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Abstract

Background. Networks play an important role in today's societies. As a consequence, changes are apparent in the political, economic, cultural, educational and social agendas. Purpose: The main goal of this article is to map the situation of school networks in Spain. The research questions are focused on what forms collaboration and networking take in the Spanish education system; how policy and practice are providing a framework for the development of networks; and what the main barriers to fostering school-to-school collaboration in this context are. Methods: A mix of case studies and documentary analysis was used. Two regions located in the Southwest (Extremadura and the Canary Islands) were selected to examine their legislation about networks in education. The following aspects were considered: aims and aspirations, areas of interest, organisational structure, benefits and incentives, network project and evaluation and improvement proposals. In this way, Spain is presented as an example of a country that is exploring the possibilities offered by networks. Findings and conclusions: There is no common state policy to support networking between schools. Rather, every local educational authority acts with different purposes and a variable extent of development.

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This particular situation offers a diverse map of education networks. The case studies show that networks are being developed bottom-up, through topics of interest, such as library, ecology, health-promotion, equality, emotional intelligence, educational research, enterprise and physical education. The paper concludes by reflecting on and discussing the current landscape of educational networks. Some barriers identified are related to: the networks' structures that could be more inclusive, the loose culture of collaboration, the weak mechanisms to link social and professional capital provided by policy-makers, the importance of belief in the network society and community power by stakeholders and also to the necessity to increase incentives for people involved, in terms of working-time conditions and resources.(HRK / Abstract übernommen)