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What is meant by 'community' in different theoretical traditions? An analysis of influential educational research

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ABSTRACT

Research on inclusive education often derives from a broader understanding of inclusion, namely as a radical change in schooling. Within this strand of research, several authors in the field have envisioned this change to be materialised in the image of schools and classrooms as communities with various characteristics where differences are seen as resources. Nevertheless, the word 'community' can carry a variety of meanings, especially when used in the field of education in which multiple theoretical traditions co-exist. The aim of this paper is to provide an analysis of the meanings of the word 'community' throughout influential educational research and in relation to the different theoretical traditions that inform it. The meanings are analysed through a reading of the 50 most highly cited educational research papers in the database Web of Science that are concerned with communities in schools and classrooms. Through a thematic analysis of the definitions and descriptions of community in the sample, four metaphors were identified – community as Idealised-Home, Idealised-Academia, Idealised-Polis, and Power-Resisting Space. These meanings are discussed in relation to the theoretical traditions discerned and their implicit societal purposes. Moreover, implications of the review for research on inclusive education are discussed.

Introduction

Throughout the history of inclusive education as a research field, two ways of understanding inclusion, namely a narrow and a broader, have guided research according to Ainscow, Dyson, and Booth (2006, 2). A broader understanding of inclusive education is not focused on individual students or groups, but on schools and how they can change to become settings that support and welcome diversity (among several Ainscow 1991; Barton 1997; Skrtic 1991; Tomlinson 1982). The image of that changed school or classroom as a community has a long-standing presence within the field of inclusive education, from Ballard's (1997, 244–45) suggestion of inclusive classrooms as communities where all students are valued members with equal rights and Booth and Ainscow (2002)

emphasis on community building for the development of an inclusive school culture, to Thomas and Macnab (2019) who propose an intersectional lens to create communities which better understand the barriers that cause exclusions, and Slee (2019) who sees community as both an educational and societal ideal to rely on in order to counteract the widespread acceptance of exclusion as a norm. Moreover, research on inclusive education that also encompasses the image of school and classroom community, often points to various barriers that a culture of competition and standards poses to aspects of education that could facilitate inclusion. Such aspects of education that are impacted, are for example, the autonomy of schools and the potential for collaboration between schools (Ainscow 2010), the capacity for development of meaningful relationships and professional identity (Ballard 2003), or the appreciation of the richness brought in classroom through students' diverse backgrounds (Curcic et al. 2011, 132). For these scholars, the cultivation of community-like relationships within (and between) schools can lift such barriers as well.

Despite the identification of a growing interest in the theorisation of inclusive schools and classrooms as communities, Göransson and Nilholm (2014, 276) emphasised the limited theorisation of community creation within the field of inclusive education, specifically when it comes to the empirical investigation of ways to establish them. Recently, though, some interesting empirical research has been conducted in that direction within the field of inclusive education, e.g. on students' views about the meaning of belonging and of diversity by Black-Hawkins, Maguire, and Kershner (2022), or on school-wide relationships within inclusive schools by Allan and Persson (2016). However, the creation of communities in school has been an influential object of study in other areas of educational research, both as an ideal and a practice. Thus, there is a diverse educational field theorising and investigating community to learn from, and we believe that a systematic review of this field could yield important knowledge and insights relevant to inclusive education.

Drawing on a view of scientific discourse as an ongoing dialogue between scientific communities that use metaphors as 'lenses' to enable new ways of thinking about important issues (Popkewitz 2012, 7), we argue that it is of great importance to identify and critically analyse the discursive constructions of images about community in educational research and relate them to the theoretical traditions within which they are used. That is because metaphors and theory function in two ways: to legitimise certain aspects of institutional life by defining what aspects are to be taken for granted (Popkewitz 2012, 14) and simultaneously to 'direct attention to the possibility of alternatives', when new metaphors and theories are proposed that point to new 'social possibilities' (Popkewitz 2012, 16). Hence, this study has the potential benefits of opening-up new metaphorical and theoretical possibilities in the research field of inclusive education and of illuminating how different understandings of community relate to each other. Thus, communication between different positions taken will be facilitated. While our focus is on how educational research about community can contribute to the further theorisation about inclusive communities, we will also pay attention to the ways in which community research within education can benefit from research within inclusive education.

This paper builds on a reading of the 50 most highly cited educational research papers about communities in schools and classrooms sampled from the Web of Science database. We intend to map and analyse the field in regard to the metaphors, disciplines and

theoretical traditions that characterise this research. The database Web of Science was chosen because of its wide recognition and of the relatively strict quality criteria on journals included. The most highly cited research was analysed on the assumptions that such research would be central to the field. It should be noted that the procedure used in this study could, with some modifications, be used with other databases.

Three research questions are addressed in this paper:

(1) What meanings of school and classroom community can be identified in influential educational research?
(2) What theoretical traditions can be discerned and how do they influence the understanding of community?
(3) In what ways can this analysis of educational research about community benefit research about inclusive communities (and vice versa)?

To answer these questions, we combined a systematic mapping of highly influential papers in the field (Román et al. 2021; Hirsh et al. 2022; Nilholm 2017) with a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2022) of the descriptions and definitions of community found in these papers. In the field of education, it is acknowledged that several scientific traditions co-exist and that studies are conducted in line with several different theoretical perspectives (Lather 2006). Hence, a systematic mapping and analysis of the theoretical perspectives that guide influential research will contribute to the disentanglement of the ways in which knowledge is produced and interpreted. In addition, thematic analysis was also chosen as a method suitable for the qualitative analysis of texts aiming at identifying patterns of meaning (Braun and Clarke 2022).

Our theoretical and epistemological points of departure derive from pragmatism (Danforth 2006; Rorty 1989) in the sense that the explicit or implicit societal goals to which research intends to contribute are seen as central for the evaluation of the theories developed in a multi-paradigmatic field (Nilholm 2017). Each scientific tradition can be seen as encompassing a distinct worldview, and in that sense, it can be connected to certain broad societal goals that motivate research (Skrtic 1991, 1995; Lather 2006). Moreover, a pragmatist perspective suggests that with no stable foundations to support it, the final decision about what types of community are to be established and by whom becomes an issue of power.

To identify the theoretical traditions in which research has been conducted, we follow Skrtic's (1991, 1995) typology of two broad perspectives in research in relation to the way in which knowledge is conceptualised, namely Foundationalism (further divided into four paradigms) and Antifoundationalism. Skrtic's (1991, 1995) model was chosen due to the clearly presented characteristics of each tradition, which we consider still descriptive of the educational field to-date and the multiple examples of theorists and works, that made the construction of a guide for the categorisation of papers feasible (see Appendix B, available as supplemental online material). Foundationalist traditions in Skrtic's model are adapted from Burrell and Morgan (1979) and classified as Functionalist, Interpretivist, Radical Humanist, and Radical Structuralist based on the assumptions about the nature of society (as being characterised by consensus or conflict) and about the nature of scientifically produced knowledge (as being subjective or objective; cf Bernstein 1983). An Antifoundationalist perspective, on the other hand, moves beyond these boundaries,

emphasising contingency in both dimensions (society and knowledge). Furthermore, each tradition can be related to a broad societal purpose for research, namely prediction for Functionalism, understanding for Interpretivism, and emancipation for Radical traditions, while deconstruction is seen as the main aim of Antifoundationalist scholarship (Skrtic 1991, 1995; Lather 2006). Consequently, we employ the five following categories for our analysis of theoretical traditions: Functionalist, Interpretivist, Radical Humanist, Radical Structuralist, and Antifoundationalist.

Material and methods

The most-cited educational research about community is analysed in the present paper on the methodological assumption that the research community has given a great deal of attention to those papers, which can therefore be considered central to the research fields (Hirsh et al. 2022; Nilholm 2017; Román et al. 2021). Our first step, then, was to identify influential educational research where schools and classrooms are seen as communities. We only focused on research using the word community and not on the overall concept, meaning that uses of other terms to refer to collective and relational understandings of education were not included. Searches were made on Web of Science (WoS), a database with great coverage of quality research in education, which also offers the feature 'times cited', our indicator for the centrality of papers to the field. The process described below took place in May and June 2021.

After a first exploratory phase of searches, a list of papers was created on the basis of the search that was shown to provide the most relevant results, which was TITLE: (communit*) AND TOPIC: (educat* OR school* OR classroom). We proceeded with searches of communit* in the TITLE after trying out the search in both TITLE and TOPIC and found that the first was giving more focused results than the latter. Thus, this combination resulted in 7,352 citations after limiting the scope of searches to the following five WoS categories: Education – Educational Research, Psychology Educational, Education Special, Sociology, and Political Science. Language preference was set to English. All papers emerging from this search process were listed from the most to the least cited, with the cut-off being a minimum of 25 citations, resulting in 700 papers. For an article or review to be included in the sample, its content had to be about community and education from preschool to upper secondary level, and more specifically to refer to classrooms or schools as communities. Having applied our inclusion criteria, 50 articles remained.

Mapping and analysis of the articles

The first phase of the analysis, conducted by the first author, involved a mapping of and familiarisation with the material. In this paper, due to limits of space, we only refer to three aspects that were mapped, namely the year and place of publication, times cited, and the discipline of the contributors. The initial mapping of important information about each article was followed by a first close reading of the papers. During this phase, memos were created for each paper, with notes about their content. Additionally, the first author identified and marked excerpts in the texts that could be coded in either of the broad codes of 'meaning' or 'theoretical tradition', as guided by research questions 1 and 2. This

first phase was completed with the help of the N-Vivo software for qualitative analysis. Under 'meaning', text excerpts were coded that contained definitions or descriptions of school and/or classroom community. Lastly, parts of the text where the theory or the theoretical concepts employed in the paper were stated were coded in the category 'theoretical tradition'. In the absence of a clear theoretical contextualisation of a study, traces of its theoretical roots were searched for in the basic assumptions adopted and the overall references cited in the study. For a more nuanced analysis of the meanings and the theoretical traditions, the aims, research questions and the intended contribution of each study were coded as well. This process was repeated a second time to make sure that all papers were coded sufficiently with regard to both analytical foci, namely meaning of community and theoretical tradition.

The second analytical phase involved the coding of the excerpts within each focus. A thematic analytical approach (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2022) was selected for the identification of strands of meaning of 'community' in the texts. The large excerpts from each paper that were coded in the prior analytic step were re-written into shorter descriptions summarising the content in wording as closely as possible to that of the texts. These semantic codes were also related to their latent meaning (Braun and Clarke 2006, 2022), as read in the overall context of each paper, in the notes on the initial memos, in the research questions, and in the aims and motivation. This process led to the inductive identification of four themes of meaning that were briefly described and named (see next section). Each paper was further assigned to one of the five predefined categories of theoretical traditions discussed earlier: Functionalist, Interpretivist, Radical Humanist, Radical Structuralist, and Antifoundationalist based on the guide we developed from Skrtic's (1991, 1995). In each phase of the coding, after the papers were classified by the first author, a sample of ten cases was discussed with the second author. Additionally, we (the two authors) regularly discussed the challenges occurring throughout the process of coding and thematising in relation to the theoretical framework, to constructively resolve ambivalences.

Findings

The following section begins with an account of the overall mapping of the corpus. Then, we present the outcome of the analysis of the meanings given to community (RQ1) and the theoretical perspectives discerned (RQ2).

General description of the sample

The papers that were selected for analysis were published over a long period of time, the oldest in 1988 and the most recent in 2016 (Table 1). The most-cited paper had at the time of sampling 791 citations, and the least cited was 26 (see Appendix A, available as supplemental online material).

Table 1. Number of papers by publication period.

Period of publication:	1980-1989	1990-1999	2000-2009	2010+
Number of papers	1	16	22	11

With regard to the journal publishing the article, the theories employed, and the authors' specialisation, the papers were categorised as belonging to psychology (16), sociology (6), educational organisation (i.e. school and teaching organisation) (5), philosophy of education (4), special education (3), and information and communications technology (1). The remaining 15 papers were examining aspects of subject teaching, i.e. science (7), maths (4), language (2), and literacy (2). Forty-one papers were published in journals from the US and only nine were in European or internationally oriented journals. Thus, different aspects of educational research clearly dominate the sample, even though there are marked influences from psychology and sociology.

What is meant by community?

Through the thematic analysis, four distinct themes of meanings of school and classroom community were inductively identified based on the underlying metaphor that was seen as characterising each theme. First, the codes that most clearly encompassed a metaphor were selected, for example 'community-oriented schools reflect the primary group relationships of family and neighbourhoods' (Baker et al. 1997, 588). Other codes were then clustered (and re-clustered) around the initial codes until four themes were generated, and within each of the themes all of the codes could be related to each other (Braun and Clarke 2022). The four themes were named according to the underlying metaphor that characterised them, as described briefly below:

(A) Idealised-Home: schools and classrooms that are attentive to and nurture children's as well as adults' social needs.
(B) Idealised-Polis: a 'small republic' of democratic governance.
(C) Idealised-Academia: schools and classrooms in the image of existing knowledgeable communities and their collaborative and communicative practices, to which students become enculturated.
(D) Power-Resisting Space: schools and classrooms where teachers and students actively challenge power and create a space where multiple narratives can exist.

Idealised-home

In this metaphor – identified in 16 papers – personal, supportive bonds between members are emphasised as the most central feature of community relationships, and these can be described with family-like characteristics. The shared underlying assumption here is that a sense of belonging to the school or to the classroom community is not only a presupposition for further development of academic (for students) or professional (for teachers) skills but also for developing a sense of belonging to the overall community.

An emphasis on the cultivation of close, supportive relationships at school is seen as a major contributor to the creation of a sense of community and thus to increased motivation for further engagement and personal development. Several practices are connected to this goal, such as relational rehabilitation for restorative justice instead of strict disciplinary practices (Karp and Breslin 2001, 250), keeping schools and classrooms small (Felner et al. 2007), or creating space for deep discussions between students and teachers (Battistich et al. 1997, 138) and school-wide reflection between staff (Kruse and Seashore Louis 1997, 74).

A shared underlying assumption in this theme is that of a division between the social and the academic aspect of education. This becomes apparent not only in the papers that promote the ideal of community in school but also in the two papers that maintain a critical stance towards the Idealised-Home metaphor and its use. More specifically, in a comparison between schools with either communitarian or academic climates in relation to students' achievement in maths, community is described in terms of close, supporting bonds between teachers and students, while the academic climate is described in terms of pressure to achieve better results (Phillips 1997, 641–42). Savage (2011, 56), on the other hand, identified a paradox when the concept of community (described by the author in terms of pastoral care) was employed in Australian policy and political discourse, in combination with the (contradictory for existing schools) intention of excellence through competition.

Idealised-polis

The papers in this theme are guided by a metaphor of school community as an Idealised-Polis, where relationships are built around participatory decision-making and deliberation. Community in the ten papers that build on this metaphor is described in terms that can be associated with a democratic vocabulary. For example, in one case, it is described as a 'little Republic', committed to the norms of care and responsibility and resembling a deliberative democracy (Power 1988, 195), while in another case community in school is seen in the involvement of all (adult) members in decision-making regarding the school's affairs (Parker and Raihani 2011, 718).

In this theme, although elements from the Idealised-Home community are present, the image of community in school is connected to practices of democratisation of the school organisation in terms of increased participation in school life. A variety of democratic values constitutes the main topic, as for example community-related self-regulation in Yowell and Smylie (1999). Similarly justice, morality and democratic participation are stressed as central values for a 'Just Community', which stands 'for meaningful experiences in significant forms of participation' (Oser, Althof, and Higgins-d'alessandro 2008, 407) and the experience of which has 'helped students to deal with the everyday, real life moral problems in their schools' (Power 1988, 200).

A common assumption here is that external control and bureaucratic organisation contribute to an individualistic image of the citizen that harms the social purposes of education. Moreover, bureaucratic governance is mostly understood in relation not only to a centralised public system but also to the standardisation prescribed by market-influenced reforms, as in Strike (2004, 228) who states that 'standards-based reform tends to instrumentalise education and privatise individual goals'.

Idealised-academia

The largest category (19 papers) is that in which the classroom is depicted as a community of novice academics who collaborate with each other and advance their practices and who resemble communities recognised as knowledgeable, for example, communities of scientists or habitual readers. What is common in those papers is that community is presented as the natural context for the practices considered to be fundamental for learning, namely interaction and discussion. The classroom is envisioned simultaneously as a group of people becoming a community because of their shared endeavour of

learning, but also as a group of peripheral participants in the world-wide knowledgeable communities.

Argumentation and deliberation are central practices in the Idealised-Academia metaphor, and the means for persuasion are based on robust evidence and arguments formulated in (subject) relevant language. Thus, common understanding and sensemaking in the classroom are reached 'through the goal of persuasion' (Berland 2011, 630) and through 'collaborative work' that 'requires articulating various ideas' (Berland and Reiser 2011, 192), while Engle and Conant (2002, 405) emphasised how 'resources supporting discourse practices (were) involved in problematising content'. The incorporation of the language and modes of the knowledgeable community in the classroom community's practices is of such an importance that it is often seen as an indicator of the learning that is achieved, e.g. Goos (2004, 274) states that 'there was evidence that … students were beginning to appropriate forms of reasoning and patterns of social interaction consistent with the notion of inquiry mathematics that were valued by the teacher'. However, the importance of deliberation does not expand to the governance of everyday affairs of the Idealised-Polis, but remains primarily concerned with the content of subjects taught in groups and in the classroom as knowledge is negotiated and co-constructed.

The power-resisting space

Five articles in the sample, primarily dealing with issues of difference and power, were seen as expressing a distinct theme. The authors problematise the deeper and pre-existing inequalities that are historically produced and embedded in dominant discourses and the ways in which education relates to and resists them. The five papers are concerned with power and resistance in various educational contexts, including racially desegregated schools in the US (Fine, Weis, and Powell 1997), community schools in Palestine (Fasheh 1990), schools where students with and without disabilities study together (Berry 2006; Kliewer et al. 2004) and, on a more abstract level, schools in the postmodern, globalised world (Furman 1998). The way community is described in this theme is in its engagement with injustices that shape various aspects of schooling. Attention is drawn to the ways in which power intervenes with the micro-level of school life, but also with the ways schools and classrooms that strive to be communities can work to resist it.

School and classroom community as a Power-Resisting Space also encompasses elements from the other three metaphors in terms of recognising the value of togetherness and belonging, of participatory governance, and of collaborative learning. However, emphasis is put on the norms that influence and set the rules for belonging, not only to the school, but also to the community outside the school. This becomes clear in Fine, Weis, and Powell (1997, 252) and Furman (1998, 312), who theorise the creation of a 'community of difference', adding another level to the understandings and the related practices of community analysed earlier, namely an alertness towards the mechanisms that produce and also exclude differences. The school community is imagined as a space that has the potential to resist the relationships that already exist in society. In a similar vein, an education that respects and empowers the overall community is for Fasheh (1990, 32–33) one that frees the imagination and contributes to the development and sharing of knowledge that serves the real needs of a community. At the classroom level,

the community studied by Kliewer et al. (2004, 399) was seen as becoming enriched when the norms that privilege certain ways of communication were challenged.

Variations within community metaphors

In the Power-Resisting metaphor, community is consistently described as a changing space that becomes more hospitable and open through processes that challenge the ways in which power shapes the members' relations and identities. However, the purpose of community within the other three metaphors is not expressed so homogeneously, but rather in a continuum, where on the one end community can be seen as an end in itself and on the other as the means for further gains.

More specifically, in the Idealised-Home metaphor, the value in the creation and maintenance of close, supportive relationships is expressed, on the one end of the continuum, as morally important in its own right. For example, Karp and Breslin (2001, 250) propose that school should take inspiration from the model of 'loving families' whose disciplinary practices focus on the social and moral dimension of members' behaviour. On the other end, the importance of supporting such relationships relates to them being seen as an optimal context to increase individual academic performance, as in Felner et al. (2007, 211), whose project for the development of small learning communities is motivated by a view that 'academic performance and achievement (is) nested in a broader view of individual and contextually based competence, in which academic achievement is but one element of a larger set of competencies'.

Idealised-Academia communities, which are characterised by close collaboration, discussion, and shared goals are related to deeper and more meaningful learning (e.g. Lemke 2001, 298) and are described as having their own pedagogical value when, for example, communal participation is associated with increased creativity for the whole community and not for each individual separately (e.g. Kumpulainen, Mikkola, and Jaatinen 2014, 69). At the other end of the continuum, the Idealised-Academia can be presented in a more instrumental way, for example as the means to apply interactive pedagogical interventions (e.g. Berland and Reiser 2011, 194).

As regards the Idealised-Polis, the degree to which hierarchies and democratic practices intertwine can be placed on a continuum in relation to how the purpose of democratisation is understood. At the one end, relationships are expected to be horizontal, with students and teachers participating almost equally in decision-making (e.g. Oser, Althof, and Higgins-d'alessandro 2008; Power 1988). A more moderate view on school democratisation, though, connects it mostly to decentralisation, without challenging in-school hierarchies (e.g. in Parker and Raihani 2011).

What theoretical traditions can be discerned?

Each paper in the sample was assigned to one of the five theoretical traditions (Functionalist, Interpretivist, Radical Humanist, Radical Structuralist and Antifoundationalist), primarily based on the theoretical perspective declared by the author(s), but also in relation to the coded aims, research questions, intended contributions or other parts indicating characteristics of each tradition as summarised in the coding guide (Appendix B). For example, papers with a microscopic focus and a vocabulary of progression and achievement as measured in testing were identified as

Functionalist, based on excerpts such as the following: '(w)e hypothesised that teachers' sense of community would have a significant and positive relationship with classroom quality and positive attitudes about their careers' (McGinty, Justice, and Rimm-Kaufman 2008, 367). Similarly, to classify papers as Interpretivist, excerpts should demonstrate a focus on the analysis of social interaction and research aims related to understanding, for example 'research discussed in this paper investigates students' co-creation of a common artefact [. . .] and how the collective goal-oriented actions are supported by sociocultural practices and mediating artefacts' (Kumpulainen, Mikkola, and Jaatinen 2014, 56).

The distribution of papers across theoretical traditions and in relation to the community metaphors used are presented in Table 2. As one can observe, most of the studies in the sample are written within either a Radical Humanist or an Interpretivist tradition. This means that the socially constructed nature of knowledge is largely assumed within the sample, which already points to the (pedagogical) importance assigned to human relationships, communication, and interaction within this field.

Different critiques of the dominant paradigm in school organisation can be found in studies conducted within Interpretivist, Radical, and Antifoundationalist perspectives. In our sample, Interpretivist studies draw attention to the practices that support interaction and learning through communication and often emphasise two obstacles to this, namely reforms based on standards and teacher-centred teaching. Studies conducted from a Radical Humanist perspective also stress those two obstacles to community relationships in schools; however, their expressed concerns tend to point to the social impact of a highly individualistic understanding of the purposes of education. Lastly, two papers written within an Antifoundationalist perspective, i.e. Furman (1998) and Savage (2011), problematise, although in different ways, the use of 'community' in education. What concerns the authors is that community, which is typically associated with democracy, diversity, and equality in education, can be paradoxically used to serve the opposite goals than intended if adopted to fit existing (individualistic) contexts or if it is simplistically interpreted as the creation of a 'We'.

Overall, the degree of a critical stance in the articles appears to be influenced not only by the theoretical tradition from which they originate, but also by the combination of the latter with the underlying metaphor of community. Thus, Radical Humanist articles with an understanding of community as Idealised-Home offer more limited ground for a critical analysis of school as an institution – focusing, for example, on the issue of alienation within modern societies and its consequences for the development and well-being of individuals at school. In combination with an Idealised-Polis metaphor, though, Radical Humanist papers suggest broader changes, emphasising the political implications of

Table 2. Distribution of papers across theoretical traditions in relation to community metaphors.

Metaphor	Theoretical Tradition					
	Functionalist	Interpretivist	Radical Humanist	Radical Structuralist	Antifoundationalist	Sum
Home	5	4	6		1	16
Polis		2	8			10
Academia		19				19
Power-Resisting		1	2	1	1	5
Sum	5	26	16	1	2	50

alienation and the role of education as creating a common ground for a more connected social body. Finally, the metaphor of the Power-Resisting Space, emphasising multiple loci and moments of oppression and resistance that emerge in the context of relationships within and beyond school, allows for a critical stance, also from an Interpretivist perspective (as in Kliewer et al. 2004). In any case, perceiving the school and the classroom as a community infers the search for solutions in relationships rather than individuals, even in Functionalist studies.

Discussion

In this last section, we initially summarise our findings with regard to research question one and two and then we provide an answer to our third research question, about the relation between our review of research and the field of inclusive education. We argue that both the overall research field of our sample and research that focuses on the theorisation of inclusive communities could benefit from each other. Finally, we discuss the findings of the review from our pragmatic point of departure.

Main findings

Four underlying metaphors about community were identified in the analysed texts with respect to the emphasis put on the understanding of community and subsequently with respect to the central practices connected to each metaphor. Hence, community practices were linked to supporting the development of caring, personal relationships (Idealised-Home), to school governance and participatory decision-making (Idealised-Polis), to enculturation into academic practices through discussion and collaboration (Idealised-Academia), and to the habit of analysing, historicising and challenging assumptions behind common practices (Power-Resisting Space). Although there is agreement in the overall aim of offering an 'alternative vocabulary' (Rorty 1989, 11–12) to the individualistic, competitive trend in education, a variation at the ways and the degree in which these metaphors actually differ from the criticised paradigm in school organisation is identified in our analysis. This is elaborated below, when seen in the context of the theoretical traditions within which the metaphors are used.

Most papers in our sample were written within either the Interpretivist or the Radical Humanist perspective, thus, based on Skrtic, this research on school community is mainly either aiming at increasing the possibilities for understanding communal practices (1991, 32) or at facilitating members' emancipation through the questioning of ideas that limit their freedom (1991, 32). By relating the metaphors identified in the papers to the theoretical traditions in which they were produced, we described a spectrum of intended changes in school organisation, if community and its goals are to be achieved. Specifically, minor changes were proposed from the combination of a Functionalist perspective and an Idealised-Home metaphor, that only modestly challenge the dominant, competitive educational paradigm – but still promote collaboration in the classroom, sharing of experiences, and a less intervening role for the teacher as practices that support members' sense of school belonging. On the other hand, the most complex challenges to educational systems were put forward from radical (Humanist or Structuralist) perspectives, when a Power-Resisting metaphor was in play. There, several forms of oppression

are identified and exposed in a process aiming to expand the limits of possible action at school (and beyond).

Implications of the analysis on research about inclusive communities

As established in the introduction, the growing interest in the understandings of community in the field of inclusive education is demonstrated in recent studies exploring the potential of this image in different ways, while questions about the understanding of community have been also raised and explored in different ways. In conducting this systematic review, first we have mapped and analysed a field and this analysis has made similarities and differences between positions more explicit. Thus, the review can facilitate the communication within the field. Secondly, the identified metaphors and theoretical positions can serve as resources in widening the theorisation of communities in inclusive education, which also opens up the potential for the expansion of these metaphors (and even for the development of new ones) that will more directly relate to issues of diversity and inclusion.

Thirdly, it should be stressed that the general, diverse educational field interested in community can be illuminated by issues which inclusive education research attends to. Thus, it is clear that the specific challenges of disability and its interactions with other categories such as gender and social class is not so central in the overall field of research about educational communities, especially since only one study in the sample (Berry 2006) focuses explicitly on the interplay between classroom community and an intersection, that of disability and gender. Consequently, we suggest that these rather parallel research fields could benefit from each other.

A final remark from a pragmatic perspective

In the present analysis, school communities, basically understood as interactive, collaborative spaces, are seen as responding to diverse needs (or desires) that the school has not yet met, such as the need to belong, to co-decide, to co-create, and to re-imagine. Thus, as already argued, the four metaphors can be read as suggested alternatives to an instrumental, individualistic view of education. However, from a pragmatic perspective which acknowledges multiple legitimate research approaches, we cannot take a particular metaphor or theory as our point of departure. On the contrary, negotiations about what metaphors or theories that are to underpin the work towards more inclusive schools comes to the fore. In this way, the issue of power should not be avoided but rather placed at the centre of attention. As Held points out (2006, 2–3), power is enacted through democracy which can take different forms. A radical understanding of democracy is to argue that power should be given to the community itself, i.e. to the communities of schools and classrooms. It is important to understand that how such a community would form itself could not be stipulated in advance. Moreover, such initiatives will always be restricted at some level by existing political and administrative framings.

We suggest that if research on inclusive communities is conducted from a pragmatic perspective, which aims at deepening democracy and contributing to a just society, insights can be provided about when, how and with what consequences community finds space to form itself, taking the different metaphors with their concomitant

possibilities and restrictions into account. Political framings that open up for deliberation and participation (cf. Held 2006, 246) might be more beneficial for communities to form themselves. On the other hand, the political and administrative framings of what is possible to do in schools and classrooms will always restrict that possibility for the community, but might also, on a more positive note, provide e.g. legal protection for vulnerable groups. Thus, it can be argued that a critical analysis of the balance between external demands and the possibilities for the community to form itself lies at the centre of attention for a pragmatic approach to inclusive communities.

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