Education, Disability and Inclusion

A Family Struggle against an Excluding School

Ignacio Calderón-Almendros and
Sabina Habegger-Lardoeyt

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To Rafael, for his will power and his capacity to dismantle the most entrenched schemas with just his life experience.

To Rafael's mother and father, for proving that, without love, pedagogical efforts lose their purpose.

To Rafael's brothers and sisters, brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law, nephews and friends, for being living arguments for inclusion.

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FOREWORD

Ignacio Calderón and Sabina Habegger have given us all a gift with this much-needed book on education, disability and inclusion from the vital and powerful counter-hegemonic discourses of insiders and participants. As we accompany Rafael, his family and allies through their experiences in school, we learn first hand the ways in which schools as social institutions reconstruct culture and identity all too often to the detriment of students like Rafael. The layered discourses throughout the book, coupled with an analytical framework and empirical evidence, leave us with no doubt that our approaches to teaching and learning need to change.

This book begins with the premise that Rafael, and all children and youth have the ability to learn and grow, and are born with the potential to be educated. Part one of the book devotes considerable attention to issues that have long plagued our classrooms and society: issues of equality, fairness, opportunities to learn, attitudinal barriers, and the ways in which our current policies and practices compromise and impede progress. This section provides ample evidence that disability and intellectual aptitude are not characteristics of the student as much as they are a characteristic of the situation. Schools seem to be more about categorization, sorting, labeling, and testing students rather than they are about preparing students for a life of active citizenship and community and family involvement—in short, life after school. After all, students are ultimately tested in the experiences of life, not on math or reading scores. Rafael's experience in particular puts a spotlight on the effect schooling has on a sense of cultural belonging and positive self-identity—the essential tools for community living.

Throughout the book, the depth and breadth of this portrait of action research is impressive in and of itself. Covering over a decade of experiences, the internal and external researchers use multiple sources of data: standardized tests, student and family narrations, observations, informal interviews, and extensive written documentation of reports and letters. The authors exhort the reader to engage with the text actively and critically, to undertake a self-examination of his/her own attitudes and practices. They ask us to consider: what responsibility is assumed by the school as an institution? What is the purpose of assessment and diagnosis? What should be taught? When should it be taught? How should it be taught? Is it ever considered that the cause of a problem could be found outside of the student being evaluated?

Answering these questions with a critical reading and response requires a different frame of reference and analysis than the scientific positivism of biology and psychology that has permeated and driven special education thinking and practice. The authors challenge this thinking and practice with an alternative analytical framework that draws from discourses, theories and interpretation systems which take into account issues of social justice, culture and resistance. Specifically, the authors begin by noting that the starting point for a biological framework focuses on individual biological limitations and personal characteristics. This framework ignores the broader socio-cultural cultural forces and contexts under which schools operate. A socio-cultural framework takes into account the powerful influence of culture and society on individual ability, growth and potential in the context of the environment. It also recognizes the inequality and complex power relations inherent in school practices—particularly those of diagnosis and exclusion. Notably, Rafael's experiences in school and his responses to it, reflect Paulo Freire's theory of resistance as well as his concept of banking education (students as empty vessels to be filled with factual knowledge by teachers), and critical pedagogy (students and teachers as co-constructors of knowledge writ large through critical thinking and experiential learning). This paradigm shift—from scientific positivism to socio-cultural and resistance theories—is perhaps the most important contribution this book makes to provoke needed change in the current school system. This shift pertains especially to teachers who are the frontline of school practices. It forces a change in the teachers' role as mere technical practitioners to critical intellectuals who can resist school practices of banking education. It means that students like Rafael as well as his allies and family members—those at the grassroots level—have the tools to take on the role of resisting and denouncing institutional vices that perpetuate inequality and prevent social justice.

The book concludes with a description of Rafael's experiences post mandatory schooling. A counterpoint experience in a musical ensemble and the music conservatory reveals a very different approach to learning that is motivational, student-centered, and experiential. One has to ask why the formative years in schooling could not emulate these practices. In the conclusion, Rafael's successes in post-secondary education, and as an accomplished musician inspire us with hope for the future—not just for Rafael, but for all people who have been labeled with disabilities and subjected to exclusion and low expectations. When we value every student's talents and abilities and look beyond labels to the student underneath who is waiting to be discovered, then our world opens to infinite possibilities. The book makes a significant contribution to advancing inclusive education and challenges all of us to actively engage in the work of social-justice in our daily practice as teachers, education professionals, administrators, family members, and individuals with disabilities. We are all part of an interconnected world and need to play our part, if we are to be truly inclusive.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

> In place of hope, there'd be the employment of trickery designed to hide truths that could propel the oppressed into fighting, should they only guess or intuit those truths.
>
> Paulo Freire (2015:101)

In this book we seek to understand how cognitive difference is addressed in Spanish schools. In order to do this, we have analysed the specific experience of a person with Down's syndrome, Rafael Calderón-Almendros. The analysis includes his family's dealings and conflicts with the school he used to attend. This is part of an action research process that they were involved in for several years. It does not arise from the discourse of teachers or other intellectuals, but from the life experiences of one of the groups most oppressed, not only by society in general, but also by schools as institutions, and in particular by teachers as their agents. These three agents have an unequal share of the power to construct the meanings that should be legitimately taught and learnt, and how they should be implemented.

This book focuses on the third stage of the action research project,[1] which studied the struggle of Rafael's family against the discriminatory practices that, in their view, were being used by the school. Through the use of various methods, but mainly by analysing documents from the case and others subsequently prepared, we aim to shed light on the process from a perspective of education that is inclusive, radical and committed. This serves to reflect upon the role that both schools and professionals play in the education of their students, bearing in mind that instruction is not the same as education.

The study is structured into two major areas: a theoretical one and an empirical one. The former, entitled 'Analytical Framework', provides the theoretical grounding to understand the conceptions developed by the student's family over the years which were fundamentally based on an affectionate home life. However, these concepts and representations were in stark contrast to a school culture excessively based on the academicism, qualifications and competitiveness demanded by the labour market. This is why basic, simple, family discourses must be re-written and adapted to scientific/pedagogical language, in order to resist the administrative and scientism-based arguments prevailing in schools, which serve various underlying interests. Three levels of discourse production can be identified here. The first one is the family's everyday discourse in their relationship with Rafael, with the school and with the internal researcher—Rafael's brother and co-author of this book. The second one is an attempt to organise, systematically arrange and give coherence to the actions taken with respect to the school. The internal researcher played a fundamental role in this stage of discourse production. It consisted in a rigorous preliminary pedagogical analysis which originated from the need to resist the unfair conduct engaged in by the school. This is recorded in the various documents prepared by the family, advised by the internal researcher.[2] The third level of discourse is the one outlined in these pages, where a theory is developed by treating the texts produced in the second level as elaborate discourses. To do so, the work of Paulo Freire and subsequent theories of resistance, specifically, those developed by Paul Willis, Henry A. Giroux and Peter McLaren, are relied upon. It is worth noting that the (elaborate) contributions of Rafael's three other brothers who were living with him at the time of the conflict can also be found throughout the book. These contributions were made from different perspectives: two of them, from the world of art (photography and literature, respectively), by showing a vision focused on feelings and aesthetics; the other relied on Mathematics to make a provocative analysis of the measurement of intelligence. In addition, the experiences of Rafael's best friend and of the internal researcher have been included. The internal researcher had a twofold role (as an educationalist and also Rafael's brother), which placed different demands placed on him as a result.

This third level of discourse is found throughout the entire book, but is particularly profound in the chapter being introduced here. It is a thought-provoking theoretical debate about dominant social representations of 'disability', the part played by the school in the legitimation of those representations, and the role of educationalists, with their use of diagnoses and grades. The discussion also extends to the conceptions underlying these diagnoses and school practices, in order to develop an inclusive concept of education, and to encourage reflection on the scientific and ethical validity of tests and their applications, including their function in the construction of social policies. Following the steps of Rafael's family in their opposition to the injustices occurred at the school, we reflect on how resistance to elements that oppress certain groups—in our case, people with disability—can be articulated. Three contexts, namely individual, professional and institutional, are considered with the aim of extending resistance beyond the school walls.

The following chapter, 'The Experience', discusses the steps taken by the family to confront the situation. Relying on the concepts mentioned earlier, it describes how resistance was constructed in the sphere of education in this particular case. Due to the illustrative value and outstanding results of the family's experience, the case has been contextualised through a narration of the facts. This can be useful for other families to detect discrimination in schools, as it is often difficult to identify, and for them to engage in acts of resistance. It can also be analysed by the education community, in particular, by teachers and by schools as institutions. Discrimination is often practiced without those involved being fully aware of it, and families can be a valuable source of information and analysis to help schools design truly educational tasks.

After the narration of the events, a detailed analysis of the action research process is provided. It describes the various stages involved and the way in which the authors (internal and external researcher, respectively) approached the case, with special emphasis on the conflict between the school and the family.

The case study is used to critique the role currently played by diagnoses, and provides reflections on the lines of action usually taken on the basis of such diagnoses. The purpose is to address the need to restructure schools as institutions and promote equal conditions and comprehensiveness in the compulsory levels. Special attention is given to the adaptations of the individual curriculum and the development of specific itineraries, such as Social Guarantee Programmes (*Programas de Garantía Social,* known as *PGS* in their abbreviated form in Spanish), aimed at those students who fail to obtain their Secondary School Certificate, later renamed as Initial Professional Qualification Programmes' (*Programas de Cualificación Profesional Inicial,* known as *PCPI* in their abbreviated form in Spanish). Finally, we consider one of the most efficient measures used by Rafael's family to question and delegitimise the school's actions concerning Rafael. After the psychological and pedagogical assessment made by the school, a counter-report was prepared and submitted by two external researchers and the internal researcher. This counter-report challenged (both theoretically and empirically) the school's decisions about student's abilities and his future, not only within the school system but also in terms of his work prospects.

From this point onwards, the experience discussed takes a positive turn. An analysis of every individual's educational potential, and in particular, of Rafael's potential is provided, under the title: 'The same student, different experiences of the role of education'. This section further pursues the arguments detailed above in terms of challenging the unfair treatment of some students by schools. However, on this occasion an analysis is made of Rafael's experience in a different context, which turned out to be highly successful in educational terms. This exploration is particularly thought-provoking due to its potential to reflect upon new ways of facing educational practices after they have been put into question. The following two sections show Rafael's current situation, a few years after the conflict took place. We look back to further challenge the actions taken by the school and consolidate resistant views on educational work, teachers' efforts and families' attitudes.

The final concluding chapter brings together the theoretical and the empirical frameworks in order to make some overall reflections to guide the pursuit of better schools.

It must be noted that the strength of the research lies in Rafael's family. Our work as authors was simply a process of deliberation about the issues that were negotiated with them over time. It is a theoretical and practical development of the family's ideas throughout Rafael's school years. This is why the chief merit should be attributed to the true actors and promoters of the research from the very beginning, when there were no significant discrepancies with the school's agenda. The study has a relevant 'counter-hegemonic' potential, in that it highlights the ability of the discourses of oppressed groups to delegitimise dominant arguments. The solidity of these arguments is usually grounded on unfair relationships and imbalances that disadvantaged groups can expose and substantiate. The counter-hegemonic potential of the study, both in terms of its critical approach and of the social group where it originates, provides a different type analysis of this phenomenon; however, it does not arrive at comfortable conclusions for education practitioners. This study questions customary school practices, and suggests a change of approach in view of the problems that schools can cause to certain groups and individuals. The aim is for practitioners to become true educators who facilitate the involvement of the school community in its day-to-day events, encourage people to be autonomous and recognise the human and social rights of others.

We apologise in advance to any education practitioners from the school in question if they feel uncomfortable when they read these pages. The majority of the teachers that Rafael had in his school years were true companions along his path for both him and his family. Many of them have proven to be not only good teachers, but also individuals who try to lead and help build meaningful lives day by day, maintaining coherence between their ideas and their actions. However, the main purpose of this book is to denounce certain practices and raise a debate about the roles attributed to education professionals. These practices too often bring the teaching profession into disrepute and annul one of the most basic rights of the most vulnerable students: their right to equal opportunities in education.

NOTES

[1] The entire study was conducted in collaboration with educationalists/researchers. The research was led by Ignacio Calderón-Almendros, an educationalist who acted as an internal researcher (since he is Rafael's brother). In stages 3 and 4, the work was carried out in collaboration with an educational psychologist (co-author of this book), who played the role of external researcher. For an overview of the different stages of the research process, as well as the plans, actors, concerns and assessments, see Figure 5.

[2] In the third stage, the external researcher and some sporadic contributors also played an important role. These produced a slightly more elaborate series of reflections from a scientific point of view.

CHAPTER 2

ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

> And day after day I am learning new things that gradually add a third chromosome to the twenty-first pair of the cells located in the innermost part of my body. And now and then—increasingly often—some of my skin cells undergo changes, and some people around me change their attitude.
>
> Ignacio Calderón-Almendros
> (Internal researcher and Rafael's brother, 1999)

2.1. BIOLOGY AND CULTURE: THE HUMAN BEING AS A PROCESS[1]

The processes of hominisation and humanisation undergone by our species have created possibilities for human beings that go beyond biological determination. Morphological changes developed into a general-purpose body more able to adapt to any environment, and operative intelligence emerged. This capacity to operate rationally, as well as the origins of human conduct, turned the species (in general) and human beings (in particular) into the protagonists of their lives and their own history.

From a biological point of view, human beings are born defenceless, and from a cultural point of view they are open-ended, thanks to their ability to be educated. On the one hand, the cultural phenomenon (non-existent in biology) emerges, and on the other hand, a symbiosis between biology and culture occurs.[2] Social strategies become radically important here, since sociability is an essential characteristic of our species. Natural determinism then gives way to social constructivism, and individuals are recognised as unfinished beings in an uncompleted reality (Freire, 1970).

Natural (biological) barriers cannot be fully destroyed; however, the nature of cultural barriers is not governed by laws that are external to us. These barriers are created by human beings, and therefore it is always possible to achieve a better state of affairs (culturally speaking).

The move from a biological state of affairs (what things are) to a cultural state of affairs (what things could or should be, including intention and purpose), together with the un-concluded nature of human beings, is the move from heteronomy to autonomy in the search for freedom through education. The hominisation process resulted in the humanisation process, the construction of human cultural behaviour (Carbonell & Mosquera, 2000:13). This involved the passage from a given (imposed) biological environment to a created cultural environment; from determination to construction. The humanising process is no other than the ability of human beings as a species to act politically, on the basis of an ethics which incorporates this cultural heritage.

This passage from the biological terrain to the cultural terrain can be illustrated by numerous examples. One of the most interesting ones may be that whereby a dysfunction becomes an option, as in the case being studied here: a *disabled* individual is, from a biological point of view, a waste of nature, an imperfection of the species, and therefore will have very few chances to survive in the struggle for life, and even less so, to transmit their genes to future generations. From a cultural perspective, this is an *able* individual, capable of growing and improving, and of enhancing both the species and the individuals who are close to them (the others). A defect results in a valuable contribution, and difference in diversity. Hence that which is biological in nature becomes cultural. But culture does not mean that there are no strings attached, as it is imbued with inequality but disguised by notions of nature; and with power relationships codified in genetic arguments. It is culture explained as biology. The act of becoming cultural beings initially involves a step towards choice, autonomy and freedom. Nonetheless, the history of our species continues to have an impact today, despite having moved from a solely nature-based reality to a cultural one. In many cases the perspective adopted is biological, albeit culture-based. Here education plays a key role in the attempt to not cling to biological limitations, but to hold on to culture as a means to achieve new levels of freedom.

> For biologically imposed limits on human functioning are also challenges to cultural invention. The tool kit of any culture can be described as a set of prosthetic devices by which human beings can exceed or even redefine the ‘natural limits’ of human functioning. … Biology constrains, but not forevermore. (Bruner, 1990:21)

However, autonomy is not sufficient for our development. The world is made up of multiple subjectivities, and this recognition, as well as the concern about other people, becomes another fundamental milestone in our development as a species. This entails a shift from engaging in each of our actions as an *investment* (for example, as a sick animal is less likely to survive, the others do not use any efforts in ensuring that it manages to do so) to *spending without expecting to obtain any benefit* (human beings help other sick members of the species so that they can survive).[3] This is an altruistic action, the origin of ethics. It is in this social encounter of one human being with others that the greatest ethical manifestation occurs: the breaking of the economic relationship that binds one individual to the other, who then becomes a subject rather than just an object (the acknowledgement of the other).

The radical difference between these kinds of behaviour lies in their sense of usefulness. Whereas in the first case, the initiative is a response to an instinctive need; the care for sick people involves a costly action (in economic or biological terms, or in energy terms) which is no longer an investment, but merely an expense in the natural sense. Something emerges in human beings that leads them to carry out unprofitable (moral) tasks and something in the environment undoubtedly changed to enable this conduct to take place (culture). This ‘altruistic’ action only happens when the individual is able to break away from the natural leash by creating a cultural nature. Additionally, once human beings have the ability to act without receiving anything in return, thanks to their relationship with the environment, the individuals of our species start to give value to the other. This is clearly a conscious action, where individuals are capable of separating themselves from the object by putting themselves in the other person’s place. This marks the beginning of ethics in our species, or rather, in the world.

When we recognise others as subjects who construct and deconstruct their meanings, we understand the unconcluded nature of reality. Each individual develops different concepts of reality, of a reality that is cultural and therefore, undefined. Consequently, the knowledge of others’ realities can only come from them. This situation calls for the use of consensus as a responsible action.

This entire process marks the passage from a biological to a cultural state of affairs; from a neutral to an ethical stance. In biology there is no difference between good and evil, since biology is not governed by the rules of morality, but by conditioned actions. A clear example can be used to identify that which is biological: instincts are very efficient and necessary mechanisms that help animals stay alive and maintain their species. Without them, an animal would not be able to survive in its environment, as confirmed by Charles Darwin. Animals had to develop a way to adapt to their environment, to be able to find food, reproduce, etc. These patterns allow them to stay alive as organisms, but fundamentally, as a species. Human beings, however, evolved (humanisation process), without resorting to instinctive mechanisms. This was mainly due to the fact that humans did not adapt to the environment, but adapted the environment to them by using their symbolic capacity, thus replacing instincts with reason. This makes us much more vulnerable in the first stages of our lives, whereas later in life it is a great advantage. Animals have clearly defined specific behaviour patterns, which are activated when they receive the appropriate stimulus. Nevertheless, when facing the same situation as any other animal, human beings are capable of discerning which response is the most relevant and on that basis they opt for one action or another. This issue, which is only succinctly argued here, is a basic explanation of the passage from the biological state of affairs (neutral, given the lack of any other options) to the ethical state of affairs, which emerges from having a choice assisted by both culture and by other human beings.

Culture therefore becomes the new context or habitat in which we develop, beyond the natural environment. This has strong implications, not only for the characteristics of human beings, but for the relationships they establish with their surroundings. Whereas in the natural context animals try to adapt in order to be able to survive, in these new surroundings, adaptation is merely one of the features in order to function effectively in the world. Culture is both something imposed on the individual (by means of socialisation) and something that may be changed by the individual (by means of education, related to autonomy and critical thinking). In this way, the biological and cultural contexts interact with each other. In J. Bruner’s words, '[it is]… biology that is the constraint, and that…culture even has it in its power to loosen that constraint.' (1990:23). Human beings are notably capable of modifying contexts, and turning them into their new organs. Their hands, for example, were replaced by tools with the ability to cut, handle things with great accuracy, and hold enormous weights.

The same happens with intelligence and the mind. In contrast with individual conceptions of intelligence, delimited by one's physical and morphological characteristics (and consequently, by one's psychological characteristics), J. Bruner (1990:33) advised that 'culture is also constitutive of mind', and meanings are 'public and communal rather than private and autistic' depending on their actualisation in culture. For him, culture, rather than biology, shapes human life and mind by the use of patterns inherent to the symbolic systems of culture (language, discourses, logics, forms of communal life, etc.).

This is why we agree with J. Bruner (1990:23–24) that 'to invoke biological devils… is to dodge responsibility for what we ourselves have created… We do better in questioning our ingenuity in constructing and reconstructing communal ways of life than to invoke the failure of the human genome. Which is not to say that communal ways of life are easy to change, even in the absence of biological constraints, but only to focus attention where it belongs, not upon our biological limitations, but upon our cultural inventiveness.' From this perspective the aim is not to identify natural limitations and remain fixated on them (the determination of the biological world), but to seek the potential provided by culture to overcome such determination. When this simple idea is translated into the school, it means that students can stop being blamed for 'their' failures, as so often happens with people with disabilities. The learning difficulties experienced by students considered to be normal are usually interpreted differently, and appropriate educational responses are often sought to overcome these difficulties. However, people with disabilities typically see how the expectations placed on them are dropped when, as other students, they encounter difficulties in their learning process. In these cases, there is a tendency to assume that they are due to limitations related to their 'disability', about which hardly anything can be done. Nevertheless, the arguments outlined up to this point should serve as an incentive to rethink cultural forms, to improve the quality of our lives and our relationships. All students can and should learn, as ignoring this would be tantamount to negating one of the main characteristics of individuals: their ability to learn, their very educability. The ultimate educational task is to break learners' limitations and help them to become a little freer. In order to eliminate existing boundaries, methodological, curriculum-based and organisational strategies need to be used.

Educability as an anthropological category is the *raison d'être* of pedagogy. According to Luis Navarro (quoted by López & Tedesco, 2002), the philosophy of education states that 'every person, as a "being", has the potential to be perfected, and therefore, is educable'. However, this educability, as existentialists proposed, is dependent upon the circumstances. An individual's potential will become actualised when the necessary conditions are met for education to take place. This is why we share N. López and J.C. Tedesco's view that 'every child is born with the potential to be educated, but the social context often operates as an obstacle that prevents the development of this potential' (2002). This is why 'the traditions that appeal to hereditary, biological or genetic factors independent of the social or cultural context' should be explicitly rejected. This does not mean that conditions determine educability and the formation of the individual's identity, but they do have a strong impact on both of these aspects. The difference between them is qualitative in nature. Quoting Bello, López and Tedesco (2002) defined the concept of resilience by as 'the universal human ability for individuals to face life's adversities, overcome them and even be transformed by them'. This ability to transcend social conditions related to the processes of construction of reality (called 'interpretive identity') was articulated further elsewhere (Román, Calderón, & Torres, 2011). 'Interpretive identity' alludes to the capacity that subjects have to decipher the codes of the contexts in which they operate, while constructing their self-projection in a relatively autonomous manner based on their reading of reality. This way of constructing identity also encompasses a number of systematic identities, depending on the degree of awareness of each subject and the influence they have on their context. All of this leads to the statement that individuals can, and in fact do, transcend the structural frameworks in which they are placed, although these have a considerable impact on their identities.

Following P. Freire (2015:99), if we were simply the product of genetic, cultural, class or race determination, we would not be responsible for what we do, and therefore one would not be able to talk of ethics or hope; everything would be pre-established and there would be nothing to be done other than resign ourselves to it. This is closely related to certain deterministic conceptions that consider disability as a fault which is hardly likely to be transcended. In certain cases, these conceptions are so strongly based on biology that they do not recognise the freedom of choice that people with disabilities have. They are denied the ability to use their own judgment and take responsibility for their actions (as in the statement: 'they do not know what they are doing'). This is one of the main characteristics of freedom in connection with ethics. For Freire, human beings are *projects* and can have projects for the world. This gives meaning to education and bases hope on the educability of human beings, 'the unfinishedness of their being, of which they have become aware.' Freire described education as the permanent process of hopeful search that addresses human, conscious non-determination. Pursuing this line of thought, we believe that this search is shaped by the process of cultural construction that enables subjects to analyse reality in a relatively autonomous way, and promote the development of abilities, knowledge, feelings and values, as well as transformational actions of their own reality. Consequently, it is a projection of the individual and their environment that brings together what reality is (subject and context) and what it should ideally be.

This chapter has provided an overview of some of the ideas about disability that are largely shared by society (and by schools, as they are merely a subsystem of the broader social system). An anthropological conception of these ideas has also been analysed from more inclusive perspectives. Given the socially prevailing values about the nature of human beings it is logical to conclude that socialisation processes continue to reproduce unfair models. A reflection and a concept of education have also been developed which are consistent with this cultural perspective. But, what happens in schools? What is the role they actually play in socialisation? What is the role schools should play, given that society is rooted in such biology-based, determinist conceptions?

It seems clear that the function of schools should involve taking a stance on the prevailing social coordinates. The education system—following Ángel I. Pérez Gómez (1999:137)—'loses its specificity and its true autonomy as a space for resistance, reflection and intellectual criticism, and becomes a mere instrument at the service of the demands of the social and economic system. The concept of education is becoming dissolved in the omnipotent process of socialisation', a 'polymorphic, changing and omnipresent influence of the dominant anonymous culture that is exerted through "spontaneous and natural exchanges" in the most diverse social institutions and bodies, both classic and modern … which have a strong impact on the development of the new generations and the way they think, feel, behave and express themselves' (Pérez Gómez, 1999:256). In this scenario, the role of schools should be to ensure that future generations are able to question the anthropological validity of socialisation processes, develop different alternatives and make relatively autonomous decisions. Thus, a school's work will be truly educational when the academic culture 'serves to ensure that each individual can consciously reconstruct their way of thinking and acting, through a long process of de-centring and critical reflection on one's own experience and other people's communication' (Pérez Gómez, 1999:275).

The awareness of the factors which condition our experience should be one of the foundations of school education since, in line with P. Freire (1996:186), 'it would be horrible if we could feel the oppression but could not imagine a different world. It would be horrible if we could dream about a different world as a project but not commit ourselves to the fight for its construction.' This constitutes the starting point of the study presented here, since it is our understanding that schools cannot be accomplices in perpetuating unfair schemas according to which people and groups should be classified. School classifications have strong repercussions both for the future life of students and for the construction of societies. This is due to the fact that schools as institutions are among the main social agents responsible for promoting, blocking and demoting people; and for positioning them in respect of the legitimised knowledge, standard skills and desirable conducts. This has strong implications for the labour market and wealth distribution,[4] among other aspects. It is a responsibility of schools to fight such injustices through reflection and intellectual criticism by both students and teachers. This will enable them to transform the situations in which they had initially been socialised, and denaturalise the prejudices conceived in day-to-day life.

> When teachers classify students into those who are 'intelligent' and 'non-intelligent ' (generally using dual schemas)… they make a distinction of which they are not always fully aware… These distinctions, which teachers seem to think are 'natural', evident, obvious, are related to the schemas perceived and incorporated by them—both individually and as a group—throughout their history and in a specific social environment. The 'naturalisation' of acts of distinction conceals their social and historical origin. (Kaplan, 1997:53–55)

Social reality then becomes the object of educational work, and it should be our main tool to achieve our purpose. We need to use social reality to be able to question it. But it should not be forgotten that the prevailing relationships between the various agents coming together in schools are assisted (most often unconsciously) by the schemas referred to above. This is why defending new schemas involves resisting the hegemonic systems used to interpret reality, while generating new ways of transforming it. This is the field of action of educational processes, in which new spaces are created to reconstruct culture and identities, while also transforming the scenarios in which they occur. In this sense, schools are eminently sociocultural institutions.

> School as such ceases to have a global meaning, and acts as an undetermined space which is a driving force of, and collaborator in, injustice. This is why it is necessary to give meaning to the school as a *community* institution, and to seek actual spaces of resistance for disadvantaged groups that promote a more democratic social construction. (Calderón, Contreras, & Habegger, 2002:27)

In order to continue to develop these ideas, further analysis is undertaken in the next section about the relationship between education and resistance. Following the parameters provided so far, we believe it is necessary to carry out a more in-depth review of the concepts underlying school practices, to reformulate what 'educating' means and reflect on the role of education practitioners as sociocultural agents.

2.2. RESISTANCE AS EDUCATIONAL ACTION

Once the concept of educability has been discussed, and the relevance and boundaries of the biological and cultural spheres, respectively, have been identified, it is now time to describe the repercussions that all of these arguments have both within and outside schools. It must be noted that these social representations[5]—particularly those related to 'disability', which are not too far removed from those that discriminate success from failure in schools—constitute the breeding ground for students to socialise with each other.

> In any event, if teachers have prejudices, to a certain extent this is due to the fact that their discourses and practices—considering that discourses also constitute practices—tend to reproduce ideas that are present in the society where they carry out their teaching. 'Breaking away' from these involves

> making an objective assessment of the ideas that they have internalised throughout their individual, social and school lives; not to discard them, but to analyse them and understand their impact on children's interaction and school results. (Kaplan, 1997, 43)

In this regard, 'an individual's social representations reflect social practices, while also determining the emergence of new practices' (Kaplan, 1997:43). This is how those students who are in the same class as students with a disability learn, almost without noticing it, the rules about what is valued and what is not valued, as an unconscious moral rule. This questions the actual morality of those norms, since they do not result from a clear personal choice, but from an unconscious appropriation of the prevailing moral rules. Stating that a person with a disability is unable to perform certain tasks may be a moral issue, but at the same time may be included within social schemas of interpretation which have been transferred from the social context to the individual realm, without necessarily involving prior reflection.

> Individuals are not fully aware of social representations; these operate implicitly, since they are internalised in the contexts in which individuals act and interact. (Kaplan, 1997:41)

Students construct their thoughts, feelings and behaviour largely bearing in mind the observations made by teachers in the classroom day after day. In this way—as well as through the media, their family environment, their neighbours, their peer groups, among others—they gradually acquire 'useful'[6] schemas to know who is good and who is bad; who is clever and who is stupid; who is a winner and who is a loser; who is successful and who is a failure.[7] In this way, not only is classroom culture being maintained, but students (either by adapting or by opposing) end up becoming agents of that culture.

Students who are affected by those representations are bombarded by a shared culture for which the school as an institution is particularly responsible. These students must develop despite being constantly questioned and delegitimised, and having their constructions despised. They realise that they are bound to fail in school, and this has serious consequences for them in the future from a social, emotional and employment point of view. Schools nowadays are subject to the production system; they anticipate the hierarchies established by the market and lay the groundwork for the next stage in the labour market through differentiated roles, discipline rules, acceptance of marks, competitiveness, etc. So school socialisation is closely related to the acquisition of the rules established by the neoliberal production system.

Our starting point for reflection and analysis is the oppression exercised by schools as institutions, and the various ways of legitimising and justifying the exclusion actions taken within them. Educability, as we argued in the previous section, is an anthropological condition, as well as being conditioned by the context in which the individual operates. This is why depriving certain groups and/or individuals of the necessary conditions for them to learn in school is a way of denying their self-projections, denying their right to feel that they are human beings. Human beings are constant projects, since we are unfinished, conscious beings. Education is precisely this search process. Therefore, determinist arguments are direct attacks on education and human rights.

> Teachers' social representations about children's intelligence—that is, their visions, assessments and practical schemas—constitute a fabric that education research has not yet sufficiently unravelled. The challenge is to identify what ideas about intelligence teachers actually implement in their day-to-day practice in the classroom. An 'ideology of intelligence' includes cognitive and assessment issues, general ideas, myths and beliefs about the human nature of children, and more specifically, about the nature and potential for development of the student's intelligence. (Kaplan, 1997:41)

Resistance is the first step towards releasing the ties that reject and exclude certain oppressed groups and individuals. They constitute patterns that somehow oppose the continuous internalisation and acceptance of school socialisation. Disruptive acts in the classroom, such as negating the teacher's authority, devaluating school marks, infringing basic rules (timetables, spaces, prohibitions, etc.) may constitute manifestations of resistance to the hegemonic cultural system of the school as an institution. These are moral positions—many of them defensive, some others probably reprehensible—[8] that reveal some deficiencies in a context which often denies them the possibility of growing and progressing, while obliging them to sit at their school desks. Most of them are acts of protest and denouncement, as they unveil a latent conflict which is silenced by schools, mainly due to the vast differences in the options of real involvement in school decision making (either referred to the structure of scholastic tasks or to that of social relations). However, although the majority of these are purely produced for denouncement purposes, not all of them can be called acts of resistance.

P. Willis (1977) in his brilliant ethnographic study introduced the concept of resistance as a means to create counterculture.[9] This study showed that the counter-culture developed by students to resist the school system ultimately follows the implicit domination messages in the work that they perform outside the school, and therefore they continue to be controlled by the education system. As stated by H. Giroux (1983), resistance theorists have attempted to demonstrate how students who actively reject school culture often participate in a logic and a worldview that confirms, rather than criticises, the existing capitalist social relations. In addition to the fact that many of their positions are often contrary to the interests of students, they usually serve to reaffirm and reproduce the schemas of schools themselves. After all, exerting symbolic oppression by acting as a mouthpiece for the hegemonic culture is similar to exerting forceful oppression, when one is physically stronger or has more elaborate fighting strategies. This has been extensively analysed by

H. Giroux (1983), and it is pertinent at this stage to provide a few extracts that explain this interpretation further:

> What is missing in this perspective are analyses of those historically and culturally mediated factors that produce a range of oppositional behaviors, some of which constitute resistance and some of which do not. Put simply, not all oppositional behavior has “radical significance,” nor is all oppositional behavior a clear-cut response to domination […]. Oppositional behavior may not be simply a reaction to powerlessness, but might be an expression of power that is fueled by and reproduces the most powerful grammar of domination.
>
> Thus, on one level, resistance may be the simple appropriation and display of power, and may manifest itself through the interests and discourse of the worst aspects of capitalist rationality. For example, students may violate school rules, but the logic that informs such behavior may be rooted in forms of ideological hegemony such as racism and sexism. Moreover, the source of such hegemony often originates outside of the school. Under such circumstances, schools become social sites where oppositional behavior is simply played out, emerging less as a critique of schooling than as an expression of dominant ideology. (Giroux, 1983:285–286)

As a result of this argument, Giroux concluded:

> In the most general sense, resistance must be grounded in a theoretical rationale that provides a new framework for examining schools as social sites which structure the experiences of subordinate groups. The concept of resistance, in other words, represents more than a new heuristic catchword in the language of radical pedagogy; *it depicts a mode of discourse that rejects traditional explanations of school failure and oppositional behavior and shifts the analysis of oppositional behavior from the theoretical terrains of functionalism and mainstream educational psychology to those of political science and sociology.* (Giroux, 1983:289; emphasis added)

These are the reasons why this kind of report has been prepared (guided by the feelings of the main actors involved) by analysing the discourses of those affected at the second level of elaboration, which are discussed further in the third analytical level. This is also why an introduction has been provided as a theoretical reflection on a new ‘logic and worldview’, which is recreated on a day-to-day basis by the relatives of those with a disability by taking distance from the prevailing social arguments. In this regard, we agree with the position held by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Moffe (quoted by Apple, 2000:195) that ‘judicial institutions, the education system, labour relations, resistance discourses by marginal populations… construct original, irreducible forms of social protest and therefore, contribute to all the discursive richness and complexity on which the programme of a radical democracy should be based’. Likewise, H. Giroux (2000:133–134) highlighted the importance of the desire to ensure that learning becomes part of social change. This involves 'listening to and working with the poor and other subordinate groups so that they might speak and act in order to alter oppressive relations of power.'

Through these counter-hegemonic discourses, the horizon opens up beyond the specific situation in a given classroom or school, and explanations and solutions can be found further, in the cultural platforms on which we are grounded. As H. Giroux (2000) stated, it is necessary to analyse the functioning of cultural texts in the material and institutional contexts that structure our daily life. We agree with M. Apple (2000:195) that our task should be to construct *transferable discourses*, to connect our educational actions with similar ones in other areas, and to collaborate with the movement so that people's rights prevail over ownership rights.

This is the framework in which we placed ourselves: considering schools as institutions to fight for democracy and justice, and teachers, as transforming intellectuals (Giroux, 1988, 1998, 2002; McLaren, 1995, 2002). We adopted a critical approach to the twofold role played by schools, which entailed a stark contradiction: while it reproduces the existing social relations (class relations linked to capitalist society, obviously ruled by inequality), it also conducts its educational action in a more or less democratic and egalitarian manner (Apple, 1997).[10] Teachers should take a stance in the endeavour to turn schools into democratic forums through which social, cultural and economic links imposed by hegemony can be dismantled. This is to be effected through participation, and ideally driven by oppressed groups, individuals and ideas.

This is the purpose of this book. We seek to share and build other ways of structuring the role of education practitioners, of schools themselves and of students in the practice of resistance, and we suggest that the text be read actively and critically. Despite any difficulties that may arise, whether they be structural, bureaucratic, cultural educational, attitudinal, or political, this challenging process of reflection needs to be undertaken, to show that educational elements rarely prevail in the governing institutions.

The aim is no other than to transcend reflection with the purpose of 'galvanizing the collective political struggle among parents, teachers and students around the issues of power and social determination' (Giroux, 1983:291).

However, can we become involved in the institutions and point to the existing options to change the dominant relations? (Apple, 1997:186) How can we illustrate the specific ways in which the curriculum, didactics and school organisation rely on interests of technical control of human activity, eliminating diversity and leading to a homogenising model?

> The pull of this counter-logic must be critically engaged and built into the framework of a radical pedagogy. […] But as an object of pedagogical analysis, this counter-logic must be seen as an important theoretical terrain in which one finds fleeting images of freedom that point to fundamentally new structures in the public organization of experience. […] Thus, it represents an important terrain in the ideological battle for the appropriation of meaning and

> experience. For this reason, it provides educators with an opportunity to link the political with the personal in order to understand how power is mediated, resisted, and reproduced in daily life. Furthermore, it situates the relationship between schools and the larger society within a theoretical framework informed by a fundamentally political question, How do we develop a radical pedagogy that makes schools meaningful so as to make them critical, and how do we make them critical so as to make them emancipatory? (Giroux, 1983:293)

The following sections will succinctly outline a number of issues. We will seek to understand and make visible some of the main problems generated from within schools regarding the way in which interpersonal relationships are created and recreated (Section 2.2.1); and how these often become hegemonic relationships of dependence and assistance which, in our view, are far removed from the educational field. In addition, we will analyse which curriculum, didactic and organisational resources schools use (particularly emphasising diagnostic resources) to determine unfair situations that should be removed from our repertory of ideas about education (Section 2.2.2). By identifying the problems, making available the means to denounce instances of pedagogical negligence, and ensuring that those who are oppressed are aware of their situation, some alternatives can be produced to construct a new model. The aim would be to provide students with a sense of autonomy, encouraging their ability for critical thought and transforming them. A continuous commitment and some critical training would be required on the part of education practitioners, as well as the active, dedicated involvement of families. Enabling these groups to act as a driving force has great potential (particularly for those who have been most severely harmed); not only because of what may be gained through their criticism, but also due to the difficulty in understanding the complex relations in schools, including those between the school as an institution, our market-oriented society, the socially-accepted diagnostic measures, and the daily practices of teachers and counsellors among others. These connections would probably become more visible and therefore, easier to oppose, if those relationships were analysed from the perspective of real cases of disadvantaged groups.

We will be satisfied if the example provided in the following chapters can serve to encourage some serious pedagogical reflection about schools and their relations with disabled people. The following section presents a theoretical approach to the grammar of schooling. Finding other cases to illustrate additional ways in which neoliberalism is introduced in teaching practices and the education system would be interesting and of great use for teachers.

2.2.1. Unequal Relationships and School Legitimisation

In order to analyse how many of the ‘educational’ actions implemented in schools have been legitimised according to a particular way of conceiving relationships, we will examine how the current hegemonic interaction model has been shaped. This model tends to leave to one side those whose chance to prove their abilities has been taken away by science and history.[11] We believe it is necessary to further study the relationship between teachers and students, which often generates dependence. This makes it impossible for students to develop self-confidence, and recover their responsibility for decision-making and creating and re-creating their shared space, both in terms of human relationships and relationships with nature (Silva Virginio, 2004).

Numerous studies that have analysed in detail the intricacies of the explicit and concealed curriculum in schools could be reviewed here. However, only the work carried out by P. Freire will be drawn on at this point, due to its synthetic and enlightening nature, which is highly relevant to the current situation. He established a radical difference between two conceptions of education, primarily based on the way they approach the educator/educatee equation. On the one hand, the bank-clerk approach, which serves domination, as it considers people as passive beings and regards those who best adapt to the world as well 'educated'; and on the other hand, the problematising approach, which involves action and reflection by learners in order to change the world by addressing the *intentionality of consciousness*, and therefore serves as a liberating effort (Freire, 1970). Since the purpose of this section is to analyse the unequal relations existing in schools, the concept of bank-clerk education is described below in order to contextualise the subsequent discussion:

The banking conception does not overcome the teacher-student contradiction; on the contrary, by exacerbating it, it cannot serve any other purpose but domestication. As the contradiction is not overcome:

- teachers teach and students are taught;
- teachers discipline and students are disciplined;
- teachers talk and students listen;
- teachers choose and enforce their choice, and students comply;
- teachers choose the programme content, and students receive it as a 'deposit';
- teachers know everything and students know nothing;
- teachers are the subjects of the learning process, while students are mere objects.

Such a concept of education makes students passive and adaptive subjects. And what is more grievous still, it totally distorts students' human condition (Freire, 1974).

The concept of banking education by Freire continues to have a strong presence in schools. This is why resistance should involve visualising how, through these power relations, many subordinated groups have been and continue to be silenced;[12] undoubtedly, students are one of these groups, and even more so, disabled students. What should the role of schools and teachers in developing education actions be? Resistance in education could be driven by some of the following key actions:

- Working on the structure, which involves redesigning time/space aspects (Giroux & McLaren, 1998:87–88), and creating spaces for reflection to be shared by both teachers and students about their own practice through dialogue and participation. Seminars, workshops, assemblies, discussion groups, small self-reflection research projects, etc. could be some options to be considered.

- Initiating and causing participatory action research processes among the school community, in which the different groups could study further and provide solutions to certain problems. This would promote innovative experiences that could be disseminated to colleagues and to the university community (Sepúlveda et al., 2008, 2012).
- Developing critical awareness and recognising hegemonic practices—in all of their forms and interpretations—which are reproduced in schools. Strategies such as participant observation, class diary, self-assessment and discussions could be subsequently analysed by the education community.
- Recognising certain injustices within and outside schools, as well as the way in which they have been perpetrated in the name of education (Giroux, 1988). Engaging in a critical analysis of current social situations between students and teachers and involving the entire education community would be helpful in this endeavour.
- Undertaking a shared, collective struggle in and about the world using critical language. This would lead to the understanding of education as cultural politics, and to proposing a way of seriously considering racial, class, sex and power relations from a pedagogical perspective (Giroux, 1988). The relations established by personal differences would be added to the above, thus contextualising our proposal. In order to make changes in real life situations, it is necessary to go beyond the institution walls and become involved in the wider social environment (neighbourhood, district communities, etc.), moving from the immediate surroundings towards other boundaries of the community, and gradually incorporating other institutions and civic movements that work along the same lines (other schools, community social services, associations, NGOs, etc.).
- Constructing a pedagogy of possibility: if the world has been socially constructed, it can be critically rebuilt and constructed (P. Freire, P. McLaren). Small changes taking place should be socialised by publishing the results of research, studies, experiences and innovations, as well as through involvement in conferences, collaborations in specialist journals, etc.
- Considering the teaching profession as a continuous political deliberation, and teachers as critical intellectuals, who should go beyond the technical task currently assigned to them.
- Understanding that students, family and teachers form part of the same group, in search of a key objective: causing the emancipation of the school community to build a better world. This is why shared, cooperative spaces should be created to encourage meetings, events, projects, etc.

All of these proposals seek to have an impact on the educational role of teachers, from a perspective whereby teaching is a practice-based, continuous, systematic reflection process. These tools can be useful to develop the educational function in schools, by encouraging teachers to go beyond their immediate scope for action in the socialising and instructive functions of schools.