.524	0.012**	.000*

Note. **p*-value ≤ 0.01. ***p*-value ≤ 0.05.

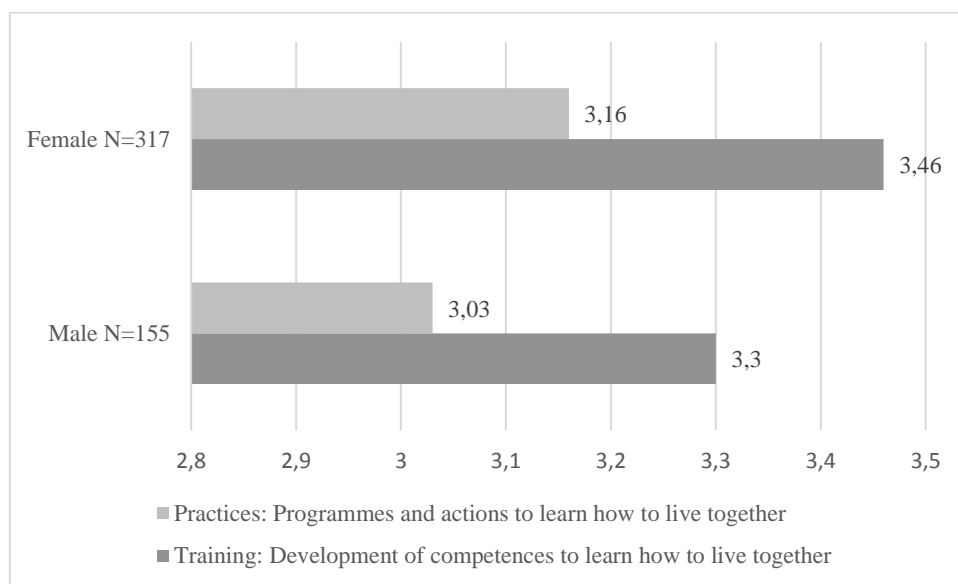


Figure 3 Comparison of means of the school administrators according to gender

Regarding the differences in age, the means for each group in this variable are shown in Figure 4. The highest mean scores found on the items in the category “Practices: Programmes and actions to learn how to live together” were among the administrators between the ages of 31 and 40. The

lowest scores were among the administrators under the age of 30, although this included only two people. On the other hand, the administrators with more experience (more than 10 years) were those who stood out in all four categories: training, practices, management and projection (cf. Figure 5).

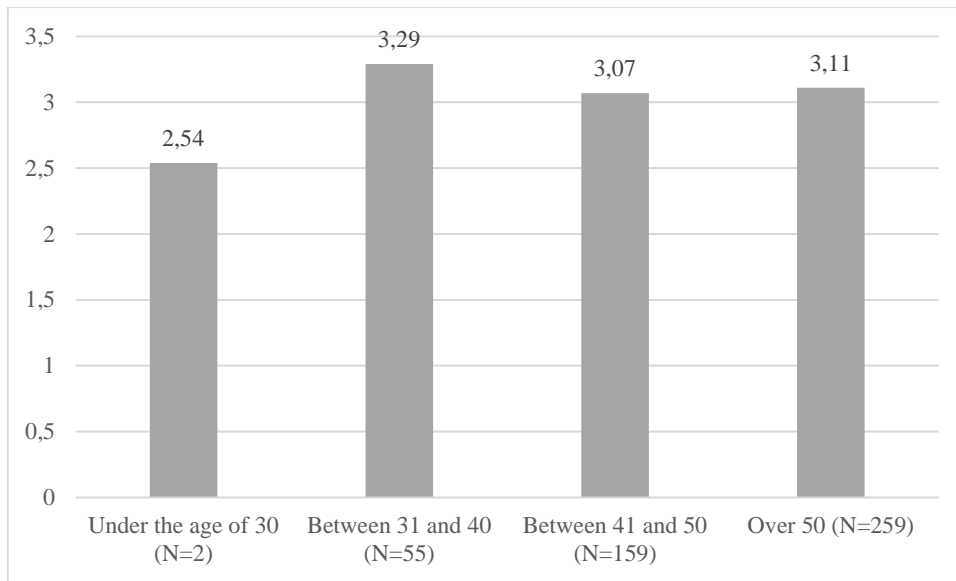


Figure 4 Comparison of means of school administrators according to age

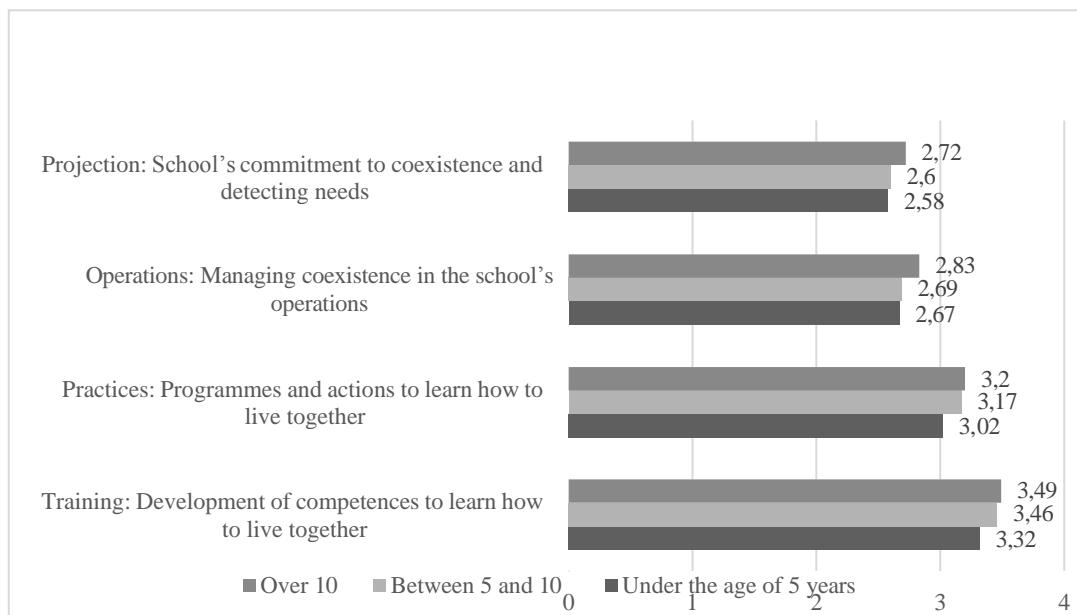


Figure 5 School administrators' mean scores according to their experience in administration

Exploring the differences with regard to training, Figure 6 shows the means for each group (those who have and have not had training). It reveals that the highest means of the scores on the

items in all three categories (training in competences, operations and projection) were given by the administrators who had received training on coexistence.

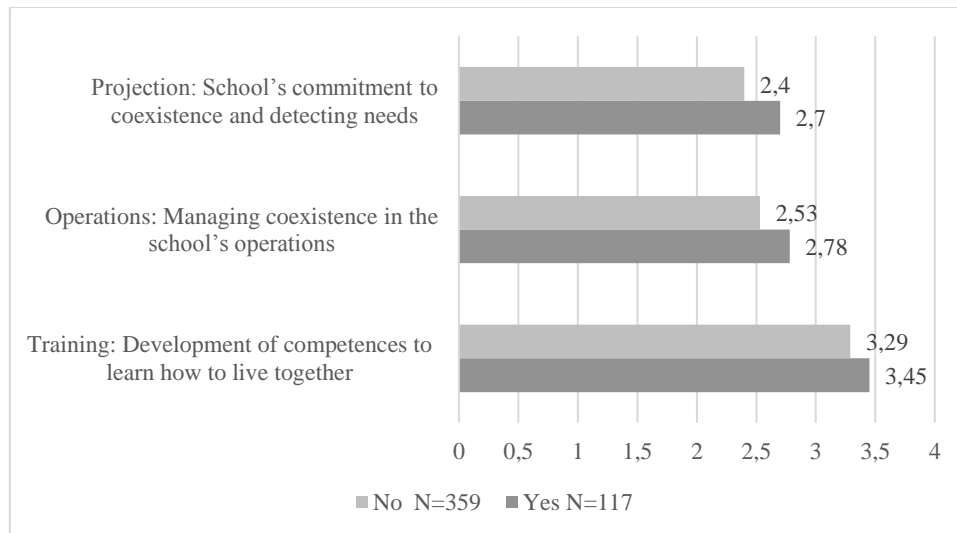


Figure 6 School administrators' mean scores according to training received on coexistence

Discussion and Conclusion

Generally speaking, we can state that the analyses conducted reflected those settings in which democratic coexistence at schools and in society were valued, although we found aspects that still required more work and improvement, especially when aiming at a transformative citizenship education as described by Banks (2017).

According to the first objective in which the schools' involvement in developing competences for democratic coexistence was analysed, we found that the participants' attitudes were generally quite favourable. Specifically, the values of coexistence, conflict management and group cohesion were mentioned most as factors which affected the school climate. This concurs with the findings by Valdés-Morales et al. (2019) who stress that a positive environment at school is related to a high level of cohesion, a warmer welcome and more support from teachers and administrators who are present and attentive to students' needs. Emphasising the role of the director, Moolman et al. (2020) point out that the type of leadership exercised in a school is a key dimension for achieving a positive context of coexistence because when students do not trust the principal or are critical of his or her disciplinary style, the climate in the school deteriorates. On the other hand, the students consider a principal who is close to the students, who is interested in them and supports them, shows strong commitment to maintaining positive coexistence bonds to be strict and fair at the same time. Also, Okorji, Igbokwe and Ezeugbor (2016:65) claim that "principals should create an atmosphere that is supportive, comfortable, friendly, productive, and relaxed, to motivate students' greater participation in learning and achieving educational goals."

Likewise, in a study on school coexistence, UNESCO (2014a:11) states that the 10 countries

analysed "emphasize the importance of education in building peace, unity and social cohesion either through national constitutions or via education legislation and policy frameworks." Consequently, we refer back to Sinclair's words that "we should have a strand within our education programmes that explicitly introduces students to the practical skills, concepts and values needed for us all to live together" (Sinclair, 2004:141), both inside and outside of school (Davies et al., 2013). Specifically, within the school, teachers must promote an atmosphere where "learners are able to develop skills, attitudes and values that improve relationships, groups and society, and are also able to demonstrate respect for human rights and democracy" (Omodan, 2019:194). Also, strategies such as teaching controversial topics reinforce pupils' critical thinking (Santesteban-Fernández, 2019) and should be included in future studies along with the principles of non-repression and non-discrimination (Gutman, 1987).

In the category on coexistence actions associated with our second objective, the mean scores were fairly high for all the items, although emotional education practices were implemented the most and restorative practices the least. In this regard, we want to note the need for a constant effort to update the strategies aimed at most effectively responding to the school's current reality and society's demands. Even though nobody questions the importance of emotional education and dealing with democratic values (Biesta & Boqué Torremorell, 2018; Mouffe, 2016; Ruitenberg, 2009), there should also be strategies that allow conflict to be managed positively and proactively and with students' participation (Bonafé-Schmitt, 2000; Boqué Torremorell, 2003; Cowie & Wallace, 2006; Dwarika, 2019; López Martín, 2007; Torrego, 2012). Restorative practices, specifically, enable

punitive disciplinary approaches to be revised to instead encourage students' participation in handling their own conflict in a democratic way, thus strengthening their interpersonal relationships and fostering the enactment of democratic citizenship competences (Armour, 2016; Boqué Torremorell, 2020; Reyneke, 2020; Wachtel, 2016). However, the administrators themselves must be aware and engaged for this to be possible (Charles, 2019; Thorsborne & Blood, 2013).

With regard to managing coexistence, the third objective, low scores were found on student participation in both developing rules and designing the coexistence plan with the students' participation. Nevertheless, we found high scores when we enquired about the approach to improve coexistence in the management project and in the annual general plan. Thus, school policies remain highly focused on adults who are the ones who rule the school to the detriment of true student participation (Abdalla, 2019). However, if we want democratic schools, the students' role must be enhanced, which means recognising not only the need for teachers to be approachable but also that students' opinions and decisions should be included in the schools' documents. A previous study found that children's participation in the classroom and the environs was encouraged, but not so much in taking the decisions that affected the school administration or in areas traditionally led by teachers (Boqué Torremorell, Alguacil de Nicolás & García-Raga, 2020). Sharing of power or placing important matters in the students' hands was still not common (Carbajal Padilla, 2013), even though schools should be an essential space where democracy is exercised and students' participation in decision-making is essential. We must not forget that as Biesta (2010) and Rancière (2007) state that an emancipatory educational process would still be necessary.

Therefore, we need to overcome this difficulty and listen to the students' voices, consider their contributions and help them take responsibility for running the school. This situation may also be evidence of a training deficit on coexistence issues, since at least one-third of the administrators indicated that they had not received training on coexistence. The analysis by Merma-Molina, Ávalos Ramos and Martínez Ruiz (2019) on the effectiveness of school coexistence plans also concludes that training programmes targeted at administrators and the committees in charge of promoting coexistence at school are needed. Similarly, the systematic review of the literature on school leadership and management in South Africa (Bush & Glover, 2016) confirms the need for specialised training, both for active principals and for aspiring managers in order to build their confidence in leading school communities.

This deficit in training is also reflected in the fourth objective of the study, since it appears to be

one of the direst needs, along with having enough time to promote initiatives. Today, training in an entire series of techniques (mediation, cooperative learning, emotional education, restorative practices, etc.) is imperative, although it must start in pre-service training (Estellés & Romero, 2016) and not only be given as courses or training for administrators, which, based on the results, seems to be the most common situation. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to further analyse this when designing adequate teacher training that equips professionals with the tools that they need to deal with the challenges that they themselves perceive through experience (Penalva, Hernández & Guerrero, 2014).

However, the scores were the highest in the fifth objective, aimed at determining the schools' willingness to cooperate in forums where children and adolescents participate in public policies. Thus, many of the schools were willing to collaborate on projects with the neighbourhood or with the municipality where boys and girls advise, make proposals, make decisions or evaluate policies, and many were willing to collaborate in projects where children participate in public administrations on issues dealing with education, health, justice and welfare. Without a doubt, children must go from being objects to subjects of policies, since the democratic deficit in children's participation is unquestionable and has been cited in multiple studies. In this regard, we quote Liebel (2007:37) who states that

[a] subject-oriented childhood policy recognizes children as competent actors and tries to strengthen their capacity to act and widen the scope of their opportunities and possibilities. The fact of aiming at strengthening the subjectivity of children is what qualitatively distinguishes it from conventional conceptions that defend girls and boys as objects of politics.

But to achieve this goal, it is not enough to protect the rights of the child by ensuring strong legal coverage since the real challenge, in many countries, continues to be that these rights become a reality in the lives of children, so, as Kilkelly and Liefwaard (2019) highlight, legal support is only the beginning of the journey and not the end. Apparently, the most progress has been made locally, and some Children's Municipal Councils have been successful (Novella & Llana, 2016), even though they operate quite differently, and the decisions are primarily targeted at urban planning and leisure activities.

Finally, statistically significant differences were found among the administrators which give us an idea of the factors that could influence democratic coexistence. With regard to the socio-demographic variables, only educational options seemed to have an influence, with the highest level of training in coexistence competences found among the administrators of schools catering for children between 3 and 16 and between 6 and 16 years old,

although the highest level in managing coexistence was found among administrators of schools for adolescents aged 12 to 16.

In terms of personal and professional factors, differences were found in experience in administration, training, age and gender. Specifically, the trained administrators with the most experience responded most positively, which again indicates the need to boost training in order to improve coexistence. With regard to age, the highest level in practices was among administrators between the ages of 31 and 40, and in terms of gender, women scored higher on the items. It would be worthwhile to study whether catering for school coexistence was a feminised issue, and if so, why.

In short, even though we could consider that the schools promoted democratic training from the perspective of the administrators, it is also essential to reflect on these results. The development of strategies like restorative practices, student involvement in school administration and improving pre-service and in-service teacher training should be priority avenues of action if we want schools to contribute to improving social coexistence and the challenges it poses to the sustainable development of the planet and the questions sparked by the current pandemic.

With regard to strategies, the goal should be to enact educational practices that promote the development of personal values and competences associated with proactiveness, commitment, responsibility, cooperation, democracy and social justice. However, these competences do not necessarily need to appear in isolation in the classroom but should instead be found and recognised within the web of educational areas and teaching and learning activities at school, always with student involvement. In this vein, the philosopher, Victoria Camps (1997, 2005), stresses the need for all individuals to cultivate the community dimension and be trained as citizens for public life. Giroux (1984, 1992) advocates the development of democratic practices at school and in the community as means of knowledge and exchange capable of promoting a critical, robust citizenry, given the danger entailed in one-track thinking. From this perspective, there are those who confirm that children have the capacity for political influence if they are taken seriously (Perry-Hazan, 2016; Yunita, Soraya & Maryudi, 2018), being able to guide activities and policies in diverse areas (Cutter-Mackenzie & Rousell, 2019; Menconi & Grohmann, 2018; Williams, Bingley, Walker, Mort & Howells, 2017).

Finally, with regard to teacher training, the demands from teachers themselves have led to an increase in courses on the topic, although there is a dearth of content on coexistence in pre-service training. The construction of the European Higher Education Area and its new roster of university

degrees was a prime chance to consider including these novel themes in teacher training, although we still have a long way to go.

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Authors’ Contributions

This article is the result of collaborative work. Maria-Carme Boqué Torremorell was the coordinator of the research project and responsible for the structure and writing of the article. Laura García-Raga was in charge of the literature review and data analysis and Ingrid Sala-Bars and Montserrat Alguacil de Nicolás collected the data and presented the results. The discussion and conclusions were a collaborative effort.

Notes

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