

# New cartographies of inclusive education through narratives and action research

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**Abstract:** This research paper aims to document narratives on diversity and inclusive education and to understand the collaborative mechanisms used by teachers and families seeking recognition of diversity and disability in schools in Spain. To achieve these objectives, over 700 people have collaborated to generate new narratives of resistance that make possible inclusive and critical encounters and processes. This collaboration has been carried out through methodologies such as Participatory Action Research (PAR) that, combined with biographical and narrative research, are nourished by individual experiences having as their axis the collective construction of meaning. As the results show, this interconnection between narratives that are normally condemned to exclusion and loneliness allows the complexity of reality to be understood through hope. At the same time, this turns teachers, families and students into activists, forming networks of mutual support and resistance that lead to resilience processes, aim at structural transformations and act for the benefit of the educational community.

**Keywords:** Inclusive education, diversity, inequality, disability, participatory action research, biographical research

## Nuevas cartografías de la educación inclusiva a través de narrativas e investigación-acción

**Resumen:** Este artículo de investigación pretende documentar narrativas sobre diversidad y educación inclusiva, así como comprender los mecanismos colaborativos que utilizan docentes y familias para buscar el reconocimiento de la diversidad y la discapacidad en las escuelas en España. Para lograr estos objetivos, más de 700 personas han colaborado generando nuevas narrativas de resistencia que posibiliten encuentros y procesos inclusivos y críticos. Esta colaboración se ha llevado a cabo a través de metodologías como la Investigación Acción Participativa (IAP) que, combinadas con la investigación biográfica y narrativa, se nutren de experiencias personales que tienen como eje la construcción colectiva de sentido. Como muestran los resultados, esta interconexión entre narrativas de personas que suelen ser condenadas a la exclusión y la soledad permite comprender la complejidad de la realidad a través de la esperanza. Al mismo tiempo, esto convierte a docentes, familias y estudiantes en activistas, formando redes de apoyo mutuo y resistencia que conducen a procesos de resiliencia, apuntan a transformaciones estructurales y actúan en beneficio de la comunidad educativa.

**Palabras clave:** Educación inclusiva, diversidad, desigualdad, discapacidad, investigación acción participativa, investigación biográfica

## 1. Introduction

Globalisation has enabled increased mobility, communication and interdependence between distant regions, bringing along accelerated social changes and a shift towards increasingly diverse societies. These changes have shown how vulnerable human beings are in times of crisis (such as those provoked by the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis, wars...) and have challenged the learning experience, proving that it is possible to have new normalities (Eschenbacher & Fleming, 2021).

Schools have also tried to adapt to these changes despite obstacles and shortcoming, including: lack of human and material resources, training programmes that are not suitable for each school's needs, poorly adapted premises, lack of multidisciplinary teams to meet the different needs of students; a decline in the perceived social value of the teaching profession, an increase in bureaucratic tasks and policies that are slow to make changes for the promotion of inclusion and equity, to name a few. In addition to this lack of support and the additional workload responsibilities for teachers, there is an increasingly diverse student body, with different abilities and learning speeds, with different gender identities and sexual orientations, who come from very different places, cultures and socio-economic settings. This is why addressing this enormous diversity in a way that respects human rights has become one of the main challenges for education systems around the world in recent decades, as stated in Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the United Nations (UN) 2030 Agenda.

Society evolves at a different pace from that of schools. This leads to major clashes between school culture and the culture of the different groups within it. In addition, teachers have to deal with subjects that are too long and decontextualized, increasing bureaucracy and new social demands, leaving them little time for dialogue, reflection and collaborative work. The capitalist culture of production has also contributed to the fact that our education systems reward productivity over social justice and equity (Košmer & Mikulec, 2021).

Since the 1994 UNESCO Salamanca Statement, inclusive education aims to reform educational systems in order to give effect to the United Nations' principle 'Education for all', trying to ensure that ordinary schools educate the entire community without exceptions, identifying local barriers that are limiting the presence, participation and achievement of some learners (Ainscow, 2020). At the same time, some authors like Slee (2011) argue that inclusive education needs to challenge the processes of educational exclusion. In other words, inclusive education cannot ignore the prevailing inequalities, which tend to legitimize and reproduce themselves. As pointed by Waitoller (2020), it is particularly remarkable the way in which 'neoliberal inclusive education', is appropriating the revolutionary project of making schools inclusive, colonising and stealing the deeply human meaning of democratising schools for all citizenship, including those whose humanity was denied (Goodley, Runswick-Cole & Lid-diard, 2016; Calderón-Almendros, 2014, 2018; Calderón-Almendros & Calderón-Almendros, 2016). The neoliberal inclusive education promotes a fictitious inclusion that, despite contemplating presence, does not alter the rules and traditions that permeate the school system.

The school as an institution is therefore faced with great contradictions between its—supposedly democratic—task and the unequal outcomes and experiences that it yields for the diverse groups and individuals whom it serves. It is necessary to support the struggles of subordinated groups such as students with disabilities, in order to challenge the functioning of a school that denies the legitimacy and value of difference. The struggles waged by mothers,