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Second Chance Schools in Portugal and Spain: Educational Proposals for Students in Greatest Vulnerability

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Second chance schools (SCS) were created with the aim of improving access to employment for young people who had dropped out of school early and were at risk of social exclusion. The purpose of this article is to identify alternative educational proposals to those applied in the general education system that are offered in the SCS in two southern European countries: Portugal and Spain. The article is also aimed at identifying commonalities and peculiarities in these educational offers. For this purpose, qualitative research has been carried out, especially by means of semi-structured interviews with the heads of almost all the entities in both countries, 24 in Spain and 6 in Portugal. After categorizing its content through a qualitative data analysis computer program, it has been found that there are seven essential elements in the work carried out by SCS: the establishment of an affective and trusting bond with young people, the search for personal growth, the commitment of educators, the use of attractive methodologies, the personalisation of teaching, the active participation of students and the investment in the relationship with their surroundings. These elements could also be the basis of a transformative educational proposal for mainstream schools.

Keywords: right to education, educational inclusion, early school leavers, risk of social exclusion, second chance school

INTRODUCTION

Second chance schools (SCS) have proved to be an effective educational stream to fully provide young people with the right to education. To be noted that these young people have been faced with difficulties in mainstream school and ended up leaving school far too early. By reengaging in education in second chance schools, these young people may make the best of an educational inclusion that keeps them from further social exclusion.

The right to education is universally recognised, but very unequally fulfilled in different parts of the world and within countries (Darling-Hammond, 2019). This right, is crucial

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for the individual and for society. It can be interpreted in a restrictive way, in which access to education, school attendance, are seen as sufficient for fulfilling this right. In a broader way ensuring the right to education also includes providing quality education to everyone, without exception. For this to occur, everyone must have access to fundamental and basic learning during compulsory education or, if this is not the case, at later stages of life (Thoyibi, 2016; UNESCO, 2021).

The right to education represents much more than having a guaranteed school place. There is knowledge and skills that must be accessible to all, as education is the basis for an individual to enjoy social inclusion and a fulfilling life (Bhatnagar & Das, 2014; Daniels et al., 2019; Ibáñez-Martín et al., 2020). One may say that educational exclusion refers to being deprived of a right to which a person is entitled, the right to education. Moreover, this right is one of the most important in what concerns social inclusion/exclusion, because it is the basis of many other social rights (Sen, 2000). The right to education facilitates other rights that bring people closer to social inclusion and the full enjoyment of citizenship (Marshall & Bottomore, 1998) given that education is the foundation for the participation of the individual in the political and economic life of a country and nowadays in the wider world, as it eases access to employment, housing, healthcare, etc. Krüger (2019) argues that overcoming educational exclusion "requires full, timely, sustained and complete schooling" (p. 3).

Educational exclusion and social exclusion feed on and reinforce each other, making it difficult to break out of this vicious circle (Domingo & Martos, 2017). Authors such as Amorocho-Herrera (2019), Fernández-Menor & Parrilla (2021), Macedo et al. (2018) and Sahin et al. (2016) consider the sociocultural context surrounding the student as a factor of risk and vulnerability that may lead to early leaving from education and training. Young people with low socio-economic status (SES) are more likely to educational exclusion that, and in restricts or prevents access to many other social rights in turn (Bernárdez-Gómez & Belmonte, 2020). Thus, for example, early leaving from education and training has very negative effects on labour market insertion and continuity in the labour market (European Commission et al., 2013; Magalhães et al., 2015; Ruiz-Mosquera et al., 2018). Exclusion leads to greater exclusion and the excluded person becomes unable to exercise their rights (Mínguez et al., 2018).

Hence, it would be a mistake to assert that the right to education is guaranteed and enjoyed by all young people in most developed countries. For example, in the European Union there is still an important proportion of young people who do not have full access to this asset, with consequences in terms of social exclusion (Council Resolution, 2021). SCS try to lessen this problem by means of educational proposals that differ from those of mainstream schools and are more tailored to young people in conditions of vulnerability.

These schools work towards strengthening the autonomy of the young person and foster their social insertion. In most cases, and despite coming from very challenging educational trajectories, the young people who reengage in education in SCS do not abandon them before finishing their training. After their SCS experience, they get a job or move towards further training by resuming their studies.

Educational exclusion in Portugal and Spain

In these two southern European countries, although the educational situation has improved ostensibly in recent years, there is still a significant number of young people who face serious problems which prevent them from enjoying an appropriate education that will protect them from social exclusion.

Education in Spain shows a double face. Spain is one of the European Union countries with the highest number of students in higher education and it is also the European country with the highest number of people who leave education without completing upper secondary education. Specifically, in 2020, 47.4% of young people aged 25–34 had a higher level of education (EU average of 40.5%); 24.3% of them had attained upper secondary education (44.8% in the EU) and 28.3% had less than upper secondary education (14.7%, Eurostat, 2021b). In Portugal, also in 2020, the percentage of young people with a higher level of education was 41.9%: not as high as in Spain, but higher than the EU average. However, the rest of the data placed it in a better situation than Spain. In Portugal, 37.1% of 25-34-year-olds had upper secondary education and 21% had no upper secondary education (Eurostat, 2021b). The figures for Portugal are closer to those of the Union, but the number of young people who do not attain upper secondary education is still a concern.

In line with the above data, the percentage of early leavers (18-24-year-olds who are not in education or training and have not attained upper secondary education in the same year) reached 16% in Spain, the worst performer in the Union after Malta (Ministerio de Educación y Formación Profesional [MEFP], 2022). In Spain, early school leaving is one of the main systemic education problems, and although this figure has been considerably reduced in the last decade (to 12.1 points), it is still very high (the EU average is 9.9%). In Portugal, too, the evolution has been similar to that of its neighbouring country, but with an even more pronounced decline. It started from a situation of 28.3% in 2010 and a decade later has reached a figure below the EU average (8.9% compared to 9.9%), reaching the 2020 target of 10% (Eurostat, 2021a).

It should be borne in mind that early leaving from education and training (ELET) is not a moment in time but the consequence of a process of disengagement and disaffection of students (Demirci, 2020; González-González & San Fabián, 2018; Khun-Inkeeree et al., 2021; Macedo et al, 2015), surrounded by macro and meso-institutional conditions that push the risk. In many cases ELET begins with the repetition of a school year; a practice with small expression in most OECD countries (below 5% in lower secondary education in all, with the exception of the two countries at focus, Spain and Portugal. In Portugal, 5.6% of students in lower secondary education and 7.2% in upper secondary education repeated grades in 2019, compared to 1.9% and 3% respectively on average in OECD countries – 2.2% and 3.3% respectively in the EU (OECD, 2021). Although the situation is still worrying in Portugal, Spain has the highest repetition rate of all OECD countries for both levels of education (MEFP, 2021), with 8.7 % in the first stage and 7.9 % in the second stage.

Second chance schools as a space for educational and social inclusion

According to data, both in Spain and in Portugal a large proportion of young people are not guaranteed a basic education. This shows the need for second educational opportunities to prevent exclusion. The expression *second chance schools* was first mentioned in the "White Paper on Education and Training. Teaching and Learning. Towards the Learning Society" (European Commission,1995). These schools were created a training policy to improve the employability of young people at risk of – or in - social exclusion. The aim was to provide them with access to their citizenship with full rights (McGregor et al., 2015).

Since then, SCS have gained an identity of their own and its number has grown, particularly in Europe, where they have been grouped in "The European Association of Cities, Institutions and Second Chance Schools" since 1999 (Koutrouba et al., 2011), but also in America and Oceania, (Cortés et al., 2017; Salva-Mut et al., 2016).

In Spain, the second chance offer is provided by non-profit entities or companies in the field of social economy (associations, foundations, and cooperatives) that come together in the Spanish Association of Second Chance Schools and there is a rigorous accreditation process (García-Montero, 2018; Thureau, 2018). There are 43 accredited schools that offer training to young people aged 15 to 29, more than 8000 in total (Martínez et al., 2021).

In Portugal, there are currently seven SCS grouped in the recently created Rede de Escolas e Iniciativas de Segunda Oportunidade [Network of Second Chance Schools and Initiatives]. All of them emerged in the last three years, except for the one located in Matosinhos, near Porto, which has been in operation for more than a decade and represents a good example. Together, these schools take in 300 young people, aged 15 to 25, who left mainstream education (too) early. These young people join second chance education with the aim of relaunching themselves, returning to school or finding a decent job (Mesquita & Hardalova, 2019). Moreover, and contrary to what happens in Spain and other European countries, since 2019, SCS in Portugal have been consolidated within the education system and are recognised as an important instrument in compensatory public policies against early school leaving (Ministério da Educação, 2019).

The relevance of this educational offer is recognised by recent research on SCS. This is the case of the Paniagua Report (Paniagua, 2022) based on a systematic review of 19 studies carried out in the international context. It focusses on educational aspects in second chance measures and indicates that these programs improve the educational return and the transition to work within flexible, individualized training environments in which human relations are the priority. Martinez et al. (2021) researched the Spanish SCS through an exhaustive questionnaire to more than 2000 young people enrolled in these schools. The study indicates that after a period of great school disaffection, the students of these SCSs feel very comfortable, enjoy their lessons and value very positively the accompaniment by educators throughout their training. Young people recognise that they are supported in many aspects beyond the curriculum. In their turn, Chisvert and Marhuenda (2022) have researched young people who have finished their

training in these schools, and in addition to emphasizing the educational return of many of them or their labour insertion, these authors highlight the success of the personal reconstruction of these young people who get to SCSs in very challenging situations.

In both countries, SCS addresses in an alternative way he training of young people who have been on the peripheries of mainstream school and are at risk of educational and social exclusion (Hancock & Zubrick, 2015; Marhuenda & García-Rubio, 2017; Meo & Tarabini, 2020). There is relevance in identifying and contrasting the SCS proposals in Spain and Portugal. Although these schools coexist and do not oppose to mainstream schools, they aim to do different things, to obtain different educational results among their students, and thus propose educational strategies and safe environment to foster young people's interest in and motivation for their education. Specifically, we set out to have a thorough understanding of common elements among schools, but also some of school specific features.

METHOD

This is a qualitative study that recourses to consultation of key people in charge of organizing and executing training programs in SCSs. The aim is to go deep into their thinking about the ways in which SCSs work. The results make part of a broader research centred on different aspects of SCS. This includes organisational aspects, and the profile, trajectories, and development conditions of SCS young people; as well as graduates' expectation of insertion in terms of training and labour market.

In Spain, 24 interviews were conducted with the managers and/or heads of studies. Six of the interviewees held positions of responsibility in educational institutions that gather several SCS. The sample refers to 40 of the 43 accredited SCS in Spain. In Portugal, interviews were carried out with six headmasters of the seven SCS currently operating in the country. A focus group discussion with 20 members of all SCS complemented this approach. The interviews with the stakeholders of almost all the SCSs in Spain and Portugal ranged between 40 and 120 minutes, a difference that resulted from people's greater or lesser will to expose their views. The discussion group lasted for three hours.

The research group of the Universitat de València and the University of Barcelona designed na interview protocol that was first used in Spain and later adapted to the Portuguese context at Porto University. Besides the common questions in Spain and Portugal, there were some specific points to be discussed, mainly due to the differences in the structure of the two education systems.

The interviews were semi-structured and covered organisation, curriculum, educational practice, and guidance. In this article, we mainly focus on the analysis of curriculum issues and educational practice. In Spain, interviews were conducted via videoconference between March and June 2021 and, in Portugal, interviews were in person between February and April 2022. Both respected the indications of the ethics committee of the Universitat de València and of Porto University.

The interviews were transcribed with the Stream program and in a second phase, were refined through a simultaneous revision of the automatically transcribed text and recordings. They were analysed using a qualitative data analysis software MAXQDA

Plus 2020. We, followed the procedure proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), consisting of five phases: familiarisation with the content, generation of initial codes, grouping of these codes into themes, and selection and formal definition of the most relevant ones. This last phase required a constant comparative method between the contents of the interviews and the theoretical concepts born from the identification of the fundamental themes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Similar procedures were used to analyse data from group discussion.

The discussion group among the seven Portuguese SCS focussed the common approaches and the differences in the educational actions of the different schools. The political framing of SCS at European level and within Portuguese public policies was also brought to discussion by the participants. The discussion group took place at the end of April 2022, during a face-to-face meeting that analysed problems related to the educational process that is being carried out and to share successful experiences and difficulties. In what concerns our research interests, this meeting allowed to discuss, reflect and qualify the results achieved after the analysis and categorization of the interviews already carried out.

FINDINGS

Seven elements for educational inclusion: building on data

Data analysis allowed to identifying essential aspects of SCSs' *promising practice*. Below, we reflect upon common features of each of these elements in both countries and some country specific differences that can be highlighted:

a) A close, affective, and trusting relationship with young people

This aspect is one of the most decisive and the first to be addressed in the SCSs. In both countries, there is coincidence in the relevance attributed to identifying young peoples' situations at their arrival at these schools, very complex life stories can be identified in some cases. There is also agreement in pointing out the importance of young people emotional recovery to find a way back to training: "They are told 'you are welcome, we don't care what happened before, everything is going to be fine.' The first thing is to enter their world" (SCS-Portugal-2). Interestingly, there are common expressions in Spanish and Portuguese schools. For example, interviewees said that it is very important to ask young people regularly: "How are you? How do you feel?" (SCS-Portugal-3, SCS-Spain-2). Human relationships are essential in SCSs. Often in spaces away from the classroom: "that tutoring on the stairs or in the park, that is, I sit in the park, and I ask 'what happened to you?'" (SCS-Spain-21).

The number of students per group helps establishing a relationship of trust and proximity between the young person and the educator: "as the groups are small, this makes the relationship much better than in traditional schools" (SCS-Portugal-1). In both countries, the groups have a maximum number of 15 students, an almost family-like relationship: "It's like a second family, but with limits, sometimes you can't get involved in everything" (SCS-Portugal-4).

The support to young people in curricular matters and in their daily problems is carefully dealt with: "There is a person supporting each pupil" (SCS-Portugal-6). It is

not an easy task to support the recovery of these students who "come with a very negative view of the school, and of the teachers" (SCS-Portugal-2). So "the key, and the difference, is in working with each individual. Gaining their trust is fundamental. It is the essence of everything" (SCS-Portugal-3).

b) The commitment of educators to their work and to young people

In line with very close and affective relationships in order strengthen the ties that bind young people to the SCSs, all the staff in the centres must be committed to their work. In the schools of both countries, participants agree that these young people require extraordinarily engaged educators that manage to deal with their very difficult work "They feel very supported by us, they know us in the morning, noon and night" (SCS-Spain-8).

Some specific features differentiate the two countries. As referred, SCSs in Portugal are part of the public policy and state educational administration. In fact, teachers of the more generalist subjects are shared with the school clusters to which they belong. This can be a problem: "there are teachers who come from the schools just to complete their schedule. This would require maximum engagement and, if possible, that the teachers stay at the school for several years" (SCS-Portugal-4). In Spain, despite that SCSs also have funding difficulties due to the lack of public support, this is not the case. The staff working in the centres are hired and usually work exclusively in the SCSs and for a long time.

In Portugal, a wide variety of professionals work at SCSs: "There are teachers of different specialities, but there are also educators, psychologists, technicians of professional outings, etc." (SCS-Portugal-1). They provide "a socio-educational response, not just training. The schools are not only providing training but also concern for their families, food, housing, drug use, etc." (Discussion Group Portugal-DGP).

c) The personal growth of learners over and above professional and training competences

In relation to the curriculum, SCSs put personal competences first, because they are the foundation of any other competences: "Personal growth is fundamental; it is about rebuilding them and support them in giving meaning to their lives again" (SCS-Portugal-3). Professional and formative competences are very important for schools, but continuous class attendance, punctuality, communication skills, teamwork, emotional strength to cope with problems, restoring young people's self-esteem, etc. are even more important. However, SCSs are aware that they must have good training programmes not to lead to stigmatisation and segregation of the schools themselves and of their students.

The SCSs in Portugal offer shorter training programmes than in Spain, mainly aimed at providing students with a level of qualification that they did not obtain in mainstream school: "they are committed to a more integrated, more holistic training, training as citizens" (DGP). The idea is to make a stop and get a boost to return to the more formal education system or to enter the labour market: "In Portugal they focus less on the labour market and more on the person" (DGP).

In Spain, the model is more like the French one, more directed towards vocational training: "depending on the demand in our area, we try to provide training that is closely linked to the company" (SCS-Spain-2). Though all the professionals emphasise that they work above all with "people who have been beaten up by life, stories that make your hair stand on end or simply sad stories or happy stories, I don't know, we work with people, their personal development is essential" (SCS-Spain-7).

d) Methodologies that attract young people's interest in training

The way in which a valuable curriculum is, developed is fundamental in any context. With young people with complex trajectories in traditional schools, it is even more important. In the learning-teaching process, methodologies are essential to foster students' engagement and participation. An attempt is made to relate the content to their interests, departing from their life experiences. The good thing is that "we can be talking about angles and end up talking about something else. My bike has, I don't know what, I don't know how much, yes, but that's because instead of having the handlebars at 45º, it has them...". (SCS-Spain-7).

SCSs in both countries use a wide variety of methodologies. There is an attempt "to make the classes very practical, with workshops on wood, life issues, etc. And with projects, for example, recently about carnival" (SCS-Portugal-3). Young people's is key, and to this end it is essential to create spaces where they find meaning and usefulness in what they are doing. In this sense, service learning is an extraordinary methodology: "all the boys and girls (…) carry out a quarterly service-learning project, (…) based on a project that has to be developed in another social entity in the surrounding area" (SCS-Spain-17). In one of the Portuguese schools, they highlight the success of their arts-based methodology with theatre and other arts. This "is what unites all the activities that are carried out. Mathematics, cooking, science, all come into the arts". Moreover, in this way, young people "see meaning in their activities, because they ask themselves why they do this or that, and here they find an answer: (...) they have to put on a show, which also makes them visible to others in a positive way" (SCS-Portugal-2).

e) The flexibility to tailor teaching to each young person

Personalisation of teaching is possible, at least that is what SCSs try and achieve in most cases. How can classes be personalised for each young person? As pointed out:

> There are phrases that self-limit us, "you can't do it" and actually you can. A minute of attention and the presence of the educator is essential for each young person. You change the activity according to each student. That is why it is recognised that there are multiple intelligences (...). Young people are not all the same. (SCS-Portugal-2)

When each young person arrives at the school, the team spends some time actively observing them. Individual plans are established: "First they are identified and then more concrete activities are carried out" (SCS-Portugal-3). In another school we are told that they try to "personalise teaching as much as possible. Adapt teaching to the interests of each student. Each young person works on a project, and it is up to them to work (...) with common projects or not" (SCS-Portugal-5).

In Portugal, young people in SCSs can subscribe to the Integrated Education and Training Programme – PIEF) if they are under 18 years old and to Adult Education and Training – EFA if they are over 18. Both programmes lead to achieving the 6th and 9th grades of mainstream school. In Spain, much depends on each autonomous community. Training programmes and pathways can be quite varied as some of them are related to vocational training.

One aspect repeated in some schools in both countries is that they start the day with school breakfast: "there is no school that starts with breakfast; although it may seem silly, well, it is not silly. There are kids who leave home without having a bite to eat" (SCS-Spain-7). As we were told "Starting with breakfast is a good way to open communication with them and it also helps to reduce possible absenteeism" (SCS-Portugal-4).

f) Students' participation in SCSs decision-making

In SCSs, young people are not passive objects, but subjects who are involved and participate in school life. In both countries, this participation is articulated through assemblies. In Portugal, assemblies tend to take place at the level of the whole school, as the number of students per school is smaller - an average of 40 students per school: "They have an assembly where they are all in the playground in a circle and discuss the progress of the school" (SCS-Portugal-1). In them [assemblies], crucial questions about the learning space are raised through the voice of each of the young people: "the atmosphere that is created helps us to learn and improve" (SCS-Portugal-3).

In Spain, assemblies are usually class-based:

> … they are not a session in which the tutor talks to the pupils about behaviour, but where pupils talk about themselves. In the end, a dialogue is created between them, and they, themselves say, "hey, what are you doing, why are you treating the teacher like that, what are you doing? In the end, what you create is a bond, which is the important thing". (SCS-Spain-17)

More than tutoring hours, these assemblies are used "so that they can also resolve their conflicts (...) or tell us what they like and what they don't like. They also provide us with many keys for improvement" (SCS-Spain-21).

g) Investment in the relationship with the surroundings, families in particular

We tried to address the surroundings of each young person, particularly families, given that it is students' closest context. Some families are faced with enormous problems that affect the students' progress, their attendance and even their possible dropout. As indicated: "The relationship with the families is very close; we try to have a lot of connections, having activities such as meals or meetings so that they are involved" (SCS-Portugal-1). To this end, "it is important to make them participants in the progress and difficulties, so that the young people's training process is supported and valued at home" (SCS-Spain-16).

In a school in Spain, it was commented: "As far as possible, we involve the family a lot", in fact when a young person misses school "a couple of days, three days without

coming to class and I show up at his house, the child freaks out and says, but what is this guy doing, what is this?" (SCS-Spain-8). In another school, in Portugal, the same was mentioned: "They have a badge when they arrive. If they are absent, professionals call them (…) and if they are absent many times you go to their houses" (SCS-Portugal-1).

DISCUSSION

Our objectives were to identify the main educational proposals developed by SCSs in Portugal and Spain and to highlight some specificities in their proposals.

As we have observed, the SCSs have some particularities. However, they have a common basis for dealing with the education of young people who have had complex trajectories in mainstream schools and who were at risk of educational and social exclusion. Seven elements were found in the SCSs of both countries that are essential to their identity: establishing a close, affective and trusting relationship with young people; the commitment of the educators; the personal growth of the students above any professional or training competence; methodologies that are attractive to young people; the flexibility and personalisation of teaching; the participation of young people in decision-making and life of the SCS; and the investment in the relationship with students' immediate surroundings, families in particular.

Establishing an affective and trusting relationship is a priority, because it makes it possible to support recovery and the reengagement of the young person in his or her education. The affective dimension of educational engagement is closely linked to the relationships established with peers, but especially with teachers and educators (Tarabini, 2015). The existence of a limited number of students is also important in the strengthening of bonds with teachers (te Riele, 2014). In SCSs, the premise that the well-being of the young person has an impact on performance is very much present, going far beyond the strict fulfilment of the curriculum (Gutiérrez & Prieto, 2020).

A positive attitude and enthusiasm for professional work (Garza et al., 2016), as well as passion for their profession and for the success of their students are fundamental and decisive factors in the intrinsic motivation of young people (Jordán & Codana, 2019) by means of adequate relational pedagogies. From the students' point of view, concern for the learner rather than the curriculum has been identified as a key quality of a good teacher (García-Rubio, 2022).

Although SCSs try to recover students for their incorporation into the educational system or for their insertion into the labour market, their great success lies in the reconstruction of young people who are very battered and with a certain fragility at the arrival at SCSs (Tárraga et al., 2022). The maturation process of these young people is among the learning priorities of SCSs. On many informal occasions, outside the classroom, but intentionally conducted, reflective and deliberative learning is sought (Martínez et al., 2021).

One of the educator's first and perhaps foremost goal is to promote students' enjoyment of their learning. This is paramount and implies engaging everyone in the construction of knowledge (Macedo, 2018). To do this, the educator must awaken the students' interest in the knowledge that he or she is trying to teach, without using an excessively

transmissive methodology, which leads to very rote learning. It is necessary to move away from banking education (Freire, 1975), in which the teacher is the one who teaches while the students are limited to learning and replace it with an emancipatory education based on complementarity and dialogue.

All of this must be done in such a way as to reinforce and value intra-group heterogeneity (Macedo, 2018). We work with a diversity of subjects in the classroom who have different interests and ways of learning. Therefore, heterogeneity must be sought in the ways of working, using various methodologies, so that the same cannot be demanded of everyone (Jerez, 2015). SCSs are committed to the personalisation of teaching, proposing a curriculum that is tailored to each young person, and not the other way around (González-Faraco et al., 2019).

In addition to other relational aspects, the affective dimension is linked to the young person's identification with the school through the experiences associated with it (Gutiérrez & Prieto, 2020). The students' harmony with their organisational culture, the fit between learning methods and their interests, the sense of inclusion and participation in school life accentuate their sense of belonging to the educational institution (Fernández-Menor & Parrilla, 2021). As a desired practice in schools, González-González (2017) points out "a stimulating institutional climate in which students have avenues and opportunities to participate and have a voice in school affairs" (p. 26). In other words, they find space to constitute themselves as subjects who are builders of their educational citizenship (Macedo, 2018).

The family situation can contribute to early leaving from education and training. Therefore, SCSs try to create a supportive relationship with families or carers and encourage their involvement in SCSs activities (Sánchez et al., 2016). The support of all those around the young person is required to reengage them in education.

Among the seven common aspects on which SCSs in Spain and Portugal are based, we have also found idiosyncrasies. Thus, SCSs in Portugal enjoy a legislative framework that supports them within public educational policies, while in Spain there is little support from the state and lack of specific legislation. Moreover, the possibilities for SCSs in Spain vary considerably depending on the autonomous community in which they are located. Also, in Portugal the conception of SCSs is that students stay for a year or two, whereas in Spain young people tend to stay longer. This aspect is linked to the training programmes offered in each of the countries, which also means that the number of students in SCSs in Spain is much higher than in Portugal, where the centres are smaller and the initiatives have only been recently implemented.

If we compare the results obtained by Paniagua's (2022) review of almost twenty international studies related to SCSs, we find some coincidence with aspects of our research in what concerns essential features in the work of these schools. It is worth highlighting: the humane and affective environment surrounding young people, the value attributed to their personal growth, and the provision of personalized education tailored to each young person. Martínez et al. (2021) underline that young people who were in the SCSs wanted to remain there because of the good classroom climate and of the good relationship with the teachers, as well as the practicality of the knowledge they

were acquiring. These aspects of this research coincide with the point of view SCSs' stakeholders who were the protagonists of our research. These and other aspects that were focussed are expressly sought by the SCSs to get these young people to reengage with their learning.

CONCLUSIONS

This study contributes to the analysis of the work of SCSs in Spain and Portugal, having had access to in-depth interviews with professionals who oversee most SCSs in both countries. We have found common elements in the SCSs of both countries. From the perspective of the people in charge, these elements contribute to reengaging in education young people who showed great disaffection from school and education related matters after facing several forms of school and social disadvantage. However, we would have liked to have access to students' perspectives. We will leave analysis of young people's voices for future studies, as they can provide relevant views on the role of these schools.

Despite having a different educational, social, legislative, and historical context and presenting some specificities, we can highlight that the SCSs in Portugal and Spain have some common pillars on which a holistic, not only instructive, offer is the basis for young people who have faced difficulties in their life conditions and school careers. Moreover, the promising practices developed in the SCSs in both countries can be a great compensatory response for these young people, and thus support them in their educational return to the formal system or their integration into the labour market.

These practices can also serve as a guide and reference for the mainstream education system, and especially for those professionals working with young people most at risk of early leaving from education and training. Therefore, the SCSs in Spain and Portugal represent a good possible solution for the reduction of early leaving and for the achievement of the objective that all young people, without exception, achieve the effective exercise of the right to education, the basis of their access to a dignified life and to *educational citizenship*.

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