What are the influences that govern how people view their worlds? What are the embedded values and practices that underpin the ways people think and act?

Discourses We Live By approaches these questions through narrative research, in a process that uses words, images, activities or artefacts to ask people – either individually or collectively within social groupings – to examine, discuss, portray or otherwise make public their place in the world, their sense of belonging to (and identity within) the physical and cultural space they inhabit.

This book is a rich and multifaceted collection of twenty-eight chapters that use varied lenses to examine the discourses that shape people’s lives. The contributors are themselves from many backgrounds – different academic disciplines within the humanities and social sciences, diverse professional practices and a range of countries and cultures. They represent a broad spectrum of age, status and outlook, and variously apply their research methods – but share a common interest in people, their lives, thoughts and actions. Gathering such eclectic experiences as those of student-teachers in Kenya, a released prisoner in Denmark, academics in Colombia, a group of migrants learning English, and gambling addiction support-workers in Italy, alongside more mainstream educational themes, the book presents a fascinating array of insights.

Discourses We Live By will be essential reading for adult educators and practitioners, those involved with educational and professional practice, narrative researchers, and many sociologists. It will appeal to all who want to know how narratives shape the way we live and the way we talk about our lives.

As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is available to read for free on the publisher’s website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com

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Miguel Alberto González González

Miguel Alberto González González reports on a narrative study of adult educators in Colombia that seeks their views of the dichotomies of inclusion/exclusion and diversity/homogeneity within their society and presents the evidence within a thematic analysis of key factors. The choice of subject and the commentary itself reveal the researcher’s desire to take an emancipatory stance.

This chapter is drawn from part of a research project that took place between 2015 and 2016, which sought to investigate the diversity/homogeneity and inclusionary/exclusionary dichotomies within Colombian education. Colombia is a country where ethnic, environmental, and cultural diversity is manifest and it is just beginning to become aware of this. Hence, social exclusion is one of its greatest problems as legislation and many other alternative proposals are insufficient to address diversity and inclusion.

This leads us to ask ourselves: what are the factors underpinning inclusion and diversity in Colombia? They are partly consequences of internal wars, partly due to international pressures as global attitudes to the human condition are undergoing major realignments that are only just beginning to be understood in Colombian society. The saving grace is that these aspects of human life are already partially addressed through a superficial awareness that change must happen. However, the country
faces significant difficulties in implementing change, as the government has neither the financial resources nor adequate infrastructure to work with, or change, inequalities in the distribution of wealth, or to support those who are economically marginalized within society and therefore facilitate greater inclusion.

Furthermore, education is the sector that best understands this great spectrum of diversity and inclusion, but there are not enough organizational and cognitive frameworks in place to confront either the chains of corruption or the relentless waves of internal violence that may never be entirely controlled or ended. In any case, it is necessary to move from an idea of diversity as a singular focused goal, towards an acceptance that diversity itself is complex, with its own diverse strands. We must likewise move away from a notion of inclusion as a unified concept towards an understanding that inclusion is multifaceted. Hence, it is often more accurate to use these terms in the plural; within this text I discuss these strands further and intentionally refer to diversities, inclusions, exclusions and homogenizations on occasion.

**Profound Interests**

Given the powerful position of education, it cannot be isolated from the problem of addressing diversity; the more education is homogenized, the more diversity and plurality become hidden, with greater educational exclusion increasing the risk of segregation, and consequently, of real and symbolic violence. Having said that, the greatest challenge the country faces in the educational field is to make practical inroads into achieving authentic inclusion and diversity. To establish these notions as legal precepts or conceptual ideas is not enough; following the cessation of armed conflict it needs to be made manifest in civil practices.

When we consider the Colombian context, this raises many key questions we need to ask ourselves. What do we ask of diversity? What do we want to do with inclusion? What concerns us about homogenization? By what criteria do we understand exclusion? How useful is it to legislate for diversity and inclusion? These questions are not solved through theory alone; intuition and social practices may also offer some answers.
Moreover, the resurgence of right-wing religious and political groups, who are willing to sacrifice their lives to enforce their demands, emanates from an ill-executed diversity and from exclusionary, even humiliating, inclusion programs, even though politicians tell us the opposite. Without a doubt, it is the political field that carries the greatest responsibility when thinking about the diverse and diversity. As Hannah Arendt (2005, p. 93) points out there is diversity within political systems but individual differences are lost in the need to form alliances that can exert power:

Politics deals with the coexistence and association of different men. Men organize themselves politically according to certain essential commonalities found within or abstracted from an absolute chaos of differences.

What she calls an ‘absolute chaos of differences’ involves disagreement, but not necessarily war as often happens in Colombia. We now know that the chaos of not understanding diversities — in this case, religious and ethical — has made us into agents of destruction, akin to predators in attacking those who are different. Colombian politicians need a better understanding of how to foster coexistence and association among their fellow citizens if the country is to serve the needs of all its people.

Methodology

This chapter is based on a qualitative research project, which, in the field, focused on the collection of the life histories of a number of Colombian academics. Since the data was collected as stories it was later subjected to narrative analysis following Polkinghorne’s recommendations (Polkinghorne, 1995). Since it is based on life histories, the study sits within the world of philosophical interests and their variants: the interpretative tradition. As Bulloogh and Pinnegar (2001, p. 15) clarify (referring to Hamilton, 1998):

Self-study researchers stand at the intersection of biography and history. The questions self-study researchers ask arise from concern about and interest in the interaction of the self-as-teacher-educator, in context, over time, with others whose interests represent a shared commitment to the development and nurturance of the young and the impact of that interaction on self and other.
This is where I stand, for life histories and self-reports are fundamental to the research process that made this text possible.

Narratives carry us into spatial, temporal, mental, formal and pragmatic dimensions. After addressing criticisms of its tentative nature, like Prince’s (1982, p. 4) view that narrative is ‘a hedging device, a way to avoid strong positions’ (surely useful when dealing with volatile situations), Ryan (2007, p. 24) explores its semiotic status, claiming that:

Most narratologists agree that narrative consists of material signs, the discourse, which convey a certain meaning (or content), the story, and fulfil a certain social function.

In this research, the social function is to recognize the theoretical and practical forms in which diversity, inclusion, exclusion and homogenization in Colombian education are activated.

A Brief Overview of Education in Colombia

Before focusing on the research aims and findings, it may be beneficial to provide a broader view of the state of education in the country, as there have been considerable improvements since the movement toward peace began, fuelled since 2002 by a commitment to an ‘education revolution’. An OECD report on the state of Antioquia (OECD, 2012) details both policy change and national statistics and those relating to university education are summarized here. Constitutionally, the country provides free compulsory education from 5–15 and since 2012 it has been free through to grade 11, the final year, removing a significant early barrier to university entrance except that substantial numbers of students drop out before they reach, or during, grade 11. In 2010, the Colombian population included 8,442,000 young people aged 15–24 but 15.2% of these had not completed secondary education and were no longer studying, 27.1% were still in secondary education, and 23.8% had left school without enrolling in tertiary education. Only 2% entered and graduated at the tertiary level, a very low figure indeed. Scores are rising in international assessment tests — but is this enough?

Tertiary education is considered a ‘cultural public service, inherent to the social ends of the state’ (OECD, 2012, p. 161) regulated by Law 30 (1992) and can be undertaken in universities, university institutions, institutes of technology and specialized professional
technical institutions. Colombia therefore offers a variety of different types of provision with varying levels of state control, as is often the case elsewhere. To address the length of time that students take to complete degrees, as well as poor retention rates, the State is making resources and support available in the form of loans to those in financial difficulty, and regional projects to provide tutoring and tracking. Perhaps more relevant to this study, however, is to note the 2011 proposals to reform Law 30, to introduce a ‘stronger quality assurance system’ and ‘expand capacity and efficiency’ (OECD, 2012, p. 91), effectively to privatize education. These reforms led to extensive, non-violent — and successful — student protest throughout 2012 (Vamoscaminando, 2012) and were withdrawn. However, Law 1740, adopted in December 2014, was set to bring in change, raising new concerns at the start of our research process and making me even more determined to document the situation before change occurred again. Now, to the research itself.\footnote{The author has translated text from Spanish to English.}

Findings from the Research

Turning to the research data, the intention is to present a thematic analysis to consider the homogeneity-diversity and inclusion-exclusion processes, in part to examine how the dichotomies work against each other. Thus, we look at each dichotomy and subsequently at the practices that support or exemplify each element, drawing upon relevant literature and research data to support many of the points.

Homogenizations-Diversities in Colombian Education

There is nothing more paradoxical than investigating homogenizations and diversities in Colombian education; the discourse is often contradictory and views forcefully expressed.

They want us to homogenize and suppress diversity through globalizing exercises, to adjust to PISA tests; that is homogenization

says a teacher from Cartago (Colombia). This teacher’s deepest complaint relates to the dominant focus on good results in international
testing: it is as if they only prepare students to perform to these standards, rather than for life itself. As another professor from Armenia (Colombia) states:

Here, rules are made for curriculum frameworks; teachers have to conform to the national standards provisions that are responses to international impositions, and every time, there is less autonomy for the country and schools.

Another teacher speaks more strongly:

Educational leaders talk about inclusion because they accept children and young people into institutions, but they forget that there are no spatial adaptations to shelter them or even a school restaurant in operation.

And this inadequate provision is further exemplified by another teacher, who explains:

The State speaks about educational inclusion, but it is rhetorical; a very high percentage of high school graduates cannot access higher education because of a real lack of offer. Is that inclusion and respecting diversity? Or is it selling false truths?

We have scandalous data when we study the different uptake of tertiary education across different socio-economic groups. In 2011, fifty-three per cent of young people from the country’s richest quintile went into higher education compared to just nine per cent of those in the poorest quintile (OECD, 2016). What kind of inclusion does that represent for Colombian high-schoolers?

Equality of opportunity is so poor in Columbia that it can almost be deemed unsuccessful; however, similar problems occur across the globe, some more extreme, some less so, for inequality seems to affect nearly the entire human race. In a detailed critique of the American Coleman report, _Equality of Educational Opportunity_ of 1966, Bowles and Levin (1968, p. 23) pointed out over fifty years ago how issues of equality are ‘some of the most difficult questions that our society faces’ and this claim was still relevant in 2017; progress is very slow.

Some homogenizations may surprise us, but they are practised within Colombian academic life every day. The difficulties, when thinking about diversity, are: first, to establish what is different, and in the first instance, is this something important; and in the second instance, to understand
what is deficient, as we often fail to notice situations others encounter. We also position diversity as external, often believing, as Skliar (2002, p. 20) claims, that: ‘Diversity is not us: it is the others’. It is as if, when we value the diverse, we apply it beyond ourselves, seeing it as ‘other’. This distancing makes it easy for us to talk about diversity, but to act in ways that encourage homogenization. One of the teachers’ comments reflect this clearly:

We ask students to adapt to the institution, the teachers, and the academic demands, and we ask everyone for flexibility. And I, as an educating subject, am I flexible?

**Homogenizations**

When homogenization is applied to the social sciences, in this case, to education, there is a kind of imposition; we implement a variety of methodologies to establish unifying criteria in a group of people. This makes it easier for the institutional control of systems, and, in this sense, education promotes homogenizations in the curriculum: similarity of spaces (identical classrooms), schedules, uniforms for schoolchildren, legislation, evaluations, speeches, arrival times, and, in stressing accreditation as a goal, the need to get a diploma. In general, we can find temporal, spatial, and socio-cultural homogenizations.

_A unified curriculum:_ The emergence of an inclusive curriculum is of concern in every context. As UNGEI (2010, p. 17) suggests, we should continually ask ourselves:

Is the curriculum sensitive to gender, cultural identity, and diversity? Review the curriculum to identify selected equity and inclusion issues such as gender and ethnic stereotyping.

To set formal curricula is a recent initiative in Colombia. We are inexperienced and have sought to establish a universal treatment believing that if everybody studies within the same conditions, we can hypothesize that they are included.

Why should I lie? Here in the university and in the school where I perform, students must accept a curriculum imposed on them, we include them in compulsory programs, whilst they almost have no freedom to choose,
explains a teacher in Armenia (Colombia). According to her story, we find an intolerant curriculum, a curriculum of conformity.

**Similar spaces:** Classrooms are similar in all the educational facilities; any differences are not very significant. Over time, variations may be introduced, but nevertheless, the spatial design is often repeated and fatiguing to work in. There is little creativity in classroom design in Colombia, and as we progress through the educational hierarchy, the spaces become less generous:

Students usually refer to university classrooms as cages; that can tell us how boring they are,
says a professor from Pereira. Students are going from a classroom to a cage; what logic of space organization underlies such a trend?

**The same schedule:** In primary and secondary schools the typical day stretches from 7am to 12pm and from 12pm to 6pm. In some cases, there is a continuous school day, i.e., the hours are extended from 8am to 5pm without any improvements in the restaurants, libraries and sports venues. As for university training, the scheduling is deplorable; the distribution of lectures requires the student to be on campus the whole day, thereby foregoing any job opportunities.

Students must bear with up to six hours between one seminar and the next one. It is typical in a Colombian university to abuse students’ time, which for sure neither facilitates spaces for work, nor improves the unemployment rates,
says a professor from Manizales (Colombia).

**Uniforms for schoolchildren:** Many training institutions, both private and public, have uniforms for their primary and secondary students. Even in some universities, there are uniforms for certain academic programmes such as psychology or medicine:

In my school we wear blue pants and a white shirt, and for P.E. we wear blue entirely,
says a high school principal, then clarifies:

I think they can be oppressive, however, there are very poor students who, if it weren’t for this uniform, they would’ve had a very bad time
with their peers just because of not having a variety of clothing or certain brands.

*Educational legislation:* There is universal legislation for education, so although each school can organize its own Individual Educational Plan, the freedom to do this is constrained by the bodies that control education. As a teacher from Manizales explains:

> My school has a fantastic IEP, we have developed it with the intervention of teachers, parents, students, and the community; now, what we don’t have, is enough financial resources to deploy it.

*Identical methods of evaluation for both men and women:* A schoolteacher says:

> I’m not sure whether women learn differently from men, but it’s true that many women under pressure start crying and men are ready to perform.

This is not unique to Colombia, according to the European Commission (2010, p. 12):

> It seems that important efforts are being made to integrate gender and gender equality as themes or cross-cutting elements in the school curricula in the European countries.

Yet there are very detailed brain studies that make it clear that the functioning of male and female brains *is* different. Isn’t it about time to reconsider whether generalized and generalizing evaluations have validity?

These are just some of the elements that promote homogenization; students lining up to study like shoppers queuing to find bargains to save money; and teachers need to be mindful of these elements when thinking about diversities and inclusions, when meeting with students. The ‘shopping centers’ that so many educational institutions are operating as, seem to be the new concentration camps, the new sites for homogenization (González, 2016a).

It is necessary, too, to re-examine how our teachers are being trained, i.e., some receive no training, no updates on diversity and equality, not even any information about inclusive education:

> Here we are brought children with difficulties and we are not prepared so that we can attend to them, but the Ministry homogenizes and imposes its forced inclusion criteria,
says a teacher. She also emphasizes the insufficiency of teacher training to show would-be teachers how to attend to young people and help them to solve their problems, as many of them are suffering from social problems that the state fails to address; problems that require joined-up action, but only get isolated responses.

Diversities

Diversity appears in many organizational forms, which correspond to the biological, sensorial, cultural and social as well as to diversity of expression. As an example, cultural diversity alone can comprise religious, ideological, linguistic, political, legal, and ethical aspects; gastronomic diversity; aesthetic diversity within literature, music, architecture, painting, sculpture, and movies; diversity of language, knowledge, and wisdom (González, 2016b).

Cultural diversity has only been addressed in legal terms since the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity was adopted in Paris in 2005. This helps to explain why thinking about diversities in terms of what makes sense and what scope there is for action is socially immature; hence the difficulties and the limited socio-political initiatives to clarify this.

Authentic diversity seeks to empower the subject (in this case the student), enabling him/her to know how s/he is now, and how s/he feels today:

Some students enter school having many learning difficulties, and very few teachers are interested in knowing what’s going on; also the content flows over the subject,

says a professor from Armenia (Colombia), raising another question: what sort of diversity do we teach if we have forgotten the student? As explained in González (2015a, p. 66): a diversity that is ‘more human, closer, and less humiliating’ is important, as he who is humiliated will be ready to humiliate; misdirected frustration leads to paths of violence.

Exclusions-Inclusions in Colombian Education

In many public sectors, and especially in education, efforts have been made to draw attention to extreme forms of exclusion, but in some
cases, policies fail to clarify the distinctions between inclusion, exclusion, and integration, which makes it difficult to improve practice. Berruezo (2006, p. 182) explains that:

The term inclusion is opposed to exclusion, just as that of integration is opposed to segregation. Perhaps the difference between integration and inclusion is a matter of nuances, but although school integration meant the incorporation of all people into the education system, inclusion requires that within that system, they are treated as subjects with full rights.

The reality is that a person or social group can be included, but not integrated, that is, not enabled to feel part of something bigger, their needs not recognized in the policies that call for their inclusion.

Exclusions

Unresolved symptoms of exclusion hide beneath the surface of life. As Tezanos states (1999, p. 12): ‘Social exclusion implies, at its root, a certain dual image of society, in which there is an integrated sector, and an excluded one’. In Colombia, there are complete communities that have been excluded and forgotten by the state; some groups that — in this, the twenty-first century — are only just beginning to be provided with basic public services and a rudimentary system of justice. In education, at least, there has been progress to ensure free primary and secondary schooling and the institutions to support this.

Racial factors: Racial characteristics refer to physical differences, like skin colour, eyes, body shape. In Colombia, as elsewhere, there are many students who are discriminated against, and effectively excluded due to their skin colour or style of hair, because they do not resemble those of the teacher or the group in general.

Ethnic factors: Ethnicity refers to customs and the cultural environment. Although stereotypes around ethnicity are contested (Telles & Bailey, 2013), some believe that Black and Indigenous Peoples are more careless, less motivated, and that therefore, the responsibility for their poverty lies in their own abandonment.
In my university we know that Blacks [sic] are happy at parties and care little to progress, to improve the conditions of their communities; Indigenous people are intelligent, but shy and usually retire having only reached mid-career status; these and other conditions mean that they are excluded by their racial status,

explains a professor from Armenia. In making such claims, he is creating a symbolic space to abandon working with certain groups because of their racial status. This is nothing more than exclusion, and there is some evidence (albeit in a study of Peru) that such prejudices may be more marked among intellectuals, some of whom appear to despise *mestizaje* (miscegenation), while among the working classes it can be deemed ‘empowering’ (De la Cadena, 2005, p. 23; in Telles & Bailey, 2013, p. 1590).

**Economic factors:** Education is also classified as public and private, and only those who have the economic capacity to do so can access the latter:

Private education can afford better teachers, and almost always better wages; that is where young people who do not do well in public education gain access; they’re expensive, not everyone can study there, not even many teachers’ children,

explains a teacher from Armenia (Colombia).

**Political factors:** This is where Colombia, although a single country, turns into many countries. Although there are two major political groupings, liberal and conservative, their leadership is dynastic. In a process of family succession, the children of elected presidents take office themselves.

Exclusion happens when someone is excluded or silenced because their views don’t match those of the powerful. Educators often retain beliefs about the best ways to teach, regardless of whether these suit the students they are teaching. Reflecting on her own education, a teacher explains how:

As a student, I suffered from discrimination, that is, exclusion, because I didn’t agree with my English teacher, with her teaching methodology. I got expelled from the course and I failed it; there was another classmate who was treated the same, but in maths.
If such abuses are evident within the discourse around language and mathematics teaching, does this not suggest similar, even more dangerous discourses around racial, political or religious differences?

*Lack of innovation:* Students or teachers who are not innovative are usually excluded or moved elsewhere. The most dramatic twenty-first-century demand is for innovation and creativity; this is what Nussbaum (2010, p. 53) refers to when she states that:

A second issue in business is innovation, and there are reasons to suppose that liberal arts education strengthens the skills of imagining and independent thinking that are crucial to maintaining a successful culture of innovation.

However, that which appears a virtue ends up being a problem, one that has invaded education at all levels, leading to the exclusion of those who are supposedly neither innovative nor creative.

*Quotas in educational institutions:* Exclusion is not only enacted through admission policies, it is also present in application processes for maintenance, subsistence, transport, and other funding support that poorer students need to access and to stay in education. Colombia reflects the Latin American stereotype, as Hevia (2005, p. 2) shows:

The marginalized population groups’ schooling levels are lower than the national averages, and in terms of schooling and literacy inequalities are perceived between rural and urban areas, among the populations with higher and lower percentages of Indigenous people, among Black and White people, among men and women.

*Forced displacement:* Statistics on forced migration published by the United Nations (UNHCR, 2016) make chilling reading, and Colombia is mentioned specifically.

The study found that three countries produce half of the world’s refugee population. Syria, with 4.9 million people; Afghanistan, with 2.7 million and Somalia, with 1.1 million, have expelled more than half of the refugees who are under UNHCR’s mandate worldwide. On the other side, Colombia, with 6.9 million people; Syria with 6.6 million, and Iraq, with 4.4 million, are those with the largest populations of internally displaced people.
When families are displaced, children and school-aged children are the most affected. As a school principal says:

I’ve had some students, many of whom are displaced; that’s painful, one doesn’t know how to face their physical needs and their psychological problems, and although we have some support, it is insufficient.

**Corruption:** Perhaps one of the most dramatic ways to exclude in Colombia is corruption. The number of minor victims of corruption is unbearable. We read in *El Heraldo* (2016): ‘With these two new victims, the number of children who died this year of the same causes is 83’. Surely, a country that, as a consequence of corruption, leaves its children to die, is a country without a conscience? Why then, should it be interested in developing the potential of its people? For what would it be educating them?

**Envy:** Envy is one of those emotions that leads us to places of tyranny towards the other. ‘There is a lot of envy among the students and, of course, among the teachers,’ writes a teacher. Envy usually happens among the students; whatever their age or class, they exclude a partner from play or an academic activity because they are envious of this student. Professors, too, sometimes express envy, due to differential treatment or salary disparity between the different teacher ranks.

**Hatred:** In the world in general, hatred seems to be something that has been inculcated, but in Colombia it seems to be a deep-seated part of everyday life.

**Disgust:** This human reaction is quite frequently seen in Colombian educational establishments, leaving a child out of a group because of their physical appearance, their odour or their secretions.

**Fear:** In a country that has experienced such widespread warfare, it is understandable that individuals, families or social group are excluded out of fear. Society is wary if your past is unknown, and for many displaced students this wariness is something they encounter daily.

**Low academic performance:** Students with learning difficulties and those reluctant to learn are often excluded from many activities; they are often the first to be excluded when prizes are to be distributed.
Negligence: Negligence, from those obliged to act and those expected to demand their rights, can both lead to exclusion.

Trends to assess students and classify them are clearly forms of exclusion. Categorizing students as normal-abnormal, committed-noncommitted, studious-neglectful disenfranchises many. So we have seen how exclusion can be spatial and/or temporal, due to silent or radical behaviour, by rank or social position, and enacted through the imposition of seemingly universal schedules in education.

Inclusions

Is inclusion a matter of equality and equity? What are the factors that create inclusion? As Rosano (2008, p. 57, author’s translation) explains, ‘inclusive education is constituted as the right to equal recognition and a similar quality of education for all, and values the different views of girls and boys’. Yet if recognition is precarious, if recognition is unknowing, it can slide into exclusions and forgetfulness. Nominal inclusion can have the opposite effect when it removes flexibility.

Legislation and inclusion: To be able to unify and include by means of laws, national decrees or local norms is to hold a stake in one the most powerful positions there is. But such actions need to be approached with care, as the outcomes may be problematic, causing ‘complications’. As an executive in Manizales (Colombia) points out:

Here we have a complication: it is mandatory that institutions accept students with different psychological and physical difficulties, alongside those who do not have them, and in the same classrooms.

Inclusion through academic schedule: In theory everybody fits equally into an academic schedule but these unify time and place but not reality.

We are all assigned the same hours, regardless of whether we have other difficulties or not, they include us without being asked, in the institutionalized agendas,

says a professor. The schedule is modern society’s great invention. It programmes and wedges people into time slots, shoehorns society into corners, because time costs money (González, 2015b). Remember that a schedule unifies times and spaces for both students and teachers.
Evaluative inclusions: There are so many criticisms of evaluation that adding another one almost sends us into orbit. Nevertheless, many evaluative traditions are a means to exclude as they do not always even measure knowledge, but rather each teacher’s own interests or the external intentions set for international measurement systems.

To pose a single question, create a questionnaire for all, is to exclude many learning forms, and especially, it facilitates the teacher’s path because he does not need to devote much time on grading, which is confused with evaluation,

explains a university executive in Pereira (Colombia).

Forced inclusion: ‘The way in which the groups are integrated in the classroom does not reflect students wishes, but [panders] to some people’s whim or to computer distribution software’, reiterates a teacher in Manizales (Colombia). This is a clear example that inclusion in a particular study group is not voluntary, but forced; there have been known cases where it is mandatory to attend a religious rite, a cultural act, or a sporting event, contradicting what Giné (1998, p. 40) states when he insists that inclusion:

...is fundamentally to do with the fact that all students are accepted, recognized in their singularity, valued and able to participate in school according to their capabilities. An inclusive school is, therefore, one that is offering all its students the educational opportunities and the necessary support (curricular, personal, material) for their academic and personal progress. (Author’s translation)

Forced inclusion is evident when a student is forced to join a work group and to converse with a group of peers; but it is also present when a group of professors have to accept public policies that they do not like.

In Colombia, the population is classified by social strata from one to six. The estates one to three are those with economic difficulties who constantly struggle to survive, while strata four to six have to pay higher taxes to finance the public services provided to the others. As a consequence, some people are reluctant to admit their social stratum. Although this is a form of inclusion with worthy political and social ends, this is forced. People have no choice and cannot opt out.
14. Inclusion and Exclusion in Colombian Education

**Shame**: This is the reaction of certain social groups or economic powers when, harassed by the press or another social group, they decide to include others not through conviction but through shame, to avoid further criticism.

**Human sympathy**: This is an example of authentic inclusion, inclusion arising from a deep interest in belonging and to helping the ‘other’ to be recognized. In Colombian education, cases are known of people including students by helping them to acquire school supplies, food and transport out of human sympathy rather than convenience.

**Social justice**: This occurs when, convinced that there are people and social groups who are disadvantaged because of their geographical location or for cultural reasons, decisions are taken to make programmes of social inclusion. Such an act of justice is a type of response toward the improvement of the ‘other’.

**Environmental relevance**: In the face of environmental threats, excluded social groups may be invited to participate in projects to protect or improve environmental conditions and this is also a form of inclusion.

**Redistribution of economic resources**: Although this is a fairly recent global development, there are philanthropic billionaires making decisions to redistribute their profits to benefit vulnerable social groups, and already there are some examples in Colombia. Many peasants now own land they can cultivate. For example, in 2014, Law 1728, ‘Norms for the distribution of vacant land to poor families for social and productive purposes’, enabled a small-scale, but significant, redistribution of economic resources.

**Academic achievement**: Following the myth of Pygmalion, teachers often more readily institute extracurricular activities for students with good academic performance.

**Compassion**: There are many ways to feel pity and compassion, and such inclusion was evident in the data. ‘I accepted a child who did not know anything about maths because it hurt me’ [not to help him], explained a teacher from Cartago, Valle del Cauca, Colombia.
**Guilt:** Carelessness in carrying out an activity can create critical situations or difficulties for other people, and there are cases where this leads to the inclusion of certain social groups not as a political option but to assuage guilt.

Inclusion in the education system requires this to be accepted across the board, but in the first instance by the teachers, the ones who have to live with it. There is no doubt that ‘if teachers do not have a positive attitude towards educational inclusion, it is very difficult, if not impossible’ (author’s translation of Cedeño, 2006, p. 7). A teacher can obey an academic order or adhere to politically or culturally forced inclusion, but they can also include people through consensus, following the lead of the individuals to be included, respecting their wishes.

From a linguistic ideal, it is a challenge to get closer to what is being asked, for example, as the UN (2008, p. 5) states:

> An inclusive school is one that has no selection mechanisms or discrimination of any kind, and which shapes its functioning and pedagogical plans to integrate students’ diversity, thus, favouring social cohesion, which is one of the purposes of education. (Author’s translation)

To be truly inclusive, schools require an educational system that abandons selection and is open to the local community. They need to play a formative rather than an evaluative role in children’s education. In what way and when will we understand this in Colombia?

**Some Alternatives for Thinking About Diversities and Inclusions in Education**

Among the many options offered by teachers to promote inclusions and diversities are: redirecting economic resources, advanced teacher training, controlling corruption, abandoning political radicalisms, enhancing the ideals of democracy, and giving a central place to aesthetics.

Teachers must insist on restoring horizontal communication to address diversity and inclusion. NCSE (2011, p. 28) states that:
Communication in the school community is conducted in modes, language and format(s) appropriate to the requirements of pupils with special educational need and their parents/guardians.

Teachers should emphasize the necessity for having a greater knowledge of the local, national, and global socio-cultural realities. This makes demands on teachers to read more widely and to find openings that respect differences without meddling with universal discourses, as Frederickson and Cline (2002, p. 32) claim:

Ethnic and cultural differences represent important dimensions of diversity along which differences in the ways individuals interpret their worlds may be identified and environmental influences may vary.

Teachers need to recognize that the basic principles of diversity centre on having the same opportunities within difference, living together rather than competing, freeing rather than controlling, building confidence against overconfidence, and restoring empathy.

Conclusions

Inclusiveness and diversity, however unlikely it seems, appear to make many people nervous, including teachers:

...until they were asked, the professors were not aware of the fact that they had been feeling fear. They recognize that fear is a lifestyle and therefore, they not only teach it but also generate and manage it. (González 2014, p. 355)

Diversities and inclusions are quite vulnerable. Whose project is inclusion and diversity? Which powers benefit from convincing us to be plural, diverse and inclusive? To face these questions about diversity requires conscious thought in order not to subject others to someone else’s personal criteria; not to humiliate others when they do not wish to be included, or to place ourselves beyond the languages of power that insist on diversity. Gimeno (1999, p. 2) states that:

Diversity (and also inequality) are normal manifestations among human beings, even of social facts, of cultures, and in individuals’ responses to classroom education. (Author’s translation)
Diversity may be more or less visible, but it is as normal as life itself, and you have to get used to living with it and working within it. Teachers, executives, and administrative staff need to know more about others who are different: Why do we want to change the other?

We have media powers that tell us where, when, and what to want, how to dress, what to study, what to read, who to hate; therefore, even, what to think.

The gaps between ‘what it is’, ‘what it should be’, and ‘what it must be’, are more visible in countries with wars, with corruption, with insufficient norms that protect the underprivileged. Indeed, when we look at the diversities/homogenizations, at the inclusions/exclusions, we find what seems to be an insurmountable distance between the concrete and the abstract, between the first economic world countries and the rest. Whatever options are chosen among the many put forward to improve attitudes and action around inclusion and diversity — all of them with a unique north — the human being is to be projected as an end, never as a means.

References


