

How to make the participatory social documentary a tool for educational inclusion?

Abstract

The participatory social documentary has shown great potential as a research tool for social and educational transformation. Under the critical paradigm and the methodological alternative of participatory action-research, this documentary aims to provoke transformations, turning all the subjects involved (filmmakers, protagonists and spectators) into protagonists and narrators of the story. To do this, a group of activists for inclusive education and a team of university researchers, accompanied by the filmmaker Cecilia Barriga, come together to create a documentary piece that seeks to make viewers aware of the suffering of people who are discriminated at schools because of their gender, race or disability, as well as to involve them in transforming these conditions.

1. Objectives or purposes

This presentation aims to show the value of participatory social documentary as a research tool that enables the analysis, denunciation and transformation of social, political and educational problems. For this, a documentary piece is presented, built together with the filmmaker Cecilia Barriga within the framework of the research project “Emerging narratives about the inclusive school from the Social Model of Disability. Resistance, resilience and social change” (RTI2018-099218-A-I00), developed at the University of Malaga (Spain), and financed with European funds and by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities. The documentary aims to promote inclusive education and social change by showing the activism of people with disabilities and their environments. It seeks to identify, build and promote new narratives about disability and schools emanating from people involved in the recognition of human rights.

2. Perspective(s) or theoretical framework

This work falls within the critical paradigm, which differs from other approaches such as positivist or interpretive, in that it not only seeks to obtain information to understand reality but also to cause transformations in the contexts in which it intervenes. And it does so from a liberating and emancipating dynamic of the people involved in it (Escudero, 1987). This current is based on the premise that in the same way that science and research are not neutral, education cannot be either, so it focuses on the analysis of "the way in which the abuse of social power, domination and inequality are practiced, reproduced, and occasionally combated, by texts and speech in the social and political context" (Van Dijk, 1999: 23).

Within the framework of the critical paradigm, participatory action research emerges as a methodological alternative, which considers people as active subjects capable of causing changes in society and in the institutions that make it up, including the school institution. According to Alberich (2002: 76), this methodological aspect "seeks to obtain reliable and useful results to improve collective situations, basing the research on the participation of the groups to be investigated". People are no longer mere objects of research to become active subjects within it (Le Boterf, 1986; Park, 1992).

In this breeding ground, the use of documentary film as a research instrument is especially relevant. In fact, it is capable of putting the director of the work in interaction with the subject-object of the film and, at the same time, of offering the viewers the possibility of immersing themselves in a place and at a certain time. In this type of participatory social documentary, all the subjects (filmmakers, actors and audience) become narrators and main characters of the story, able to provoke twists within it.

Thus, in an effort to learn about and understand other ways of perceiving the world around us and contribute to its transformation, a team of researchers from the University of Malaga (Spain), accompanied by the filmmaker Cecilia Barriga, present a participatory social documentary film whose purpose is none other than to reflect the discrimination suffered by people with disabilities in the social and school context, and at the same time, to make them aware of their ability to change it, making those spaces more inclusive and human places.

3. Methods, techniques, or modes of inquiry

This artistic creation, whose documentary work has been shared by the filmmaker and the research team (made up of families and professionals involved in respecting the right to an inclusive education), draws on a series of audiovisual resources previously generated by the entire group of people behind the audiovisual piece: workshops, scientific meetings, state conversations between the educational community, work groups, participatory Action-Research processes, biographical interviews, observations, assemblies, focus groups, personal and diary records, collaborative constructions, blog entries, press and television publications... A whole range of strategies for collecting information, processes for building new narratives and actions aimed at transforming everyday life.

4. Data sources, evidence, objects, or materials

In addition to seeking the audiovisual representation of reality in the eyes of the author, the participatory social documentary pursues its transformation. Grierson, one of the creators of this documentary genre, pointed out that the lack of information for citizens about social problems hindered any form of decision and democratic intervention. To avoid this situation and bring social problems closer to people, Grierson proposed making use of cinema, thus focusing his work as a documentary filmmaker (Sellés, 2007).

In order to make people participate in these social and educational problems, the documentary that we present aims to show a whole series of narratives that respond to the construction of a movement to fight for the rights of minors with disabilities in schools. One of the most significant narratives is the one carried out by Rubén Calleja and his family, based on the battle against the school discrimination suffered by this young man because of his disability. The Calleja Lomas family obtained a historical ruling, in which the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ruled that the Spanish State had violated Rubén's rights by removing him from the school where he had been enrolled until the eleven years old and forcing him to go to a special education center. In that ruling, the Spanish State was also obliged to compensate the family and to guarantee that Rubén could go to an ordinary center to pursue his Vocational Training studies.

Also specially significant are the stories of Zulaika, Alberto, Jorge, Antón, Indira, Zoe, Malena, Darío, Leo, Mariama, Yasmina... a group of boys and girls who have been discriminated against at school because of their disability, their race, their socioeconomic level, their sexual identity, their academic performance, etc. All of them have come together to form the group "Students for Inclusion", and together with a team of researchers from the University of Malaga (Spain) they have created the Guide "How to make your school inclusive" (Calderón, Mojtar y Cabello, 2021). This guide is the result of the sessions held by the group of high school students to reflect on the way their schools work and come up with proposals to make them more inclusive, always starting from their own voices and demands, often poorly attended by the institutions. It is a resource that the young students had the opportunity to present to the Spanish Minister of Education in order to offer her proposals to make the school a more inclusive institution. At that meeting, the young people were also able to express the suffering that going through school had meant for them at certain times.

Another of the stories shown in the documentary is the life project created by Raúl Aguirre Casanovas and his family. This young man opens the doors of his home to us and shows us how he has managed to lead a full and autonomous life despite the stigma associated with his disability. Stories like Raúl's serve to exemplify how times and spaces can also be transformed, and how through coexistence we can learn to be more sensitive to the needs of others and contribute to making our environment more hospitable.

This cinematographic work encourages the audience to criticize and reflect, but also seeks to involve them in the fight to eradicate certain discriminatory practices that continue to be reproduced in school and in society. It is a window for dialogue, in which young people, families and professional activists reflect together on how they live or have lived their time at school, and on what we have understood until now by education, by school and by disability. Likewise, with the purpose of crossing that fine line that often divides what is desirable and reality, they offer us the keys to face new stages in this process of rebuilding schools to make them more welcoming and respectful places.

5. Results and/or substantiated conclusions or warrants for arguments/point of view

This work is not limited to documenting the stories of a series of young people and families marked by a series of social categories and stigmas that oppress and discriminate them, but also those of a movement made up of a group of people who, supported by their own experience, They aim to contribute to creating a more inclusive society. Thus, this documentary has enabled them to share experiences, find support, recognize fissures in the system that oppresses and ultimately empower themselves, recognizing and showing that the substance of the subject does not lie in the medical and individual component of disability, but in the political nature that builds and maintains the current interpretation of the differences that prevails in our societies and schools.

Recalling their stories has allowed the key actors of the film to take stock of their achievements, and recognize a social narrative of what has happened to them: the one they have lived through, but also the one that preceded them and the one that they now contribute

to generating. It contributes to completing their identity construction processes, at the same time that it allows generating political movements of resistance, to make schools more democratic (Freire, 1970; Giroux 2006; McLaren and Kincheloe, 2008).

6. Scientific or scholarly significance of the study or work

The relevance of the audiovisual piece that we present lies in two significant qualities of the social documentary: its reflective nature and the possibility offered by this genre of reappropriation of meanings for those to whom it is addressed. This instrument, of great informative and artistic value, makes it possible to transcend the narratives of the actors themselves, and create new ones based on the different interpretations that the audience makes while viewing it. At the same time, it also seeks to make the audience participate in this transformative movement that is being forged and whose process is being built as well as documented.

Looking at the other as spectators, as Flaherty (1939) would say, we look into a mirror and see our spectrum, what we do not know about ourselves and our context. However, it is those other eyes that look at us that complete our identity. At the moment of exchange of glances between the viewers and the actors, between the one who observes and the one observed, it is when a joint image is forged that allows both to reflect on their own identity. This is probably one of the most valuable qualities of this type of resource, which allows us to reflect on our own experience, on our way of approaching and interpreting social and educational reality, and on our ability to act on it. In this way, new collective imaginaries about inclusive education are being forged, capable of permeating educational policies and institutions in order to encourage coexistence in a diverse society.

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