



Reaching Social Impact Through Communicative Methodology. Researching With Rather Than on Vulnerable Populations: The Roma Case

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Communicative methodology has been acknowledged as having an impact at all levels: social, political, and scientific. The social impact is achieved with communicative methodology by involving the people or communities we intend to study from the beginning to the end of the research. There are positive benefits to those involved, which increases the impact. Therefore, communicative methodology enhances the potential of stakeholders (including those traditionally excluded) for social transformation through the use of egalitarian dialogue. Additionally, those stakeholders co-lead the research and promote change in their own social environments because of their inclusion in all stages of the research process. The theoretical basis of communicative methodology led to the assumption of postulates that enable social transformation. Researchers, taking into account the theoretical principles and postulates, interpret reality through dialogic knowledge while researching with vulnerable populations. This article illustrates how it is possible to attain social impact using communicative methodology in diverse contexts and points out how the communicative organization of research and the communicative analysis of data can be decisive in attaining social impact. Such change contributes to the social and educational transformation of reality and to improving the lives of vulnerable populations.

Keywords: communicative methodology, social impact, social transformation, vulnerable populations, diversity

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years, we have witnessed growing demands from governments and society for sciences to demonstrate the benefits they provide to society as a whole. Scientists are increasingly encouraged to share the impact of their research on people's everyday lives. In the case of research concerning vulnerable populations, to attain project funding, researchers should show how such research has generated results, and benefits. Important to such accountability is the highlighting

of achievements that would not have occurred had the funds been appropriated by existing organizations or current policies targeted at these populations.

This article illustrates how social impact is embedded in communicative methodology when researching with vulnerable populations. This approach has been analyzed in depth through the SALEACOM project¹, which set up a worldwide network of researchers concerned with addressing educational and social exclusion in schools with children and youth that are sistemically underprivileged. In addition to various topics, such as successful actions, teacher training, and access to higher education, research methodologies have been a transversal topic throughout the project. In particular, we analyzed how methodologies oriented toward social transformation contribute to overcoming social inequalities. There is a special emphasis on communicative methodology because of relevant experiences within the previous 5, 6, and 7th Framework Programmes of the European Commission.

Therefore, the objective of this article is to dwell on how communicative methodology contributes to achieving social impact, paying special attention to the effects of communicative methodology when it is used for research with vulnerable populations. First, we will review the criticism on research that has produced a rather negative impact on vulnerable populations whose reality is being studied. Second, we will present the theoretical postulates of communicative methodology that are applied when conducting research with vulnerable populations. Third, we describe the procedures of communicative methodology, namely, the communicative organization of research, the communicative data collection and communicative analysis of the data, which are in place when working with vulnerable populations. Finally, we conclude with examples of social impact that have been achieved with these populations as a result of the research.

RESEARCH ON VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Although several decades of research on vulnerable populations have passed, there is scarce evidence as to whether this research has led to a positive transformation of or social impact on the community or the daily lives of the people who were subjects of the research. In fact, part of the research has even promoted or reproduced racist stereotypes about these vulnerable populations.

There are several examples of academics that have raised their voices against the bias of this exclusionary research. For instance, this type of reality has been recorded for a long time now in studies related to Roma people. Roma are the largest minority in Europe and have a history of severe human rights violations, racism, and social exclusion. The Roma scholar Hancock (1988, 14) criticized those researchers who

try to undermine Roma realities and thus reproduce the social exclusion of the Roma people.

Those who know my work know that I have thoroughly fought against the attitude of the non-Roma researchers that study our people and that want to close us up in a “time capsule” for us to be “real Roma,” illiterate, nomads, and primitive, like Himmler wanted. These persons think that we are unable to unite, to have a political conscience, and to choose our leaders.

As noted by Hancock, part of the explanation for this bias is due to the exclusion of the non-traditional participants from the research. By excluding the non-traditional participants, the researchers deliberately ignore and silence the primary information source of the Roma reality that they plan to understand and improve. Thus, the exclusion of these voices from the research inevitably reproduces the social exclusion of the vulnerable populations because such conclusions mirror the research methods that were carried out.

Other Roma scholars such as Courthiade and Duka (1995) criticize the approaches that want to deny the existence of Roma identity and to scrutinize the Roma people from the mainstream expectations of conduct. As the authors explain, many people have tried to identify Roma as a problematic group and potentially criminal. These explanations, as the authors pointed out, were official during the Third Reich, and they can even be seen currently in scientific articles. We can find these so-called scientific articles not only in social and humanities research but also in medical research. In the medical research area, racism has been widely recognized by research (Huang and Coker, 2010). Moreover, Roma researchers have also detected racist practices against the Roma population in the area of health, such as forced sterilization for Roma women in Eastern countries (Santos et al., 2016).

Racism in social research is related to both ethnocentric and relativist approaches. On the one hand, ethnocentrism generates modern racism (Flecha, 1999), and involves beliefs such as the existence of inferior and superior cultures or the idea that the characteristics of these cultures prevent their respective members from enjoying equal rights and opportunities. Father and son authors Cavalli-Sforza provide a clear example of modern racism when Roma people are depicted as thieves, lazy, and not compatible with going to school with others.

Is it fair to tolerate, support, and protect a culture of thieves and lazy people? What else could they do? It is very difficult to accustom the Gypsies without having them suffer. The Gypsy is raised within the nomad culture, in which his group has always been adapted and non-compatible with going to school, among others. He/she encourages theft because stealing and escape is an easy task (Cavalli-Sforza and Cavalli-Sforza, 1994, p. 266)².

On the other hand, relativist approaches are the basis of postmodern racism (Flecha, 1999), which basically consists of considering inequality situations as the product of cultural attributes and defending these “cultural differences” as an

¹SALEACOM: *Overcoming Inequalities in Schools and Learning Communities: Innovative Education for a New Century* is a HORIZON 2020 Marie Skłodowska-Curie Research and Innovation Staff Exchange (RISE) project, which lasted for 36 months, from 2015 to 2017, funded by the European Commission.

²Own translation from the Spanish edition of the book.

alternative to ethnocentrism. Among other examples, Okely (1999, p. 78) argues that illiteracy means freedom for the Roma people: “the Gypsies” non-literacy, far from being an inevitable cultural handicap, is in many key areas a force for freedom’.

These kinds of contributions have also been denounced by the Roma scholar community: “actually, some researchers try to justify our illiteracy, saying, sometimes unnecessarily, that the illiteracy is part of our cultural identity” (Rose, 1983, p. 23). Many Roma researchers are demanding approaches and methodologies to overcome this exclusionary research, highlighting that Roma people want to participate only in research that treats them on an equal basis (Amador, 2016).

Research undertaken “on” vulnerable groups rather than including the voices of those who are being studied in the entire research process is more likely to assume ethnocentric or relativist perspectives (Lauritzen and Nodeland, 2018). In both cases, they prevent the creation of scientific knowledge of the culturally diverse groups that co-exist in contemporary societies, with negative consequences on the population instead of serving the best interests of these vulnerable populations.

This gloomy landscape calls for a change. It is a matter of uttermost importance to build trust and put science at the service of those sectors of society that most need it. In this context, communicative methodology has already demonstrated the use of a permanent egalitarian dialogue between researchers and people who participate in the research. In that sense, García-Espinell et al. (2017) used communicative methodology to demonstrate how this is possible, through an egalitarian and intersubjective dialogue between the Roma people and the mainstream health system, improving their health conditions by overcoming common episodes of discrimination in the health system. More examples similar to this can be found in different research projects within the 5, 6, and 7th Framework Programmes of the European Commission, with relevant socio-political impacts for overcoming the exclusion and discrimination of vulnerable groups.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF COMMUNICATIVE METHODOLOGY

Communicative methodology is framed in a society that demands more dialogue, is more reflexive, and is increasingly critical regarding social inequality. The methodology gathers contributions from several theories, such as communicative action, constructivism, dialogic action, dialogic learning, dramaturgy, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and transcultural studies. These methodological influences are materialized in communicative methodology through seven postulates.

Postulates of Communicative Methodology

Communicative methodology is inclusive, egalitarian, and aimed at social transformation, which is carried out by the individuals themselves. Thus, this methodology acknowledges that all individuals have inherent capacities for communication and social interaction and that they can understand the world,

generate knowledge, and change social structures. Moreover, they can communicate in a rational way, their common sense is influenced by the context in which they live, and thus, they can transform it. Finally, communicative methodology considers that participants and researchers are on the same epistemological level because they all possess knowledge. Therefore, in communicative methodology, there are no interpretative hierarchies, allowing both researchers and participants to participate on an equal basis in the generation of new dialogic knowledge. In this way, the use of communicative methodology in research with vulnerable populations implies the participation of all individuals on an equal basis with the researchers, the co-creation of dialogic knowledge, and the possibility of real social impact for all. Gómez et al. (2006, p. 41–47) describe the following postulates of communicative methodology:

Universality of Language and Action

While exclusionary research assumes deficit theories that deny the agency of participants, in fact, there is the capacity to interpret critically the reality with the possibility of change. The communicative approach is based on the work of authors such as Habermas (1984, 1987), Austin (1962), and Vygotsky (1962, 1978) and assumes that all individuals have inherent capacities to communicate and interact with each other. There are no superior and inferior cultures; rather, there are different cultures with universal values and universal capacities. Contributions such as the work of Cole and Scribner (1974) also demonstrate that disadvantaged people develop cognitive and communicative capacities.

Individuals as Transformative Social Agents

This premise builds on authors such as Garfinkel (1967) to assert that individuals are not cultural dopes and have the capacity to understand the world, generate knowledge and change structures. In the same vein, Freire (1970; 1976) work emphasizes that all the people are capable of critically understanding their reality and, consequently, can change the world. He also discusses the relevance of both denunciation and annunciation as part of the utopian purpose of creating a better world. Freire’s theory of dialogical action is a basic point in communicative methodology to address the means to transform reality.

Communicative Rationality

Building on the work of Habermas (1984, 1987), communicative rationality considers language as a vehicle for dialogue and understanding on an equal basis, far from the instrumental rationality in which participants use language to achieve specific aims. Researchers have their own interests, and the research process is based on these interests, but this does not mean that the dialogue with participants is based on an instrumental rationality. Far from this, under a communicative approach, researchers use communicative rationality throughout the whole research process.

Common Sense

Context shapes individuals’ common sense, as studied by Schütz (1967). Therefore, this postulate places emphasis on the context where the interactions are taking place and where knowledge is

generated. Communicative methodology respects and values this context and favors the collection of data in the different cultural contexts where participants live (which can range from public spaces to associations and churches).

Abolition of the Interpretative Hierarchy

This postulate is a result of the previous ones, and it implies that individuals are capable of the scientific interpretation of their respective realities. Researchers do not hold the truth; the reality is interpreted through the best arguments among all participants, regardless of whether they have an academic background. This postulate is also directly related to the concept of the demonopolization of expert knowledge (Beck, 1994) in which researchers break with the traditional exclusionary hierarchy between social actors and researchers. Experts are those who bring knowledge closer to participants while rejecting the opportunity to stay in a position of power.

Equal Epistemological Level

Consistently, both researchers and the people with whom they conduct research participate in the process of the co-creation of new knowledge on an equal basis. This process involves breaking from the traditional difference between researchers as “subjects of study” and participants as “objects of study.” The individuals bring their daily life knowledge and experience to the forefront but not as “data” to be instrumentally used nor as the only source of knowledge. Researchers have the responsibility to combine scientific knowledge with participant knowledge so that a real dialogue can take place.

Dialogic Knowledge

Rooted in contributions from Vygotsky (1962), Freire (1970, 1976), Beck et al. (1994), Flecha (2000) and Habermas (1984, 1987), this postulate consists of generating new knowledge using the principles of dialogic learning from an intersubjective perspective. The researchers must pursue a maximum degree of achievement to attain egalitarian dialogue, solidarity or consensus, which are typical values for this type of learning. The dialogue is based on validity claims, never on power claims, searching for a common understanding of the reality of consensus between all participants. This dialogic knowledge incorporates the objectivist and subjectivist approaches to interpret reality and acts in a dual way, recognizing, at the same level, the system (structures) and the daily life of the participants (life world). Such knowledge highlights the capacity of participants to reflect and be reflexive (Beck et al., 1994) as well as preparing the environment to facilitate interactions (Vygotsky, 1962). The establishment of this dialogue implies contributing during the research process because reality and the construction of knowledge are not neutral (Freire, 1970).

RESEARCH WITH VULNERABLE POPULATIONS. PROCEDURES FOR COMMUNICATIVE METHODOLOGY

The above-mentioned postulates and theoretical basis are embedded in a set of procedures that have already been implemented in previous research projects involving underprivileged populations such as the Roma, migrants, and people in poverty. Here, we will explain in detail some of the main features of its implementation, mainly through *WORKALO: The creation of new occupational patterns for cultural minorities: the gipsy case* (funded by FP5) and *INCLUD-ED: Strategies for inclusion and social cohesion in Europe from education* (FP6). The underlying idea is the involvement of vulnerable populations in a continuous egalitarian dialogue and the specific ways in which this idea is operationalized to be recreated in all research. We also note some of the things we learned from the challenges we encountered.

Communicative Organization of the Research

The communicative organization of the research is a basic feature to guarantee the inclusion of diverse social actors throughout the entire research process—from the research design to the interpretation and dissemination of the results—and the pursuit of social transformation. Particularly, the communicative organization of research can be materialized in the following strategies or activities: a multicultural research team, advisory committee, working groups, or plenary meetings.

Multicultural and Diverse Research Teams

It is widely acknowledged that the research teams in educational research tend to be very far from representing the great diversity of our societies and schools. In doing research specifically focused on the inequalities and situations of disadvantaged and underprivileged populations, this team composition is especially regrettable. Therefore, a crucial strategy for improving the way in which research approaches educational and social exclusion is to recruit and engage with indigenous researchers (Mertens et al., 2013) or those belonging to vulnerable groups. The INCLUD-ED project identified and analyzed educational actions that contribute to overcoming inequalities and promoting social cohesion (Flecha, 2015). During its 5 years, researchers from different backgrounds were part of the research team. Among them, there were Roma and Moroccan junior researchers, as well as a former pupil of one of the schools participating as a case study in INCLUD-ED (situated in a deprived area) who had a research fellow related to this project. Their insights were extremely helpful for the preparation, development, and analysis of the fieldwork as well as for the entire process. Crucially, this helped identify the strengths and capabilities of underprivileged pupils and their families.

Advisory Committee

The advisory committees are composed of vulnerable population representatives that bring their knowledge to the research. Their roles include a critical review of the reports and findings of the

research, guide the research process, assure the fulfillment of the communicative postulates, and disseminate these findings within their communities to improve the life of the respective vulnerable populations (Gómez et al., 2006).

The selection of the members of an advisory committee becomes a key issue to avoid an over-emphasis on “formality” or privileging the voice of people who, despite their belongingness to a certain group (e.g., being Roma, a woman or a migrant), do not truly represent the situation of vulnerability. For instance, lobby groups are related to end-users. In INCLUD-ED, the selection of members was based on three criteria: (a) they represented a given vulnerable group and considered themselves to be at risk of social exclusion within that vulnerable group, (b) they did not hold a higher education degree, and (c) they had experience overcoming inequalities through community participation or social and political involvement.

This selection process provides the opportunity to engage with, for instance, an illiterate Roma grandmother in the WORKALO project. In that case, the woman made an important contribution to the state of the art of the project. She criticized the assumption of mainstream theoretical explanations that the shift to an information society affected everyone in Europe in the same way by pointing out that the Roma people did not have the security of lifelong employment as others working in industrial society do (Vargas and Gómez, 2003). Thus, for many people, the transition to an information society meant a change in their working conditions, but this was not the case for the Roma people. The egalitarian dialogue and abolition of interpretative hierarchy were the conditions for achieving this knowledge co-creation.

Working Groups

The working groups are created to bring efficiency to the research process. The idea behind these small and flexible groups is that they can work on specific tasks depending on the needs of the project, which can then be discussed afterwards in the plenary meetings and with the advisory committee (Gómez et al., 2006). On many occasions, these groups are composed of volunteers who are experts on a certain issue or in a certain discipline. Such scientific knowledge of volunteers or their direct experience can be employed to form free oriented task groups collaborating with the project. For instance, in the FP6 project INCLUD-ED, a specific team focused on the methodology was created. Along with the project, this group had the responsibility of preparing the data collection techniques and designing the data analysis procedures.

Plenary Meetings

The plenary meetings provide a forum for the research team to work together on the development of the project and then forward the results to the advisory committee (Gómez et al., 2006). At the end of the project, there will normally be a final event presenting the results to the public and stakeholders. At this time, representatives of the vulnerable populations who have been involved in the project are invited to present their social impact experiences wrought by the project. It is desirable in the communicative organization of research to establish a structure

and develop plenary meetings and dissemination dynamics. However, the constraints of time or budget can limit these intentions. Nonetheless, the development of communicative technologies can contribute to overcoming most of the issues related to the time and money needed in the research process. Ideally, the research team who wants to perform research with vulnerable groups should aim at including all of these elements of the communicative organization of research, starting with those who are most important to their respective research.

Communicative Data Collection Techniques

To collect the data, communicative methodology has led to the development of specific techniques adapted to its theoretical postulates. In this methodology, qualitative and quantitative techniques can be used separately; when the techniques are combined, the research design becomes mixed. Notwithstanding, the communicative qualitative orientation contributes in a more robust way to the co-creation of the knowledge aimed at attaining social transformation. These communicative, qualitative data techniques are communicative daily life story (CDLS), communicative focus group, and communicative observation (Gómez et al., 2006).

Communicative Daily Life Story (CDLS)

The specificity of the CDLS consists of gathering thoughts, reflections, and forms of action through which individuals face exclusionary situations in their daily life. CDLS is a very useful tool to give a voice to the most vulnerable populations and to give them an active role in the creation of valuable knowledge (García-Yeste, 2014; Ramis et al., 2014). In INCLUD-ED, the CDLS of Roma and migrant students provided relevant knowledge regarding the discriminatory treatment they received in the school and the positive referents from their own group at the school. In conclusion, the connection was made between high expectations and their educational improvement.

Communicative Focus Group

Communicative focus groups are formed by natural groups aimed at reaching a collective interpretation of reality through egalitarian dialogue and validity claims. The researcher has the role of promoting interaction and communication in the group to guarantee the mentioned collective interpretation (Aubert et al., 2011). In INCLUD-ED, the research team conducted six longitudinal case studies in schools. Four rounds of fieldwork were performed for each case. The focus groups were conducted with professionals in the schools (teachers, consultants, social educators, etc.) to exchange personal subjective information (opinions, knowledge, etc.).

Communicative Observation

The element that distinguishes communicative observation is that the dialogue with the people being researched is continuous throughout the whole process. For instance, when researchers attended an evangelical mass with the Roma, they informed the community of the purpose of the observation, and afterwards, they discussed their impressions about the ritual.

Communicative Analysis of Data

The communicative analysis of data has the main purpose of overcoming the exclusionary research by offering a transformative orientation and thus contributing to the social impact of research. For this reason, the communicative analysis of data is developed based on exclusionary and transformative dimensions (Gómez et al., 2006).

The exclusionary dimension refers to those elements that reproduce or enhance the social exclusion or discrimination of the vulnerable populations, while the transformative dimension refers to those elements that help overcome or tackle the social exclusion and discrimination against vulnerable populations. All data are interpreted taking into account both dimensions, and in that way, the transformative capacity of social agents is always maintained. The communicative analysis is arguably the blueprint of communicative methodology, distinguishing it from other methodologies.

The identification of these two dimensions is carried out at the analysis phase of the data. In this phase of the research process, the researchers first identify the categories and sub-categories of research based on the literature review and the scripts they used. Second, the researchers establish a grid of analysis where they assign a code to specific elements that are identified either as exclusionary or transformative for each category and sub-category. Finally, the analysis of the data is performed, and the sentences or paragraphs are highlighted using the agreed upon codes; thus, the information is easily extracted and grouped for the interpretation.

Again, a key feature is the inclusion of many voices in the data analysis. In the process of the interpretation of the results, members of the vulnerable populations are also invited to participate. Such participation may occur in different ways, for instance, with a “second round” of fieldwork that allows us to discuss the findings and interpretations or by strategies such as the advisory panel or working groups that we have previously explained.

REACHING SOCIAL IMPACT

Aroa, Alfredo, Jorge, and Saray are some of the more than 20 Roma that have entered the university in the last years in Catalonia. They will study fields such as education and political science. Their educational achievements will offer a better future for their children than what they can offer working in *mercadillos* (street markets). They all live in deprived neighborhoods and did not have any acquaintances that went to the university when they were children. Some of them did not complete primary or secondary education. Now, they have created CampusRom, the first Roma university network in Catalonia. In addition to achieving their own dreams, they also demonstrate to non-Roma researchers that their ethnic identity is not linked to marginalized situations or to school disaffection. Undoubtedly, their achievements will raise the numbers of Roma entering the university and raise the expectations of many Roma families and non-Roma professionals about their children’s success in education, future in the labor market and social positions.

These enrolments are due to the Integrated Plan for the Roma People in Catalonia, which, among other actions, provides support for preparing Roma students to pass the university entrance exam. The Plan has been implemented in an unusual collaboration between public administration and Roma associations and seriously takes into consideration the WORKALO findings. Instead of describing the inequalities and lack of Roma people with job opportunities, WORKALO stresses the skills and abilities they have developed and their competence within an information society.

At the same time, the Integrated Plan for the Roma People would not be possible without the motion approved by the Spanish Parliament in 2005, recognizing the rights of the Roma (Sordé et al., 2013), and the official recognition from the European Parliament of the Roma as a distinct ethnic minority on 28 April 2005 (European Parliament, 2005). This recognition, which can be viewed as the start of the European Parliament’s explicit commitment to improving the situation of Europe’s largest ethnic minority (Munté et al., 2011; Aiello et al., 2013), was suggested by a political representative of the European Parliament, drawing on WORKALO’s findings and resulting recommendations.

Achieving this impact is essentially related to the communicative approach of the WORKALO project. From the participation of an elderly grandmother in the theoretical discussion in the advisory committee to the elaboration of policy recommendations, all phases were developed with accurate respect and dialogue with those most concerned by the findings likely to be achieved. The researchers of the WORKALO team, grass-roots Roma people, and representatives of Roma associations presented the results together in a conference at the European Parliament in 2004 that reached key policy-makers.

Thus, Roma participation in a study led to the European Union’s commitment to defend the full recognition of the identity, culture, and language of the Roma people as a European minority (Aiello et al., 2013). In turn, this commitment also contributed to promoting national and regional strategies to tackle the great inequalities their people face and other policies taking into account the research findings.

The INCLUD-ED project shared the same communicative orientation of looking for solutions beyond barriers. The main objective of this research project reflected this communicative orientation in distinguishing two dimensions to be identified and analyzed—educational actions that contribute to overcoming inequalities and promoting social cohesion in Europe and actions that generate social exclusion. The Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) identified “are characterized by reorganizing the available resources in the school and the community to support all pupils” academic achievement, instead of segregating some of them according to ability or by lowering down their educational opportunities’ (Flecha and Soler, 2013, p. 451).

In fact, SEAs are characterized as being universal and transferable to other contexts. Together with the learning communities, a project that started in 1978 in Barcelona, which “consists of the transformation of schools and their socio-cultural environment in order to achieve academic success for all students” (Gatt et al., 2011, p. 37), SEAs bolstered the social

impact of INCLUD-ED. As part of this impact, there is reduction in absenteeism and early school leaving (Flecha and Soler, 2013) and improvement in academic achievement (Elboj and Niemelä, 2010; Díez et al., 2011; Valls and Kyriakides, 2013; Flecha, 2015) in schools where they applied SEAs. INCLUD-ED was the only Social Sciences and Humanities research project recognized as one of the ten success stories at the FP6 by the European Commission due to its high social impact.

This impact could only be achieved with communicative methodology applied in INCLUD-ED. The project's success was due to an orientation toward solutions and successful actions rather than toward difficulties and barriers, as well as the involvement of participants who had previously never been able to have their voice heard.

Concerning the worldwide debate regarding what social impact is, on the one hand, and what impact are specifically the results of social sciences, on the other hand, the two examples provided here are very illustrative of what can be achieved with dialogic approaches in research (Flecha et al., 2015). Social impact is not “reaching society” in dissemination activities or being mentioned in social media, nor is it the transference of knowledge *per se*. The social impact of research is when “published and disseminated results, which have been transferred into a policy or an NGO-led initiative, produce improvements in relation to the stated goals of society” (Reale et al., 2017, p. 3).

The results of the WORKALO and INCLUD-ED projects have been published in highly ranked journals in different disciplines. They have achieved political impact as public administrations, individual schools, NGOs, and other stakeholders have been interested in their results. The findings of INCLUD-ED have informed policy-makers at different levels: internationally (for example, Secretaries of Education in Argentina, Colombia, and Mexico), in the EU (3 recommendations and 2 resolutions) (Flecha and Soler, 2014), and in Spain (recommendation, legislation and agreements with the public administration). However, the ultimate goal in both cases was to make a difference in the populations that face unacceptable inequalities.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article claimed to illustrate that relying on the direct and active participation of the people whose reality is being

studied throughout the entire research process increases the social impact of such research. In communicative methodology, this participation is performed on the basis of clear theoretical concepts and postulates that promote egalitarian dialogue, dialogic knowledge and co-leadership, and social transformation for the participants in the research. Furthermore, communicative methodology has specific strategies for the implementation of its postulates, strategies in the communicative organization of research, communicative data collection techniques, and communicative analysis of the data.

We have seen in the two examples involving vulnerable populations that when the procedures of communicative methodology are in place, the political impact and social impact of the research are enhanced for the vulnerable populations, and society, in general, gains from the dissemination of the new knowledge that has been co-created between the researchers and the end-users. Finally, the road has been paved for future research with vulnerable populations, and the fact that people in many parts of the world are enjoying the benefits of the research carried out through communicative methodology is yet more evidence of the transferability of this methodology to different places and different socio-economic contexts.

Communicative methodology is increasingly being acknowledged as a very useful methodological approach to serve a society that needs dreams and science to reach social transformation, working with rather than on vulnerable populations (Gómez and Flecha, 2004). This methodology is aligned with the efforts to increase rigor in ethical issues and the idea of the co-creation of knowledge. As committed researchers, we must continue to improve this approach, as much of the current social inequalities are still far from being overcome.

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