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**Dialogues of knowledge. Diversity and exclusion in Colombian education, captured through autobiographical narratives**

The present text is part of an investigation development that takes place between 2015 and 2016, where there’s an interest in knowing what the diversity-homogenizations, inclusions-exclusions in Colombian education are. Colombia is a country which is based on ethnic, environmental, and cultural diversity, it has just begun to become aware of this condition, hence, social exclusion is one of the greatest difficulties where legal deployments and other alternative proposals are insufficient to address diversity and inclusion.

Education as the power it is, cannot be isolated from this problematic, because the greater homogenization is, the more hiding of diversity and plurality; and the greater educational exclusion is, the higher the risks of segregation are, and therefore, of real and symbolic violence. Having said that, the greatest challenge the country faces in the educational field, is to contribute to an authentic inclusion and diversity exhibition; not only as a legal precept or conceptual display, but as a citizen practice manifestation in an armed post-settlement era.

Some conclusions lead us to ask ourselves: What are the logics of inclusions and diversities in Colombia? These logics are due to the internal wars aftermath, to the international demands; due to a human condition rebirth that has only begun to be understood in Colombian society. What is salvageable, is that these human life fields are already addressed through a certain general awareness, however, the most difficult thing is that they have neither the financial resources, nor enough infrastructure to be more inclusive in a diversities wealth. Furthermore, education is the one that best understands this great spectrum of diversities and inclusions, nevertheless, there are not enough organizational and cognitive elements to confront neither the corruption chains, nor the internal violence winds, those that cannot be entirely controlled. In any case, it is necessary to move from a diversity idea to a diversity with ideas, and from an inclusion idea, to an inclusion with ideas.

**Key words:** dialogues of knowledge; inclusion and exclusion, Colombian education, languages of power, policies, autobiographical narratives.

**Profound Interests**

Several questions touch us when we approach these Colombian reality social aspects, what do we ask diversity? What do we want to do with inclusion? What concerns us about homogenization? Under what criteria do we understand exclusion? What is the sense of legislating for diversity and inclusion? These questions are not solved with great theories, as also intuition and practices themselves give us certain answers.

Moreover, the resurgence of right-wing religious and political groups willing to sacrifice their lives to enforce their demands, are due to an ill-executed diversity and to an exclusionary and even humiliating inclusion programs, even though politicians tell us the opposite. Without a doubt, it is the political field that has the greatest responsibility when thinking about the diverse, the diversity, to which Arendt (2008, p. 131) points out that "politics is about being together and with each other, among the diverse. Men organize themselves politically according to certain essential communities in absolute chaos, or from an absolute chaos of differences”. What she calls absolute chaos of differences, involves a disagreement, but not necessarily wars; we now know that the chaos of not understanding the diversities -in this case, religious and ethical-, have made us devastating, and if you want, predators.

**Methodology**

This text is a qualitative research, which focus or field device is the several Colombian academics life histories. As it has to do with life histories, this is understood within the world of philosophical interests and their variants.

As Balloogh and Pinnegar clarify (2001, p.15) "Self-study researchers stand at the intersection of biography and history. The questions self-study researchers ask about the interest and the interest in the interaction of the self-as-teacher educator, in context, over time, with others whose interests represent a shared commitment of the development and nurturance of the young and the impact of that interaction on self and other". Life histories and self-reports are an important scenario in this process that gives way to this document.

Narratives carry us to spatial, temporal, mental, formal and pragmatic dimensions. Without ignoring a criticism that underlies the narration semiotic field as established by Herman (2007, p.24) "The semiotic status of narrative most narratologists agree that narrative consists of material signs, the discourse, which conveys certain meaning (or content), the story, and fulfill some social function”. Then, these searches social function is to recognize the theoretical and practical forms in which diversity, inclusions, exclusions and homogenizations in Colombian education, are activated.

**Homogenizations-diversities in Colombian education.**

There is nothing more paradoxical than investigating homogenizations and diversities in Colombian education, the answers appear contradictory and forceful "They want us to homogenize and suppress diversity through globalizing exercises, as adjusting to PISA tests, that is homogenization", says a teacher from Cartago (Colombia). This teacher’s deepest complaint corresponds to the strength that is made towards international testing, it is as if they prepared students to perform in these standards, but not for life. "Here, rules are made for curriculum frameworks, teachers have to conform to the national standards provisions that are to respond to international impositions, and every time, there is less country and schools autonomy", says another professor from Armenia (Colombia).

Another teacher is more forceful "Educational leaders talk about inclusion because they receive children and young people in institutions, but they forget that there are no locative adaptations to shelter them or even a school restaurant in operation". Another teacher explains "The state speaks about educational inclusion, but it is dramatic, a very high percentage of high school graduates cannot access higher education because of a real offer lack. Is that inclusion and respecting diversity? Or, is it a false truths selling?" Just by looking at the country’s capital we can have scandalous data “Only 16% of the young people from Bogotá, reaches a university.” What kind of inclusion do we speak about for Colombian high schoolers?

Equity opportunities is almost unsuccessful in Colombia, nonetheless, it occurs in nearly the entire human race. As Bowles and Levin (1963, p.23) shows us over 50 years ago, as if that were happening now in 2017 "Equality of Educational Opportunity addressed itself to some of the most difficult questions that our society faces.

Some homogenizations may surprise us, but they are practiced in Colombian academic life every day. The difficult thing to think about diversity, is that what is different, is read in dichotomy, in a first instance, as something important; and in the second as a deficiency. We also read diversity in the externality, in fact "Diversity is not us: it is the others" (Skliar, 2002, p.20); it is as if for valuing the diverse, it happened through the outside, through the others. Therefore, it makes it easy for us to talk about diversity, but to act by a homogenization criteria, "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?”, a teacher writes.

**Homogenizations:**

When homogenization is applied to social sciences, in this case, to education, there is a kind of imposition; it is turned to a variety of methodologies for unifying criteria in a group of people. This makes it easier for the institutional control systems, and, in this sense, education promoting homogenizations in curriculum, similar spaces, schedules, uniforms for schoolchildren, legislation, evaluations, speeches, arriving times, and to get a diploma. In general, we can find temporal, spatial, and socio-cultural homogenizations.

* **Unified curriculum**: The emergence of an inclusive curriculum worries in every scenario, as we are asked by UNGEI2 (2010, p. 17) "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." As it has been said, in these field in Colombia we have hardly advanced, hence, that we have included everybody under the same conditions, as we pretend them to be included. “What to lie for? Here in the university and in the school where I perform, students must accept an imposed curriculum on them, we include them in compulsory programs, whilst they almost have no freedom to choose", explains a teacher in Armenia (Colombia); from her story, we find an intolerant curriculum, a curriculum in ecstasies.
* **Similar spaces:** classrooms are similar in all the facilities, their changes are not that significant, then, after many years some variations can be made, nevertheless, the spatial design is very repeated and fatiguing. There is little creativity in the design, and as we progress within the training, those are less generous spaces, "Students usually refer to university classrooms as cages, that can tell us how boring they are," says a professor from Pereira, and from a classroom to a cage, what space organizational logic underlies?
* **The same schedule**: In the primary and secondary schools there are no hours outside the classic days 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, there is a schedule deplorable distribution that requires the student to be the whole day around it, and thus, not having any job opportunities. "Students must bear up to six hours between one seminar and the next one. It is typical in a Colombian university to abuse from students’ time, which for sure neither facilitates working spaces, nor increases 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 programs such as psychology or medicine "In my school we wear blue pants and a white shirt, and for P.E. we wear blue in its entirety", says a high school principal, then clarifies "I think they can be suppressed, 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 a general legislation on education, and although each school can organize its own IEP3, its freedom is less vis-à-vis educational control bodies, “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, it’s enough financial resources to deploy it”; as a teacher from Manizales refers.
* **Identical ways of evaluating for men and women**: "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", a school director says. 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." There are very detailed brain studies where they make it clear that the functioning of male and female brains are differentiated. Isn´t it about time to re-signify generalized and generalizing evaluations?

It is necessary to verify how our teachers are being trained, i.e., those who do not have any training or any update on diversity, equity or even anything about inclusive education, "Here we are brought children with difficulties and we are not prepared to attend them, but the Ministry homogenizes and imposes its forced inclusion criteria", says a teacher; as she also emphasizes on the insufficient teaching training to attend young people and solve their problems, whereas many of them are suffering from social problems that the State evades, and which requires joint action, but isolated responses.

**Diversities:**

Diversity, among many organizational forms, is corresponded to: biological, sensorial, cultural, social diversities, and diversity expressions. For example, in Cultural Diversities it appears, González (2016, p.100) "Religious, ideological, linguistic, political, legal, and ethical diversity. Gastronomic diversity. Aesthetic diversity: literatures, music, architectures, paintings, sculptures, movies. Linguistic, knowledge, and wisdom diversity." Cultural diversity has a short legal term, since the Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity is adopted in Paris only until 2005. This shows us that thinking about diversities as a ​​sense and action scope, is confronted with insufficient social maturation, hence, the difficulties and the few sociopolitical clarifications about it.

Authentic diversity is interested in empowering the subject, by the knowing of how we are now, and how we feel today, "Some students enter school having many learning difficulties, and very few teachers are interested in knowing what’s going on, as the content overlaps on the subject", says a professor from Armenia (Colombia), adding another question: What sort of diversity do we teach if we have forgotten the subject? As explained by González (2015, p.66) "A more human, closer, and less humiliating with his knowledge teacher"; he who is humiliated will be able to humiliate, his misdirected frustration leads us on paths of violence.

**Exclusions-inclusions in Colombian education**

In many sectors, especially in education, efforts have been made to stress the hectic forms of exclusion, but in some cases, it does not clarify the distances between inclusion, exclusion, and integration, which makes it difficult to find some outlets; 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 truth is that a person or social group can be included, but not integrated, that is, not feeling being part of something, or of that which says to include them.

**Exclusions:**

There are exclusion symptoms unresolved aspects underneath. 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 which have been excluded and forgotten by the State, some groups that scarcely -in this twenty-first century-, have begun to have public services or the presence of the justice apparatus; as in education an interesting progress has been made to at least, ensure primary and secondary free school and institutionalism.

* **Economic exclusions**: Education is also classified as public and private, to the latter, only those who have the economic capacity to do so can access "Private education can have better teachers, and almost always better wages, there is where young people who do not surpass public education, access, they’re expensive, not anyone can study there, not even many teachers’ children", explains a teacher from Armenia (Colombia).
* **Political exclusions**: This is where Colombia as a country, turns into many countries, and although there are two major political groupings: liberal and conservative, their leaders come from family successions, i.e., children from persons who have been elected as presidents.
* **World vision**: It is when someone is excluded or silenced from manifesting a different vision from the one exposed by certain powers, whilst education keeps these strange symptoms. "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 math", says a teacher. If these abuses are recorded in a language or mathematics teaching, what can we think about racial, political or religious differences?
* **Because innovation**: Students or teachers who are not innovative are usually excluded or put into another place. The most dramatic 21st century demand is innovation and creativity; this is what Nussbaum (2010, p. 53) refers to “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”, this which appears as virtue, ends up being a problem that has invaded education at all levels, generating exclusion to those who are supposedly neither innovative nor creative.
* **Quotas in educational institutions**: Exclusions not only pass through admissions, it also passes through maintaining, feeding, transportation, and getting elements from the training act. Colombia is the Latin America photo, as Hevia (2005, p.32) 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**: Numbers shown by the UNHCR are chilling. "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 population2". When families are displaced, children and school-aged children are the most affected, "I’ve had some students, many who are displaced, that’s painful, one doesn’t know how to face their physical needs and their psychological problems, and although we have some supporting, it is insufficient”, says a school principal.
* **Corruption**: Perhaps one of the most dramatic ways to exclude in Colombia is corruption. Because of the corruption, the number of minor victims is unthinkable, we read in “El Heraldo” (2016) "With these two new victims, the number of children who died this year for the same causes is 83". Hence, a country that as a consequence of corruption leaves its children to die, is a country without a conscience. Then, what should it be interested in the becoming training of its people for?
* **Exclusions because envy:** Envy is one of those emotions that usually put us in places quite despotic with the other. "There is a lot of envy among the students and, of course, among the teachers," writes a teacher.
* **Exclusions because hatred:** hatred has been taught in the world, but Colombia seems to be an indispensable chair in everyday life.
* **Exclusions because disgust:** This human reaction is quite frequent in Colombian educational establishments, leaving a child out of a group because of their physical appearance, their odors or their secretions.
* **Exclusion because fear:** In a country in such a widespread war, it is understandable to exclude a person, family or social group for fear, not knowing the past of the other, that ignorance of its origin makes you afraid, those experiences live with Often displaced students.
* **Because low academic performance:** Students with learning difficulties or for deciding to learn are often excluded from many activities, even when distributing prizes are the first on the list to be excluded.

Trends in classifying students between normal-abnormal, committed-noncommitted, studious-neglected are clear symptoms of exclusion. It has been talked about spatial, temporal, silent, radical exclusions, by ranks or social positions, and scheduled exclusions.

**Inclusions:**

Is inclusion a matter of equality and equity? What are inclusions correlates about? In fact, Rosano (2008, p.57) explains that “inclusive education is constituted, then, in the right to equality recognition and educational quality for all, and is based on girls and boys diversity valuation”, that place of recognizing with precariousness, in recognizing by unknowing, can move us to exclusions and forgetfulness.

* **Legislative inclusions**: This is one of the power greatest stakes, to unify and include by means of laws, national decrees or local norms. “Here we have a complication, it is forced that the institutions receive students with different psychological and physical difficulties, with those who do not have them in the same classrooms by decree” says an executive in Manizales (Colombia).
* **Academic agenda inclusions**: Everybody fits equally in an academic agenda, the agenda unifies times, but not realities. “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 agenda is the modern society’s great bet. “We know about agendas because of intoxicated times, we know about programmed, scheduled, wangled, agitated, and even cornered societies by time commercialization” (González, 2015a, page 28). Remember that an agenda unifies times and spaces for both students and teachers.
* **Evaluative inclusions**: There are so many critics on evaluation that adding another one is almost abound in the known. Nevertheless, it is seen a way to exclusion in many evaluative traditions, this is because it does not always measure knowledge but each teacher’s own interests, or even external intentions as those from international measurement systems. “Unifying a question, a questionnaire for all is to exclude many learning forms, and especially, 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 obey students wishes, but to some people whims or to a computer distribution software”, reiterates a teacher in Manizales (Colombia). This is a clear example that being included in a particular study group is not voluntary, but forced; there has been known cases where it is mandatory to attend a religious rite, a cultural act, or a sport event; this contradicts what Giné states (1998, p. 40), where he insists that the inclusion “has to do fundamentally 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, that offering all its students the educational opportunities and the necessary aids (curricular, personal, material) for their academic and personal progress.”
* **Inclusions because shame:** This is a reaction of certain social groups or economic powers that, harassed by the press or other social group, decide to include not by conviction but by shame, not to give rise to further criticism.
* **Human sympathy:** In this case are authentic inclusions, inclusions become of a deep interest to be part and help the other to be realized. In Colombian education cases are known to include students, to help them to acquire school supplies, food and transportation not for convenience but for human sympathy.
* **Because social justice:** Convinced that there are people and social groups that are disadvantaged because of their geographic location or for cultural reasons, it is decided to make programs of social inclusion through an act of justice, as a sort of response to the improvement of the other.
* **Inclusions due to environmental relevance:** In the face of environmental threats, excluded social groups are included in order to participate in projects to protect or improve environmental conditions.
* **Because redistribution of economic resources:** although this is a path that has just begun to have force in the world with those philanthropic millionaires, there are already some examples in Colombia of economic groups that are making decisions in redistributing their profits in those vulnerable social groups.
* **Academic achievement:** Following the myth of Pygmalion, teachers often more easily include extracurricular activities for students who have better academic performance.

Inclusion in the education system requires an acceptance from its parts, but in the first instance, from teachers, those are the ones called to live it, no doubt that “if teachers do not have a positive attitude towards educational inclusion, it is very difficult, if not impossible” (Cedeño, 2006, p.7). A teacher can make an academic order or political-cultural forced inclusion, but can also include in consensus, in the direction of what the included one wishes.

From a linguistic ideal, it is a challenge to get closer to what is being asked, for example, for the UN, (2008, p.5). “An inclusive school is one that has no selection mechanisms or discrimination of any kind, and which transforms its functioning and pedagogical proposal to integrate students’ diversity, thus, favoring social cohesion which is one of the education purposes”. More than a school requires an educational system that stops being selective and opens to the community it represents spatial and formative demands. 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, desolating political radicalisms, enhancing the ideals of democracy, giving a central place to aesthetics.

Teachers insist on restoring horizontal communication to address diversity and inclusions. NCSE states (2011, p. 28) 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 emphasize on the necessity for having a greater knowledge of the local, national, and world sociocultural realities. This demands are made from teachers with greater readings and openings that respect the differences without invading with universal discourses, “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" (Frederickson and Cline, 2002, p.32).

Teachers recognize that the basic principles of diversities are manifested in having the same possibilities within the difference, living together rather than competing, freeing rather than controlling, building confidence against overconfidence, and restoring empathy.

**Conclusions**

Diversities and inclusions are quite vulnerable. Whose project is inclusion and diversity? Which powers are befitted from convincing us to be plural, diverse and inclusive? To face these questions, a conscience about diversity is necessary in order to not subject others to someone else’s own criteria; to not humiliating others when they do not wish to be included, or to dignify ourselves outside the languages ​​of power that insist on diversity.

Gimeno (1999, p.2) states that "Diversity (and also inequality) are normal human beings manifestations, even from social facts, from cultures, and from individuals responses to classroom education”. Diversity may appear more or less accentuated, but it is as normal as life itself, and you have to get used to living with it and working from it". Teachers, executives, and administrative staff need to know something more about the others, Why do we want to change the other?

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

The distances between ‘what it is’, ‘what is has to be’, and ‘the must be’, are more visible in countries with wars, with corruption, with insufficient norms to protect the underprivileged; in fact, when we look at the diversities/homogenizations, at the inclusions/exclusions, we detect an almost insurmountable distance between the concrete and the abstract between the first economic world countries and the other ones. Then, among the many options to go up into inclusions and diversities, all of them with a unique north: the human being is to be projected as an end, never as a means.

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