

Chapter 2

The Communicative Methodology of the INCLUD-ED Research

Scientifically published and recognized, the communicative methodology accounts for both the scientific and social aspects of research. In research conducted using the communicative methodology, knowledge is constructed through dialogue between researchers and end-users, who are not traditionally included in the research process. Researchers contribute knowledge from the scientific community, which is contrasted with social actors' interpretations of their life experiences and common sense. This methodology creates the optimal conditions to realize the intersubjective relationship necessary for both researchers and social agents to share their knowledge and identify actions that overcome exclusionary elements. On the basis of this communicative approach, researchers, teachers, parents, pupils and policy-makers have presented the results of INCLUD-ED at the European Parliament with the subsequent approval of resolutions and recommendations by the Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Europe, all of whom are grounded in the results of the INCLUD-ED project. By overcoming the interpretative hierarchy, the communicative methodology has contributed improving social actors' exclusionary situations.

All of the analyses conducted by INCLUD-ED sought to identify how education can be improved such that all children succeed in school and have greater opportunities for social inclusion. In pursuit of this aim, the perspectives of a wide range of end-users (children, families, and vulnerable groups) and stakeholders (teachers, administrators, policy-makers, communities, and NGOs) were taken into account throughout the research process. Their voices were included in the research design, data collection and analysis, and the dissemination of the results thanks to the use of the Communicative Methodology, which relies on the direct and active participation of the individuals whose experiences are being studied. This involved an ongoing dialogue with end-users and stakeholders in the fields of education, culture, and social policy, throughout the 5 years of the project's development. Importantly, the direct involvement of these groups in the research process guaranteed that the research objectives and findings would address the needs of the groups whose

experience was being studied and the research results would have a positive impact on their lives by transforming their daily experiences.

The communicative perspective arises from different theoretical contributions. Habermas (1984), in his theory of communicative action, argues that there is no hierarchy between the interpretations of the researcher and the subject and that their relationship should be based on the arguments they provide, not on their social or academic position. The relevance of the subjects' interpretations is considered through the lens of Schütz and Luckmann (1973) phenomenology and it allows the researcher to strengthen the role of typifications in constructing ideal types. However, the communicative perspective also draws on Mead's (1934) symbolic interactionism, which stresses that interactions result in changes in individual interpretations and therefore do not exclusively depend on the individual subject. Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodological framework is employed to improve understandings of subjects' insights into their contexts.

The communicative perspective includes the contributions of objectivist and constructivist orientations but emphasizes the processes of critical reflection and self-reflection and intersubjectivity, in which meanings are constructed through communicative interaction among individuals, ultimately leading to agreement. The researcher contributes his or her expertise and knowledge concerning developments in the scientific community to the dialogue, contributions that are subsequently contrasted with the thoughts and experiences of social agents.

The communicative research methodology was analyzed in a book co-authored by Touraine, Wieviorka and Flecha (2004) on the voices of cultural groups in social research. Other renowned authors, such as Jerome Bruner and Amartya Sen, have recognized the scientific and social relevance of this research methodology. In the INCLUD-ED project, we investigated, understood and interpreted educational and social realities using this orientation.

The communicative methodology makes it possible to integrate and incorporate knowledge from different disciplines and orientations, using distinct methods (quantitative and qualitative) and techniques to collect and analyze data; that is, the communicative methodology allows us to apply a mixed methods approach. The different methods were selected according to operational research objectives, but the communicative orientation was maintained throughout the project and applied to all techniques and methods. The communicative methodology seeks to transcend traditional theoretical dualisms in social sciences, such as structure/individual, subject/object, and relativism/universalism and does so by assuming a series of postulates: the universality of language and action, individuals as transformative social agents, communicative rationality, the elimination of the interpretative hierarchy, and dialogic knowledge (Gómez et al. 2011). To apply these principles to an investigation, the methodology requires the researcher to create the conditions that enable intersubjective dialogue between participants and researchers and establish clear criteria and consensus to identify emerging categories and contrast interpretations.

Analyzing the educational strategies that contribute to social cohesion and those that lead to social exclusion requires the inclusion of the most diverse set of voices

available (i.e., all related stakeholders and end-users) and the use of a wide range of sources. While the voices of vulnerable groups have traditionally been excluded from research, the communicative methodology relies on the direct and active participation of the individuals whose reality is being studied throughout the research process. After years of doing research “on” them without their involvement, which failed to have any positive effect on their community, the Roma refuse to be involved in any research that applies this exclusionary pattern. Under the communicative methodology, Romani associations have been able to participate in research that takes their voices into account and, as a consequence, provides political and social recommendations that contribute to combating their social exclusion. The INCLUD-ED project relied on the participation of representatives from collectives of immigrants, persons with disabilities, women, youths (at risk) and Roma throughout the entire research process, from the design of the study through the data collection and analysis (Valls and Padrós 2011).

The dialogue is also guaranteed by the creation of consultative mechanisms at key points of the research process. Specifically, we created two consultative bodies: the Advisory Committee (comprising individuals from vulnerable social groups) and the Panel of Experts (which includes renowned experts and scholars in the field and key policy actors). The involvement of their different voices ensures the validity and rigor of the scientific process, thereby contributing to high-quality results. The Advisory Committee (AC) is a consultative body comprising members of the five vulnerable groups studied by INCLUD-ED: women, cultural minorities, migrants, youths, and persons with disabilities. The AC members were selected by all partner institutions based on three criteria: (a) they represented a given vulnerable group and consider themselves at risk of social exclusion as members of that vulnerable group, (b) they did not hold a higher education degree, and (c) they had experience in overcoming inequalities through community participation or social and political involvement. The ten members of the AC had access to the INCLUD-ED results and met with the coordination team to discuss the research. More important, they offered recommendations on how the findings could be applied to have the greatest social and political impact; those recommendations were discussed with the researchers and integrated into the project.

The impact of the Communicative Methodology has already been widely recognized. For example, the Conclusions of the Conference “Science against Poverty”, which was held at La Granja, the 8th and 9th of April 2010, stated that the “Critical communicative research perspective has shown to have a significant social and political impact on European educational and social systems” (European Commission 2011).

Consistently adopting this perspective, different research techniques were employed during the 6 projects that comprise the INCLUD-ED project. Those research techniques are qualitative, quantitative and communicative and were used to collect and analyze data to properly achieve the objectives of each of the six projects (Tables 2.1 and 2.2).

While many studies have already described the causes of the educational and social exclusion experienced by vulnerable groups, the focus of INCLUD-ED is not

Table 2.1 Summary of data collection and data analysis techniques employed in INCLUD-ED

	Data collection techniques	Data analysis techniques
Quantitative	Questionnaire	Statistical analysis
	Secondary analysis of existing datasets (e.g., OECD, EUROSTAT, UNESCO, PISA, PIRLS, TIMSS)	
Qualitative	Literature review from main scientific data bases	
	Policy analysis (e.g., Directives, policies, EURYDICE)	
	Documents	Content analysis
	Standardized, open-ended interviews	Communicative data analysis (exclusionary and transformative dimensions)
Communicative	Communicative daily life stories	
	Communicative focus groups	
	Communicative observations	

failure or exclusion but rather to identify actions that are already successfully overcoming the existing barriers that those groups face and that promote their inclusion in different areas of society. For this reason, the communicative data analysis employs a double axis, which involves the exclusionary and transformative dimensions of each category under study. Codifying the data along the exclusionary and transformative dimensions helps us to analyze inequalities, but most importantly, it is effective in identifying solutions through dialogue among all agents involved, that is, the educational strategies that contribute to social cohesion and those that hamper it.

The communicative approach is followed throughout all phases of project development, including the dissemination of the results. The most relevant efforts at communicating our results in terms of policy were the Mid-Term and Final INCLUD-ED Conferences, celebrated at the headquarters of the European Parliament in Brussels in November 2009 and December 2011. Over 300 individuals attended each of the conferences, including members of the European Parliament, representatives of different Member States and regional parliaments, European Commission representatives (DG Research, DG Education, DG Employment, among others), policy-makers, researchers, teachers, family members, citizens, NGOs, companies and children. The audience had the opportunity to hear how Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) are overcoming educational and social exclusion, even in the most disparate neighborhoods in Europe. This entailed a shift from assumptions to the use of evidence in improving education. The development of evidence-based policies was highlighted as being more necessary than ever to overcome the high rates of school failure and early school leaving in Europe.

Table 2.2 Data sources and data collection techniques used in each project

Cluster 1: educational systems in Europe Theories, characteristics and outcomes		
<i>Project</i> 1	<i>Objective</i> To analyze the characteristics of the school systems and educational reforms generating low rates of educational and social exclusion and those generating high rates	<i>Work performed</i> (a) Literature review on educational reforms and theories to identify the primary debates concerning educational inclusion and exclusion, with a specific focus on vulnerable groups (i.e., cultural minorities, migrants, youths, women, persons with disabilities), the main curricular areas (i.e., math and science, reading and ICT), different levels of education (i.e., pre-primary, primary, secondary) and programs (i.e., vocational training and special education) (b) Policy analysis of educational systems and reforms in 26 EU Member States ^a from the perspective of inclusion and segregation (i.e., orientation, general structure, curriculum) with particular attention being devoted to vulnerable groups (c) Secondary analysis of educational outcomes across Europe using the major international datasets (e.g., PISA, TIMSS and PIRLS) to analyze early school leaving and school performance
<i>Project</i> 2	<i>Objective</i> To analyze the components of educational practices decreasing the rates of school failure and the components of practices that are increasing school failure rates	<i>Work performed</i> (a) Literature review on effective educational practices in Europe, focusing on whether they promote inclusion or exclusion and considering three areas of interest: levels of education, areas of knowledge and vulnerable groups (b) Based on the results of Project 1, 20 case studies in 6 different countries (Cyprus, Finland, Hungary, Latvia, Spain and the UK) were conducted on effective educational practices at different educational and programmatic levels. The schools selected fulfilled two criteria: (a) a culturally diverse student body with low socioeconomic status and (b) evidence of progress in academic achievement, relative to other schools in similar contexts. The 20 case studies included: 4 pre-primary schools, 4 primary and 4 secondary schools, 4 vocational training centers, and 4 special education programs in regular schools. Different data collection techniques were employed in each case study: 10 standardized, open-ended interviews (4 students, 3 family members, 3 teachers and other professionals from the school community), 1 communicative focus group with teachers, and 5 communicative observations of effective educational practices

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Table 2.2 (continued)

Cluster 1: educational systems in Europe Theories, characteristics and outcomes		
Outcomes Cluster 1 allowed the research team to identify the educational actions contributing to improving academic achievement and realizing positive modes of coexistence among diverse social groups regardless of their socially disadvantaged context and membership in vulnerable groups		
Cluster 2: connections between educational and social exclusion and inclusion Structures, social agents, and policies		
<i>Project</i> 3	<i>Objective</i> To study how educational exclusion affects diverse aspects of society (i.e., employment, housing, health, political participation) and what types of educational provision contribute to overcoming it	<i>Work performed</i> (a) Literature review on the relationship between educational outcomes and exclusion or inclusion in four aspects of society (i.e., employment, housing, health, and social and political participation) and on the actions that allow individuals to overcome these inequalities (b) Secondary analysis of existing datasets on social exclusion indicators (c) Policy analysis on the role of education in the different aspects of society highlighted in EU recommendations and directives (d) Standardized, open-ended interviews (170) with: professionals and policy-makers involved in the different aspects of society studied and working at the national level in different countries (Slovenia, Spain, Italy, Austria, Romania, Belgium and Finland), as well as with professionals and policy-makers working at the European level
<i>Project</i> 4	<i>Objective</i> To investigate how educational exclusion affects diverse sectors of society, particularly the most vulnerable groups, and what forms of educational provision contribute to overcoming the resulting discrimination	<i>Work performed</i> (a) Literature review on the ways that vulnerable groups—women, migrants, cultural minorities, youths and persons with disabilities—are affected by educational and social exclusion (b) Survey of NGOs working with vulnerable groups. The survey focused on identifying—from the perspective of social agents—how educational exclusion affects members of the vulnerable groups

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Table 2.2 (continued)

Cluster 2: connections between educational and social exclusion and inclusion Structures, social agents, and policies		
		studied and what forms of educational provision contribute to overcoming the discrimination that they face (c) Communicative daily life stories (25) and focus groups (10) with members of vulnerable groups to analyze how, from their perspective, educational exclusion affects them and which strategies helped them to overcome the various barriers they face
<i>Project</i> 5	<i>Objective</i> To analyze the interventions that combine educational policy and other areas of social policy and identify which of those interventions are effective in overcoming social exclusion and developing social cohesion in Europe	<i>Work performed</i> (a) Policy analysis of European directives and policy documents in the different social areas with the aim of identifying the educational components that have contributed to vulnerable groups acquiring rights (strengthening citizenship) (b) Literature review of integrative actions: policies that connect education with other areas of social policy and have achieved significant results in overcoming social exclusion in the areas of health, housing, employment, and participation (c) In-depth analysis of 18 selected integrative actions
<i>Outcomes</i> Cluster 2 detailed how education can promote social inclusion, especially among vulnerable groups, in different areas of society, specifically in employment, health, housing and social and political participation. In particular, the research conducted in this cluster identified the central characteristics of integrative successful actions that can be transferred to and recreated in other contexts		

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Table 2.2 (continued)

Cluster 3: social cohesion from below		
Strengthening social cohesion through education		
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<i>Project</i>	<i>Objective</i>	<i>Work performed</i>
6	To study communities involved in learning projects that have developed integrated social and educational interventions that contribute to reducing inequalities and marginalization and foster social inclusion and empowerment	<p>(a) Four-year, longitudinal case studies of 6 schools (in Malta, the UK, Finland, Lithuania, and Spain), selected according to the following three criteria:</p> <p>(1) Schools that have demonstrated their students' academic success (as reflected by their educational attainment) relative to schools with similar characteristics,</p> <p>(2) Schools that serve a high percentage of low-SES students and those with minority backgrounds,</p> <p>(3) Schools with substantial community involvement. Quantitative and qualitative data collection methods were used, including: a questionnaire administered to families and pupils; communicative life-stories collected from pupils and relatives; open-ended interviews with members of the local administration, NGOs and professionals; focus groups with professionals; and communicative observations of community participation in the school</p> <p>The following techniques were used in each case study: 13 standardized, open-ended interviews (5 with representatives of the local administration, 5 with representatives of other community organizations involved in the local project, and 3 with professionals working on the local project), 13 communicative daily life stories collected from end-users (6 from family members and 7 from students), 1 communicative focus group with professionals working on the local project, 5 communicative observations, and 2 questionnaires administered to end-users (one addressed to family members and the other addressed to students)</p>

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Cluster 3: social cohesion from below Strengthening social cohesion through education	<p>(b) Longitudinal case studies and cross-case studies were performed, based on the data collected for each school in the four rounds. For each round, specific research questions were defined to analyze new topics taking into account previously obtained results. The first round focused on educational strategies that lead to social cohesion and improved academic results related to community involvement. The second focused on the different types of family and community participation. The third round focused on the connection between those different types of family and community participation and students' academic and non-academic improvements. The fourth round focused on this connection but concerning the transformation of the neighborhood in terms of the following social areas: housing, health, employment, and social and political participation</p>
Outcomes Cluster 3 shed light on the specific types of family and community participation in schools that contribute to students' academic success and social cohesion within the school and beyond	
^a The educational systems of the following countries were studied: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, the United Kingdom, Austria, Finland, Sweden, Cyprus, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Romania	

The audiences at these conferences not only had the opportunity to learn about the SEAs through presentations by researchers but also those by the end-users of these SEAs, who had participated in the research and reported on the impact the SEAs were having on their lives. Marta, a 10-year-old student at one of the successful schools studied by the project, explained how the *interactive groups* and the *dialogic literary gatherings* functioned at her school, where children now perform better academically and emotionally. Marta gave evidence of the gains created by those actions by sharing numerous examples involving her classmates. Among the stories she shared was the case of Aishan, a child who was in her class when they were 3 years old and had to leave for Senegal with his family 2 years later. He did not attend school during the time he spent in Senegal, and when he returned to Spain during the fourth grade, instead of being placed in a separate classroom with a curriculum with lower learning objectives, he was included in the regular classroom in *interactive groups*. Thanks to this policy he was not left behind and is gradually becoming able to keep up with the pace of his peers as they become friends.

Similarly, at the Final Conference Manuel, a family member from La Paz school, one of the case studies analyzed as a part of INCLUD-ED, explained the enormous improvement experienced in his school after the SEAs had been in place for 5 years. The school substantially reduced early school leaving, overcame absenteeism, improved students' academic outcomes as measured in official external evaluations, and eradicated conflicts, thereby fostering social cohesion in the community. Given these outcomes, the school became a model for the community of what could be performed in other areas of the neighborhood to overcome poverty. Thereby, a transformation of health, housing, social and political participation, etc. was initiated based on the successful actions. The transformations being achieved in this regard are enormous, changing the present and future of youths and adults in the barrio (Aubert 2011). Thus, Manuel concluded his speech to the European Parliament with the following moving sentence: *From here I want to say to all the parents and children of the world that if we had the misfortune of being poor and living in difficult areas, we can also change because we need it, society can see how we can get out of poverty.*

The successful actions that resulted in these improvements in the lives of Marta and Manuel are explained in the following chapters.

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