



The PAEDU Protocol as a Foundation for Inclusive Leadership and Social Justice in Educational Contexts of Exclusion

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Abstract. This chapter presents the PAEDU Protocol as a strategy for inclusive, critical and distributed leadership implemented at IES Can Balo, the school responsible for formal education within the Juvenile Justice Centres for Minors in the Balearic Islands. Against a backdrop of extreme educational exclusion, the text analyses how the leadership team articulates inclusive education, social justice and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) through a sequential seven-stage process aimed at identifying barriers, getting to know the students, designing universal curriculum proposals, implementing them, evaluating them and continuously refining them. Based on the case study, it is shown that pedagogical leadership not only organises and coordinates, but also distributes responsibilities, promotes teacher collaboration and fosters the transformation of the school's culture, policies and practices. The PAEDU is thus proposed as a transferable framework to promote more equitable, participatory and inclusive schools, capable of responding more justly to the diversity and vulnerability of the student body.

Keywords: Inclusive Leadership, Social Justice, Universal Design for Learning.

1 Introduction

In the last decade, educational leadership has established itself as one of the intra-school factors with the greatest impact on the equity, quality and social justice of education systems. International organizations such as the OECD and UNESCO agree that, in contexts of growing inequalities, diversification of the student body and scenarios of high vulnerability, the role of management teams is decisive for the design and development of inclusive responses that guarantee the right to education for all. This centrality of leadership is linked not only to the efficient management of resources, but also to the ability to transform educational cultures, policies and practices towards more democratic, participatory models, while guaranteeing equity in access to educational opportunities.

In this sense, the OECD (Varsik, 2022; OECD, 2023) proposes a comprehensive framework for addressing diversity and inclusion that is based on five key policy areas (governance, resources, capacity building, school-level interventions, and monitoring and evaluation), underlining that managerial leadership acts as a hinge between the system level and the day-to-day reality of schools. In turn, the recent report and UNESCO's own position (2024) on leadership in education emphasize that education leaders must place equity at the core of the institutional project, while becoming benchmarks for inclusive practices and promoting participatory decision-making processes.

In the Spanish context, there is an insistence on the need to rethink pedagogical leadership as a distributed, collaborative leadership aimed at the profound transformation of schools, especially in those that educate socially disadvantaged students (Choi & Gil, 2017). This perspective is directly aligned with the international agenda of social justice in education, for which it is not enough to expand access, but it is necessary to transform the ways in which schools teach, evaluate and organize (UNESCO, 2017).

This chapter is located at the intersection of these debates, taking as a case study the IES Can Balo, the centre responsible for regulated education in the Juvenile Justice Centres of the Balearic Islands, and the Protocol for Educational Access and Universal Design (PAEDU) that has been designed jointly between the management team of the centre and a group of researchers from the University of the Balearic Islands. Based on this framework, IES Can Balo is a secondary school that works with young people whose educational trajectories are already marked by situations of uprooting, demotivation, socioeconomic vulnerability and multiple forms of exclusion, configuring a limit scenario to test the transformative capacity of inclusive leadership. In this centre, the management team, together with a faculty made up of highly committed teachers, has promoted the PAEDU as a pedagogical and organisational leadership device that places the design of universal, accessible and inclusive curricular proposals along seven interconnected stations.

The objective of this work is twofold. Firstly, it aims to characterise the PAEDU Protocol as the foundation of inclusive and critical leadership aimed at building social justice in a context of extreme educational exclusion, showing how the management team of IES Can Balo uses this device to redefine the culture, policies and practices of the centre. Secondly, it seeks to situate this experience in the national and international panorama on managerial leadership, inclusive education and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), analysing the extent to which the PAEDU dialogues with consolidated frameworks, such as the Index for Inclusion, the UDL developed by CAST and the models of inclusive leadership and social justice formulated in other contexts. Based on these purposes, the chapter is articulated around two research questions: (1) how does the PAEDU operate as an inclusive and distributed leadership device at the IES Can Balo?; and (2) what contributions does this experience make to the international debate on leadership for social justice in contexts of extreme educational exclusion?

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Inclusive Education and Social Justice

UNESCO (2026) understands educational inclusion as a process aimed at identifying and eliminating the barriers that prevent the presence, participation and achievement of all students, especially those in situations of greater vulnerability. This conception shifts attention from individual deficits to the structural, cultural, and pedagogical conditions that produce exclusion, emphasizing the need for systems that guarantee not only access, but also meaningful and quality educational experiences for all. Along these lines, inclusive education is closely linked to social justice (García-Barrera, 2023) as it is committed to redistributing opportunities, recognising identities and promoting democratic participation in school life.

The Index for Inclusion (Booth & Ainscow, 2011) has established itself as one of the most influential frameworks for operationalizing inclusive education in schools, proposing a process of collaborative review of cultures, policies, and practices. Through its dimensions and questionnaires, it conceives the school as a learning community, in which diversity is understood as a resource and change is articulated through continuous cycles of reflection, planning, action and evaluation.

Social justice, in the field of education, implies going beyond compensatory policies (García-Barrera, 2023) and moving towards school models that question the logics of selection, segregation and stigmatisation that have historically accompanied certain groups (migrant students, students belonging to ethnic minorities, students of low socio-economic status, with disabilities or who have gone through the juvenile justice system). The literature on inclusive education insists that the challenge is not only to incorporate these students into the ordinary classroom, but also to profoundly transform the curriculum (Illán-Romeu & Molina-Saorín, 2011), assessment and school organisation (Fernández-Batanero, 2006; Álvarez-Rementería, Darretxe & Ozerinjauregi, 2021) so that they can fully exercise their right to learn and participate.

2.2 Educational Leadership, Inclusion, and Social Justice

In order to analyse the role of the management team of IES Can Balo in the implementation of the PAEDU, the main conceptual frameworks on leadership are presented below.

International reviews on educational leadership (Bolívar, 2010; Gamarra, 2024; Mendoza et al., 2023) agree that this is the second intra-school factor with the greatest influence on student learning, only behind classroom teaching. Over the past few decades, leadership models have evolved from approaches focused on administration and bureaucracy to perspectives that emphasize instructional or pedagogical leadership, transformational leadership, distributed leadership, and, more recently, leadership for social justice (OECD, 2023).

In line with leadership for social justice, understood as the willingness of management teams to transform culture, curriculum and school practices for the benefit of historically marginalised students (Theoharis, 2007), the leadership model of IES Can

Balo guides the PAEDU to question structures that have contributed to the exclusion of minors with judicial measures.

Instructional leadership (Moral, 2018) focuses on improving teaching and learning, emphasizing tasks such as accompanying teachers, formative supervision, the use of data for decision-making, and the alignment between curriculum, assessment, and professional development. Transformational leadership (Leithwood et al., 1996), on the other hand, focuses on the construction of a shared vision, the strengthening of school culture and the motivation and commitment of teachers, generating conditions for innovation and sustained change. Distributed leadership (MacBeath, 2005) questions the figure of the director as a "lone hero" and proposes to understand leadership as a practice that is exercised in a shared way between different actors in the school, structuring spaces for participation, collaboration and co-responsibility.

In the field of inclusion, several authors have developed the notion of inclusive leadership or leadership for social justice (Fernández-Batanero, & Hernández-Fernández, 2013; Hunt et al., 2024), understood as the ability to use formal and informal authority to challenge inequities, redistribute resources and supports, and promote pedagogical practices that recognize diversity as a value. The work carried out in this framework (Fernández-Batanero, & Hernández-Fernández, 2013) shows that management teams that promote inclusive cultures tend to make explicit a school project focused on a "school for all", organize flexible support structures, promote collaboration between teachers and even establish alliances with families and the community.

From this perspective, inclusive leadership involves not only redistributing resources, but also actively advocating for inclusion, educating the school community, fostering critical awareness, and ensuring that decisions and policies are adopted from a holistic approach (Ryan, 2012; Shields, 2018).

The literature on "school management for inclusion" indicates that inclusive leadership takes the form of organisational decisions that prioritise attention to diversity, the construction of cohesive teaching teams and the promotion of active methodologies that allow the participation of all students (Gómez-Hurtado, 2012). In addition, studies on schools with a high inclusive culture show that leadership practices in these schools differ from those with a low inclusive culture, particularly in the way in which responsibilities are distributed, conflicts are managed, and students' difficulties are interpreted (Valdés, 2020).

2.3 Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and pedagogical leadership

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) provides a framework for designing learning environments that consider, from the outset, student variability and remove barriers to access, participation and achievement (CAST, 2024). UDL is structured around three principles (providing multiple forms of involvement, representation and action/expression) that are specified in guidelines and checkpoints for the design of curricula, materials and activities. Therefore, far from proposing *ex post* adaptations for "special cases", the UDL proposes to build flexible, scalable and adjustable curricular proposals to the characteristics and singularities of all students.

Various recent studies (Almeqdad et al., 2023; Pineda et al, 2025) have shown the positive impacts of UDL on participation and performance when implemented in a coherent way with active methodologies and technological resources, although they also highlight the need to improve teacher training and avoid merely superficial approaches. In Ibero-American contexts, various studies highlight the potential of UDL to articulate equity, accessibility, and quality, as long as it is inserted in a school project and in policies for attention to diversity, and is not reduced to isolated orientations (Ayala, 2025; Navas-Franco et al., 2024).

In the Spanish context, materials such as the UDL guides of the Ministry of Education, Vocational Training and Sports have contributed to translating this approach into the curricular and regulatory framework, linking it to universal accessibility and the rights of people with disabilities (Instituto Nacional de Tecnologías educativas y de Formación del Profesorado, 2023). These resources also underline that UDL can only unfold its full potential when there is a pedagogical leadership capable of aligning educational project, curriculum design, evaluation and professional development, so that universal design is assumed as a criterion of pedagogical quality and not as an added requirement (Andrango et al., 2025).

2.4 Inclusive leadership in contexts of educational exclusion

Leadership in contexts of high social vulnerability presents specific conditions and demands. The OECD (2023) has shown that schools that school socioeconomically disadvantaged students tend to concentrate more challenges and often fewer resources and experienced staff, which raises the need for specific support and professional development policies for their management teams. Reviews of leadership in Latin America and other contexts of the global South point to the tension between bureaucratic demands, precariousness of resources, and the mandate to promote inclusive education, particularly in environments marked by poverty, violence, or territorial segregation (Rivera et al., 2023).

In this sense, the juvenile justice context in which IES Can Baló is located embodies in an extreme way the tensions described in the literature on inclusive leadership in contexts of high vulnerability and in neoliberal frameworks, where the scarcity of resources, the pressure of accountability and the stigmatization of students hinder equity initiatives (OECD, 2023; Ryan, 2012; Theoharis, 2007).

Along the same lines, studies that analyze the relationships between managerial leadership, coexistence, and attention to diversity (Quispe & Hinojosa, 2023) show that effective leadership is associated with better school climates, less conflict, and greater development of inclusive practices. On the other hand, research on leadership profiles and practices in centres that are in the process of innovation (Sánchez, 2025; Sánchez & Salgado, 2025) point out that management teams that manage to promote sustainable change tend to combine a strong pedagogical orientation with evidence-based strategies of participation, teacher accompaniment, and change management. Based on all this, the proposals of the Bofill Foundation (Choi & Gil, 2017) regarding pedagogical leadership insist, precisely, on this combination of shared vision, networking and structural

support to make educational transformation viable in schools framed in contexts of clear economic and social disadvantage.

2.5 Challenges and contributions of the PAEDU at the IES Can Balo

Despite the advances in the literature on inclusive leadership, some relevant weaknesses can be identified. While, on the one hand, there are relatively few studies that address managerial leadership in extreme contexts of exclusion, such as juvenile justice centers, where trajectories of school failure, social vulnerability, and institutional stigmatization converge, on the other hand, most of the studies focus on ordinary compulsory education, with a lower presence of cases that analyze inclusive leadership proposals concretized through curricular and educational elements. explicit organizational activities.

In this sense, the PAEDU, developed and implemented at the IES Can Balo, constitutes a relevant contribution to the state of the art, since it is configured as a sequential guide of seven stations (from the analysis of barriers at the center and classroom level to the design, development, evaluation and redesign of curricular proposals) that articulates the paradigm of inclusive education, UDL and the cyclical improvement of teaching practice. Its design aligns with recognized frameworks such as the Index for Inclusion and the DUA guidelines, but recontextualizes them in a juvenile justice context, where the leadership of the management team is put at the service of building universal learning environments for young people traditionally expelled from the mainstream system.

In the following sections of this chapter, we will delve into the methodological description of the case study and the detailed analysis of how the PAEDU operates as a transformative leadership device at the IES Can Balo, as well as the implications of this experience for the international debate on leadership, inclusion and social justice in contexts of high vulnerability.

3 Methodology

The experience developed at IES Can Balo is methodologically situated within a qualitative case study, aimed at understanding in depth an educational experience located in a context of high social and academic vulnerability.

The study is part of the IES Can Balo, the center responsible for the Regulated Education Program for students with judicial measures in the Balearic Islands. It is an unconventional context, since teaching is carried out in five organizations, four of which are socio-educational centers aimed at complying with judicial measures. To contextualize the experience analyzed, Table 1 summarizes the main characteristics.

Table 1. Context and scope of the implementation of the PAEDU at IES Can Balo.

Element	Description
Educational center	IES Can Balo
Institutional context	Regulated Education Programme for students with legal measures in the Balearic Islands

Organizational structure	5 educational organisations, 4 of them socio-educational centres
Teaching team	22 professionals
Average daily service	90 students
Approximate total attention per course	150 students
Age of the student body	Between 14 and 20 years old
Educational offer	ESO, ESPA, FP, Baccalaureate and Literacy
Implementation Course	2024-2025/ 2025-2026
Participating groups	6 groups
Lessons involved	ESPA, Vocational Training and Literacy

During the 2024-2025 school year, the PAEDU was implemented in five groups of the center, linked to ESPA teaching, Vocational Training and literacy. In the 2025-2026 academic year, its development has been expanded with the incorporation of an additional group. The protocol has been addressed to all the students of these groups and has also had the involvement of the entire faculty. This training has been complemented by internal actions such as the observation of educational processes and the performance of a school leadership committed to inclusion, pedagogical coordination and the continuous improvement of educational processes.

As for the collection of information, different instruments have been used, including the minutes of the pedagogical faculties, the observations recorded in the different phases of the protocol, the focus groups developed with the teachers and the voices of the students themselves. The triangulation of these sources has made it possible to build a broad, situated and contextualized understanding of the PAEDU implementation process and its impact on the different agents involved.

4 PAEDU proposal

The PAEDU is configured as a proposal aimed at the construction of inclusive, equitable and barrier-free educational environments, with the purpose of promoting learning, participation and progress of all students. Its main objective is to provide teachers with a structured and systematic reference that facilitates the identification of obstacles in the teaching-learning processes and allows them to transform them into facilitators, thus promoting the design of didactic proposals based on the principles of UDL, in the paradigm of inclusion and social justice.

The proposal pursues several specific goals: a) to provide tools for the analysis and diagnosis of learning barriers; b) to promote a collaborative space among teachers for the design, application and evaluation of universal curricular proposals; (c) increase student motivation and participation through inclusive pedagogical approaches; and d) facilitate the replicability of the model in other educational contexts with similar challenges.

Among the characteristics of the PAEDU is its cyclical nature and its orientation to continuous improvement. The protocol is organized into seven stations that range from

context analysis to global evaluation of the process and decision-making for future intervention proposals. Each of these phases has specific resources for its development and is systematized in an accessible web platform, available in <https://protocolo-paedu.com>, designed to promote understanding, accessibility and practical application of the protocol by teachers.

The general logic of this process can be seen in Figure 1, which represents the circular nature of the PAEDU as a process of continuous improvement and distributed leadership.

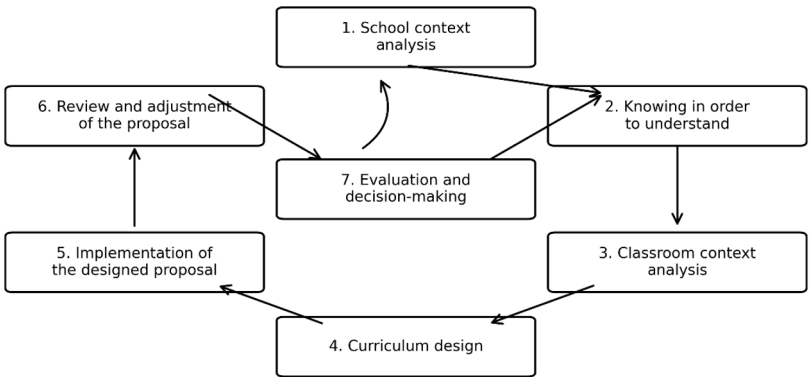


Fig. 1. Cyclical structure of the PAEDU as a device for continuous improvement and inclusive distributed leadership.

In turn, Table 2 summarizes the seven stations of the protocol and the pedagogical function that each of them fulfills within the educational intervention process.

Table 2. PAEDU stations and pedagogical function

Station	Purpose
1. Analysis of the context of the school	Identify barriers in the educational context and transform them into facilitators
2. Knowing to understand	Analyse students' capacities, strengths and needs and review teaching practice
3. Classroom context analysis	Detect barriers specific to a specific group or classroom
4. Curriculum Design	To develop universal and accessible didactic proposals
5. Development of the designed proposal	Implement universal strategies and support their implementation: shared teaching
6. Assessment and adjustments of the proposal	Analyze evidence and make adjustments during the process
7. Evaluation and decision-making	To assess the cycle globally and guide future proposals

The first station is aimed at analysing the context of the school, with the aim of identifying those organisational, methodological or structural barriers that may hinder student participation and learning. Checklists and record sheets are used to enable systematic observation of the educational environment

The second, Knowing to understand, focuses on the analysis of the abilities, strengths and needs of the students from a constructive perspective. At the same time, it incorporates a dimension of teacher self-evaluation that facilitates the review of one's own pedagogical practice.

The third station, dedicated to the analysis of the classroom context, specifies the observation in a specific group, allowing the detection of high-probability barriers and directing responses more adjusted to the reality of the classroom.

The fourth station, corresponding to the curricular design, constitutes one of the central nuclei of the protocol. It develops universal didactic proposals based on curriculum design planning models, checklists and guidelines for shared teaching, in order to guarantee access, participation and progress for all students.

The fifth focuses on the development of the designed proposal, accompanying teachers in the implementation of universal strategies and shared teaching through checklists.

The sixth station addresses the assessment and adjustments of the proposal, based on the analysis of evidence that allows modifications to be introduced and the learning process to be improved. This phase also incorporates resources to transfer part of the assessment to the students, promoting their autonomy and metacognition.

Finally, the seventh station contemplates the global evaluation of the cycle and decision-making for future proposals, identifying strengths and areas for improvement through checksheets that serve as a basis for starting a new cycle of improvement and universal curricular planning.

5 Results

The analysis of the minutes of the pedagogical faculties, the observations recorded throughout the different phases of the protocol, the focus groups of teachers and the voices of the students allow us to identify results in different dimensions of the educational process. These findings show that the implementation of the PAEDU has had an impact not only on didactic practice, but also on the organizational culture of the center and on the configuration of an inclusive and distributed pedagogical leadership. The main dimensions of analysis are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Dimensions of PAEDU impact analysis

Dimensions	Description
Teacher training and development	Impact of the protocol on the professional competences of teachers
Student participation and motivation	Level of involvement and commitment of students in the learning process
Collaborative teaching culture	Degree of collaboration and cohesion within the teaching team

Design of universal curricular proposals	Development of accessible proposals adjusted to the characteristics of all students
Inclusion and educational equity	Model ability to remove barriers and personalize learning
Inclusive and distributed center leadership	Generation of shared leadership aimed at the development of an inclusive culture and the improvement of educational practice
Transferability	Possibility of adjusting the protocol to other educational contexts

5.1 Teacher training and development

The implementation of the protocol has contributed to the development of teaching skills linked to UDL and inclusion strategies, favouring the incorporation of specific tools to design proposals and activities accessible to all students. This progress is not limited to the acquisition of resources, but also involves a transformation of pedagogical practice. Thus, teachers have moved from more traditional approaches to more flexible, inclusive and context-adjusted proposals based on the identification of barriers, the analysis of the environment and the review of their own practice.

5.2 Student participation and motivation

The results also show an increase in student participation and motivation. Students have adopted a more active attitude in their learning processes, as they are offered the possibility of getting involved in proposals more connected to their interests, abilities and needs. In addition, the awareness of their own progress has favoured a greater connection with their personal interests, which has resulted in a positive predisposition towards schoolwork and classroom dynamics.

5.3 Collaborative teaching culture

Another relevant finding is the development of a collaborative teaching culture that has promoted teamwork between the university's teaching staff and research team. The exchange of materials, the shared reflection on the available tools and the observation of classroom practices have also been carried out. All this has contributed to strengthening the cohesion of the faculty and consolidating a community where all its agents can participate.

5.4 Design of universal curricular proposals

The PAEDU has promoted the design of universal, accessible curricular proposals adjusted to the characteristics and needs of all students. The different stages of the protocol have made it possible to build activities and didactic sequences that do not start from a homogeneous student, but from the real heterogeneity of the classroom. This

perspective has favored the planning of proposals that offer multiple forms of access to content, participation in tasks and expression of learning. All this has made it possible to advance in the personalization of learning for all students.

5.5 Inclusion and educational equity

The evidence collected shows a progressive transition from traditional educational models to inclusive and equitable practices. The protocol has made it possible to focus attention on the identification and elimination of barriers to learning, developing universal educational proposals for all students with equal opportunities.

5.6 Inclusive and distributed center leadership

One of the most relevant results of the implementation of the PAEDU is its contribution to the configuration of an inclusive and distributed school leadership. The protocol has not only functioned as a resource, but also as an organizational element that distributes the responsibility for inclusion among the different members of the faculty. The initial training of all teachers, the shared use of observation instruments, reflection on barriers and facilitators and cooperative decision-making around curriculum design show a form of leadership that transcends individual logic. This leadership is distributed because it mobilizes the entire teaching team in the different phases of the process, from the analysis of the context to the evaluation and reformulation of the proposals. And it is inclusive because it guides these shared practices towards the elimination of barriers, the participation of all students and the construction of equitable responses.

5.7 Protocol transferability

Finally, the PAEDU has favoured the creation of educational and didactic resources that can be transferred to other contexts with similar characteristics. The systematization of the protocol, the existence of materials associated with each phase and their organization on an accessible web platform are important strengths for its sustainability. However, the extrapolation of the model to other centres cannot be considered automatically.

Its application in different realities will require adjustments, contextual analysis and continuous evaluation.

6 Conclusions

The educational field is going through a process of permanent transformation that requires rethinking the current paradigms in order to make significant progress towards educational inclusion. This change not only implies reviewing and modifying pedagogical practices, but also incorporating approaches and strategies that guarantee access, participation and learning for all students (Booth & Ainscow, 2011). In this context, the

PAEDU is presented as an innovative proposal that articulates inclusive education, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and pedagogical leadership in an extreme scenario of educational exclusion: the Juvenile Justice Centres of the Balearic Islands, providing tools for the identification and elimination of barriers in the teaching and learning process (López-Roca et al., 2026).

6.1 Contributions to knowledge about inclusive leadership in contexts of extreme exclusion

Firstly, the experience of IES Can Balo provides relevant empirical evidence in the field of inclusive leadership and social justice, and shows that inclusion is not a utopia, but a real possibility when universal strategies are implemented and there is a firm commitment on the part of both the educational community and the leadership of the centre. To this end, it is essential to have leadership committed to equity, social justice and the guarantee of quality education for all students (Valdés, 2022).

Various studies have shown that leadership is the second factor within school with the greatest impact on student learning, only behind classroom teaching (Bolívar, 2010; Gamarra, 2024; Mendoza et al., 2023), and that the most effective approaches combine instructional, transformational, and distributed dimensions. The case analyzed confirms this convergence, but recontextualizes it in a juvenile justice environment, where leaders must face conditions of extreme vulnerability, itineraries of school failure, and social stigmatization.

In this experience, the leadership of the management team is close to what the Anglo-Saxon literature has conceptualized as 'social justice educational leadership', that is, a leadership that seeks to transform culture, curriculum and practices to improve the learning conditions of historically marginalized students (Theoharis, 2007). The management team of IES Can Balo explicitly assumes inclusion and social justice as the axes of the school project, reorganizes the teaching work around the PAEDU and guides decisions towards the elimination of barriers and the expansion of educational opportunities for young people who have been expelled, in a literal and symbolic sense, from the ordinary school system.

The study also reinforces the idea that inclusive leadership needs to be instructional, transformational, and distributed at the same time. From the instructional perspective, the PAEDU works as a tool to focus managerial action on improving teaching and learning: teachers are accompanied in the analysis of barriers, in the design of universal learning situations and in formative assessment, aligning educational project, curriculum and assessment. From the transformational perspective, management promotes a shared vision of a "possible school" in a highly adverse context, strengthens the culture of collaboration and builds high expectations about the potential of the students, in line with what was described by Leithwood et al. (1996) and Shields (2018) in their work on transformative leadership.

Finally, the PAEDU contributes to consolidating a distributed and inclusive leadership, by distributing the responsibility for inclusion among the entire faculty. Shared training, the use of common instruments, collegial planning and shared teaching are

evidence of a leadership practice in which multiple actors (tutors, specialists, management team, teachers of different teachings) take on tasks of analysis, design and evaluation, in line with the proposals of MacBeath (2005) and recent literature on inclusive leadership (Ryan, 2012; Shields, 2018). In this way, the experience of Can Balo is situated at the crossroads between distributed leadership and leadership for social justice, providing a particularly significant case due to the harshness of the context.

6.2 Contributions to the development of inclusive practices based on UDL

This chapter provides evidence on the potential of UDL when inserted into an institutional leadership strategy. The international literature has shown that UDL, as a framework for the design of learning environments that address student variability, can promote participation and performance, especially if combined with active methodologies and technological resources (Almeqdad et al., 2023; Pineda et al., 2025). However, it has also warned of the risk of superficial applications, reduced to lists of "DUA strategies" unrelated to a school project, and understood as mere superficial actions that do not allow for profound transformation and already evidenced in the international literature (Andrango et al. 2025).

The PAEDU responds precisely to this challenge by turning the UDL into a structuring criterion of curricular design and not into a voluntarist addition. The sequence of seven stations obliges teachers, based on the analysis of barriers in the school and in the classroom, to know the strengths and needs of the students, to design multilevel didactic proposals and to assess the learning processes in a formative way, integrating the UDL guidelines in each phase (Instituto Nacional de Tecnologías educativas y de Formación del Profesorado, 2023). In this way, UDL is no longer an optional resource but a design logic that guides the planning, implementation and evaluation of learning situations.

Thus, the transformation of educational practices requires a deep reflection on the pedagogical methodologies and approaches used. Teachers, together with other educational actors, must review and adjust their practices in order to generate an inclusive and positive environment that prevents behaviours of maladjustment and disconnection of students from the educational world (López-Roca, et al., 2025).

In fact, the UDL, by offering multiple ways of presenting content, expressing learning and getting involved in tasks, guarantees that all students, including those in vulnerable situations, can access the curriculum (Segura & Quirós, 2019). This approach favours participation and meaningful learning, to the extent that it recognises, values and legitimises the individual differences of each of the students.

On the other hand, the personalisation of learning and teaching proposals makes it possible to meet the needs of all students, positively valuing differences within a framework of equity and guaranteeing equal opportunities (Alba, 2019). In addition, the elimination of barriers constitutes the starting point for the development of this educational proposal. In this process, context analysis takes on a central value, as ensuring inclusion requires constant self-evaluation and critical review of the educational environment. This perspective allows obstacles to be identified and overcome, favouring the participation of all students (Booth & Ainscow, 2011).

Experience also confirms that UDL unfolds its full potential when there is pedagogical leadership that aligns educational project, curriculum, evaluation and professional development. The curriculum must be conceived from the beginning as accessible, linked to universal accessibility (CAST, 2024) and the case of IES Can Balo shows, in fact, how a management team can assume this vision and generate the conditions (co-ordination time, internal training, accompaniment) so that UDL is assumed by teachers as a criterion of pedagogical quality and not as an additional bureaucratic requirement.

6.3 Observed impacts on professional development and school culture

The results show significant effects on teacher professional development and on the culture of the school. The literature on leadership for inclusion has repeatedly highlighted that schools that move towards inclusive cultures are characterized by the existence of cohesive teaching teams, collaborative workspaces, and systematic processes of reflection on practice (FernándezBatanero & HernándezFernández, 2013; Gómez-Hurtado, 2012; Valdés, 2020).

The PAEDU, in this sense, has functioned as a catalyst for these processes: joint initial training, the shared use of barrier analysis instruments and facilitators, and the collegial planning of universal curricular proposals have contributed to building a more collaborative teaching culture. The work with multilevel sequences, the shared teaching experiences and the revision of the proposals in the light of the information collected from the students have reinforced the perception of professional self-efficacy and the awareness that inclusion is a collective responsibility, not delegable to isolated figures.

Along the same lines, the data on student participation and motivation show a qualitative improvement in involvement in tasks, recognition of their own strengths and the perception that activities are more connected to their life reality. Although this is a case study and not a quantitative impact assessment, these findings go in the direction pointed by previous research on UDL and active methodologies in contexts of vulnerability (Ayala, 2025; Navas-Franco et al., 2024). The fact that it has occurred in a context of juvenile justice, with students usually labelled as "difficult" or "unmotivated", reinforces the relevance and intrinsic value of the proposal and the experience.

6.4 Implications for leadership training and policies

From an education policy perspective, the results of the study have several implications. In line with OECD and UNESCO reports, which underline the need to train leaders capable of managing diversity, equity and inclusion as structural dimensions of the managerial profession (OECD, 2023; UNESCO, 2017, 2024), the experience of IES Can Balo suggests that management team training programs should more explicitly integrate content related to leadership for social justice, universal curriculum design, and collaborative work.

Likewise, frameworks such as the PAEDU show the value of having institutional mechanisms that translate the principles of inclusion and UDL into concrete tools for analysis, design and evaluation. Beyond the specific case of this work, this suggests that policies should promote the development and dissemination of protocols and

guides that facilitate the transition from discourse to practice for management and teaching teams, accompanied by times, resources and structures that make collaborative work viable, as demanded by European initiatives and projects in the international context such as the Schoolwide Integrated Framework for Transformation (SWIFT) (Schuh, Hart & Mills, 2014).

In addition, in order to pave the way for inclusion, it is essential to promote the permanent training of teachers and promote educational policies capable of responding to the needs and characteristics of all students (Nwachi, 2021).

In contexts of high vulnerability, such as juvenile justice centers, this need becomes even more pressing. OECD evidence indicates that schools that enroll disadvantaged students have more difficulties and often fewer resources and experienced staff, which requires specific policies to support leadership and professional development (OECD, 2023). The experience of IES Can Baló points precisely to the fact that the accompaniment of these centers, through alliances with universities and support networks, can be an effective way to build internal capacities and sustain inclusive transformation processes.

6.5 Definition of proposals

All this does not place the need to define possible future lines of research. A first line would consist of carrying out comparative studies with other juvenile justice centres or with ordinary centres that school students in contexts of high vulnerability. In this way, it would make it possible to analyse similarities and differences in the forms of inclusive leadership and in the use of frameworks such as the UDL or the Index for Inclusion. A second line could focus on longitudinal research that follows the evolution of the PAEDU over several years, including indicators of permanence, qualification or socio-educational insertion of students, in dialogue with the literature on the effects of leadership on long-term results (Leithwood et al., 2006; OECD, 2023).

Finally, it would be pertinent to deepen the analysis of the tensions and resistances faced by leaders who are committed to social justice and inclusion in such complex contexts, following in the wake of works such as those of Theoharis (2007) and Ryan (2012), which explore the personal and professional costs of this type of leadership. The case of IES Can Baló offers a solid starting point for this type of analysis, by showing how a management team and a faculty are organized to sustain an inclusive project in a context marked by exclusion, vulnerability and institutional pressure.

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