

Languages that transform: weaving narrative threads about education and disability—Boyacenses' Commitment to Social Cohesion, as an example of Anti-Ableist Research Practices-Based Project

Karim Garzón Díaz¹

Claudia Piza Castillo²

Laura Rodriguez Duque³



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The project “Languages that transform, weaving narrative threads about education and disability, Boyacenses are committed to social cohesion”, consists of the co-creation of

¹ Occupational Therapist. PhD. Social Science Childhood and Youth. Associate professor, School of Medicine and Health Science, University of Rosario. Karim.garzon@urosario.edu.co. Correspondence author.

² Disability referent, Municipality of Moniquirá Boyacá (Colombia). She recognizes herself as a person with physical disability.

³ Speech and language therapist, Master in Education and Human Development

community meetings based on intersocial dialogues as an open school strategy, where emerging narratives about disability are promoted, linked with new forms of meaning about what the lived realities of people with disabilities in their territories represent and undocking the perspective of ableism, difference and normalization.

The project is part of citizen science in cooperation with some municipalities in the department of Boyacá (Colombia). Each of the municipalities has a local government representative who, for the purposes of the project, is considered co-investigator, throughout the project cycle. Its execution is planned through fifteen (15) community meetings (5 for each Municipality) and with the participation of approximately 45 people (15 for each Municipality). These meetings will be mediated by pedagogical workshops, where discovery learning, empathy, introspection, reflective and open dialogue, creative writing (children's literature) and theater activities will be the common threads. Some results will be presented in Braille and Colombian Sign Language.

- **Central Research Question**

How to promote social narratives about disability that help to re-understand and produce new forms of meaning about what the lived realities of people with disabilities represent through community-based intersocial dialogues as an open school strategy and in relation to their territories?

- **Subquestions**

- Which narratives about disability can stimulate opportunities for social cohesion and transformation of sociocultural relations?
- How can creative writing and theater activities help mobilize effective strategies that promote the recognition of people with disabilities, unmooring the perspective of ableism, difference and normalization?

The project seeks to contribute to the production of new knowledge from and with the territories and open horizons of meaning different from the traditional ones that have prevailed in disability studies. It parts from the recognition of the emergence of multiple theories that can sometimes be considered sterile to the extent that, in the verification with social realities, continue to predominate focused on limitations, marginalization, exclusion, distinction and even abnormality discourses and practices and their reflection on social inequalities. Hence, it is recognized that the problem of disability is not the need for more research, but rather the lack of action, of relating the theories and lived realities of people with disabilities (Titchkosky et al., 2009) and of recognizing that the theories and life experiences of people with disabilities are often ignored or considered inferior compared to dominant perspectives (Campbell, 2019).

Now, in disability, it is very common to use euphemisms or expressions in educational, cultural and political settings, such as “social inclusion” to imply that the issue is considered and resolved, but it is not. This expression can be put into tension in a theoretical and practical way. For example, who includes whom? What roles underlie this perspective, perhaps “inclusivers” and “inclusive”? (Henao, 2019), why are people with disabilities the ones who

should occupy the last of them? In this sense, critical disability studies encourage debate and recognize the social and political complexity they contain (Goodley et al., 2019).

It is important to recognize in social dialogue, in the community, understood in this project as “open school”, how education becomes a dialogic process in which participants are active agents of their own liberation (Freire, 1997), and becomes a key tool for sustainable development and social cohesion. Therefore, with the project, the concentration of the “study on people with disabilities” shifts to making the realities of people with disabilities situations typical of community life, and transcending traditional explanatory perspectives of physical limitations, mental or sensory of “others”, because we speak, think and feel towards the other, from the place of the “extraordinary, of the capable” (Campbell, 2008), to undock ourselves from the notion of limitation to unlock new opportunities for action in context (Goodley, 2013) as well as understanding life and experiences outside the concept of ability and capacity (University of Dundee, 2021), in which discourses and social practices around disability have been encapsulated.

- **Project Justification.**

This project is framed within the principles of "citizen science" such as: collaboration and partnership, engagement from multiple perspectives, continuous learning and reflection, desire to understand what's happening rather than how it works, and embracing complexity (Rowbotham et al., 2022). It becomes imperative to seek different starting points for defining disability by its absence, faults, or losses (Campbell, 2012), to stimulate dialogues from different social positions, to conceive the community in territory as an ecosystem of

productive debate with high levels of commitment and to trigger actions accordingly from private to public spheres: families, neighborhoods, schools, social leaders, public managers, among others.

In addition to the social practices that result from this, the influence of speech, narratives, and the proliferation of "explanatory" models of disability have perpetuated behaviors and thoughts anchored to ableism (Garzón-Díaz, 2022), understanding this as a network of beliefs, processes, and practices that establish a normative standard of what it means to be human and dehumanize those who do not meet such a standard (Campbell, 2012; Michalko, 2011).

The project seeks to contribute to new knowledge, transcending academic rhetoric to value the sense of appropriation of social realities by open communities, through their own reflection and intersocial dialogues, mediated by pedagogical strategies, whose axes focus on provocation, discovery, empathy, and the possibility of building new narrative languages through 1) creative writing, particularly with children's literature because it allows us to "know ourselves, recognize others, discern the self, understand what feelings and thoughts we bring into play, as well as recognize the beliefs that support our actions and decisions" (Domingo Roget & Anijovich, 2017) and 2) theater, because from territorial community work, it allows for real possibilities of social cohesion through art (Fernández, 2022), with transformative capacity to counter inequalities (Serafino, 2022).

Therefore, this project involves the direct experience of audiences, acknowledges the social position they occupy, and engages human dispositions as determinants in how ideas about

disability can be socially constructed or deconstructed. (Garzón Díaz & Goodley, 2021) and consequently, aims to stimulate "connections" that can influence the understanding of ourselves, our place in the world (Watson, 2019), and above all, in relation to others.

The conceptual framework guiding the project is based on the epistemological reference of "the ecology of knowledge". In this framework, De Sousa Santos argues that the diversity of knowledge and ways of knowing must be recognized in both academic and societal contexts (De Sousa Santos & Gandarilla, 2009). Thus, the project values and acknowledges that different cultures, communities, and social groups possess their own knowledge systems, constructed through their historical experiences, traditions, values, and particular contexts (De Sousa Santos & Meneses, 2015); in this sense, it seeks to challenge the hegemony of Western paradigms in the field of knowledge and promote greater equity in knowledge exchange (De Sousa Santos & Gandarilla, 2009).

Based on the above, this project aims to anchor discussions where representations and perceptions of disability can be pondered upon as a means to challenge the prevailing exclusionary model dominant in both academia and daily life (Abrams, 2017), and because it recognizes that epistemic tensions in this field have oscillated between the medicalized and welfare-oriented perspective, the advocacy movements of individuals with disabilities asserting their rightful place in the world, highlighting oppression as one of the main determinants for enduring inequality, and those who perceive them as a distinct social group, the "diversely abled or functional", and build explanatory models accordingly, or those who identify social barriers to social participation but, at the same time, ignore the inherent conditions of what we might consider "human".

- **Description of Research Methods**

We have labeled the project's methodological approach as "participatory and intersocial research in cultural and literary narratives (languages) about disability" because it seeks to delve into the analysis of interaction and relationships among different social groups or stakeholders involved based on the community. It is grounded in education within the context of social cohesion (Durkheim et al., 1990), on cultural critical analysis, as it examines how cultural and literary narratives reinforce or challenge dominant discourses on disability (Hall, 1997), and in intersocial dialogue as a determinant in social practices to promote justice and equality (Nussbaum, 2006).

Participants. The study will include adult social groups of any gender, convened by local referents and residents for at least one year in the municipalities in the department of Boyacá (Colombia), who have been involved in plans, programs, or policies associated with people with disabilities in these territories. In total, the call is aimed at 45 participants throughout the project cycle (15 per municipality).

Data collection instruments. "The pedagogical workshop" will be used as a mediation strategy as it values learning through discovery to understand the experiences and perspectives of the participants.

Modes of analysis. We will employ qualitative content analysis through field journals encompassing observations, reflections, experiences, narrative production, and enrichment of comprehension as researchers and participants throughout the project cycle.

Description of constructs, measures, and key data sources. The guiding thread of the constructs is based on "disability experience" from: 1) individual and group perceptions about stereotypes and prejudices, 2) processes of recognition and power relations that can determine social hierarchies or boundaries between social groups. As measures and data sources, participant observation, focus groups, and participatory techniques such as creative writing and theater will be used to promote group dialogue about participants' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences in relation to the constructs.

Data collection procedures. Pedagogical workshops, field journals, and focus groups will be conducted in person and moderated by the principal investigator, co-investigators, and local referents.

Data analysis procedures. The content of field journals, transcripts of focus groups, and participant observation will be analyzed using techniques of thematic content analysis.

Annexes

[05. Braille Project Summary.pdf](#)

[📺 Languages.mp4](#)

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