

**DECOLONIZING INCLUSION: NAVIGATING COLONIAL LEGACIES AND  
REIMAGINING JUST AND EQUITABLE EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES IN  
COLOMBIA**

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BOGOTÁ D.C, COLOMBIA**

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**UNIVERSIDAD PEDAGÓGICA NACIONAL**

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«Para todos los efectos, declaro que el presente trabajo es original y de mi total autoría; en aquellos casos en los cuales he requerido del trabajo de otros autores o investigadores, he dado los respectivos créditos.»

## **AGRADECIMIENTOS**

A mis padres, por estar ahí siempre, por creer mucho más en mí de lo que yo podría llegar a hacerlo, por entender que tengo unas grandes alas y no pretender cortarlas en ningún momento a lo largo de estos años.

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## ABSTRACT

This study arises from the need to highlight the inconsistencies in terms of 'inclusion' encountered when working with individuals whom the educational system assumes to be 'equal'. When facing the realities of exclusion and marginalization in daily practice, it becomes evident how the lack of awareness in 'inclusion' and educational policies perpetuate hierarchical power structures that favor Eurocentric perspectives, ignoring local knowledge and the diversity of our society.

From a decolonial perspective, this study denounces the incongruities within the Colombian educational system regarding inclusion and advocates for change. Teaching English as a foreign language becomes a focal point, as models that disregard the cultural realities of Colombian students are imposed, reinforcing the exclusion of those who do not conform to these norms and underscoring the Coloniality of knowledge, being, and power.

To this end, the methodology for data collection is based on observing and analyzing educational practices, and a documentary review of the topic. Additionally, the analysis examines institutional dynamics that perpetuate coloniality and promote an Eurocentric view that excludes and marginalizes the 'other' drawing on decolonial theory as a critical lens to interrogate these dynamics and uncover the underlying power structures.

Furthermore, this study aims to highlight disparities and suggest a shift toward an education that values and considers differences, fostering an environment where knowledge and individual learning styles are acknowledged and valued, envisioning a space where each student is taken into account and seen. This approach is based on key points, such as cognitive and learning styles in teaching. Based on the findings gathered, pedagogical guidelines are proposed for English teachers to consider in their EFL classroom.

**Keywords:** Eurocentrism, coloniality, decoloniality, epistemic violence, symbolic violence, inclusion, exclusion, cognitive and learning styles.

## RESUMEN

Este estudio surge de la necesidad de evidenciar las inconsistencias en términos de ‘inclusión’ que se viven al trabajar con personas que el sistema supone iguales. Al enfrentar las realidades de exclusión y marginalización en la práctica diaria, se evidencia cómo la falta de formación en ‘inclusión’ y las políticas educativas, perpetúan estructuras jerárquicas de poder que favorecen perspectivas eurocéntricas, ignorando el conocimiento local y la heterogeneidad de nuestra sociedad.

Desde una perspectiva decolonial, este estudio denuncia las incongruencias del sistema educativo colombiano en materia de inclusión y propone un cambio. La enseñanza del inglés como lengua extranjera se convierte en un punto focal, pues se imponen modelos que desconocen las realidades culturales de los estudiantes colombianos, reforzando la exclusión de quienes no se ajustan a estas normas, subrayando la Colonialidad del saber, del ser y del poder.

Para ello, la metodología de recolección de la información, nace de la observación y análisis de las prácticas educativas, de la experiencia docente y de la revisión documental sobre el tema. Por otro lado, se exponen las dinámicas institucionales, que perpetúan la colonialidad y promueven una perspectiva eurocéntrica que excluye y margina al ‘otro’.

Además, este estudio tiene como objetivo señalar las disparidades y sugerir un cambio hacia una educación que aprecie y tenga en cuenta las diferencias, fomentando un entorno donde se vean y se valoren los conocimientos y las formas de aprendizaje individuales, proyectando un ambiente en el que cada estudiante sea tenido en cuenta, lo anterior a partir de puntos clave,

como los estilos cognitivos y de aprendizaje al momento de enseñar. A partir de todo lo recolectado, se sugieren algunas orientaciones pedagógicas para ser tenidas en cuenta por parte de los docentes de inglés, en el aula de clase.

**Palabras clave:** Eurocentrismo, colonialidad, decolonialidad, violencia epistémica, violencia simbólica, inclusión, exclusión, estilos cognitivos y de aprendizaje.

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# *Introduction*

During the colonial era, between the 16th and 19th centuries, Colombia was part of the Spanish Empire, which imposed an unprecedented hierarchical structure that justified the oppression by the Spaniards towards those who were not of 'pure race' as they apparently were. The slavery of indigenous people and Africans allowed them to be seen as different, as others who did not have the same privileges of power as whites, moving them from being the owners of their lands to being marginalized people who did not deserve to be seen as human beings. As Galeano highlights, the conquest transformed entire civilizations into labor for European gain, erasing their autonomy and exploiting their lands and bodies (Galeano, 1971).

During colonization, economic systems were established based on haciendas and plantations, clearly owned by the Spaniards and Creoles (descendants of the Spanish, born in Latin America). For this system to work, the labor of slaves and indigenous people were used in exchange for alleged protection and the 'wonderful' prize of evangelization; that is, an exchange was made between being exploited in exchange for shaping their ideas about a God.

The segregation of human beings, the vision of 'discovered' communities as animals or soulless beings, as their colonizers saw them, has left a painful mark on our collective

memory. This dehumanization did not end with the so-called independence of colonized territories; instead, it evolved into what Anibal Quijano describes as ‘coloniality of power.’ Quijano explains that this system of thought, and organization imposed a racial hierarchy that persists today, shaping how exclusion and discrimination are perceived as natural or inevitable parts of our society (Quijano, 2000). The legacy of coloniality is not just historical—it continues to influence our present, normalizing inequalities and denying humanity to those seen as the ‘other’.

These social structures, which have preserved inequality and exclusion, may sound terrible to conceive in our minds today, as if they had not been displaced into modernity, with other faces, other thoughts, other bodies, and other minds in power. However, in a more civilized way, we continue to be part of this Coloniality of being, power, and knowledge, which to this day is breathed in each of our minds. For instance, the way in which certain groups are still marginalized and excluded from the privileges of society—whether in education, politics, or the economy—shows how deeply embedded these colonial structures are in our collective consciousness. As Lander (1993) explains:

‘The most powerful expression of the effectiveness of modern scientific thought – especially in its technocratic and neoliberal expressions that are hegemonic today – is what can be literally described as the naturalization of social relations, the notion according to which the characteristics of the so-called modern society are the expression of the spontaneous, natural tendencies of the historical development of society’ (p. 4).

As Lander states, the dynamics of modern society do not critically consider power structures or the injustices that may be involved; rather, the desire for hegemony is naturalized, and the need to integrate all beings in the same place further marks the differences. That is to say, by presenting these structures as ‘natural’ or inevitable, modern thought conceals the power relations that shape society, making it difficult to question them.

This naturalization of social relations has silenced the voices of many, leading to the exclusion of alternative ways of thinking, particularly in the academic and social spheres. When these ‘spontaneous tendencies’ are viewed as the driving force behind societal development, the colonial roots of these tendencies are ignored. This ignorance leads to the perpetuation of racism, *machismo*, and the imposition of power, all of which continue to perpetuate coloniality in our societies to this day.

There are extremely important concepts here: exclusion and inequality in the modern world, which, as Lander (1993) says, demands a deconstruction of society, and here I would dare to say that we need, and deserve, a process of individual and social decoloniality. This means truly understanding that there are others and that we are part of an unequal world, but one that should not be homogenized in order to ‘flatten the differences before those in power.

Now, the questions are: Why, in a country like Colombia, do we continue to perpetuate Coloniality in every aspect? Is our society already so molded and conditioned to be less than nothing, to accept the imposition of minimizing discourses as the only alternative for us? These questions are not meant to be answered directly, but rather to invite reflection on the deeper structures of coloniality that persist in our society, and the ways in which we are conditioned to accept them.

If we apply the previous questions to the educational field, we would see an even darker panorama, because the education system, as a central institution in shaping identities and knowledge, allowing itself to become a place of repression of thought, promotion of colonial discourse, and bias and discrimination towards students who are not part of what is considered ‘normal’ or ‘European.’ This makes the situation in education even more dire, as it perpetuates the colonial mindset from an early age. And here a quote from Santiago Castro-Gomez comes to mind: ‘All state policies and institutions (schools, constitutions, law, hospitals, prisons, etc.) will be defined by the legal imperative of ‘modernization,’ that is, by

the need to discipline passions and direct them towards the benefit of the community through work' (Castro-Gomez, 1993, p. 89). From the above, what is the real objective of the school in Colombia? Does it constantly promote critical and inclusive thinking? Or is it a shaper of passions that creates work machines? This is near to the era of colonization mentioned above, in which only the best-trained machines will give a collective benefit of cheap labor to society.

Of all that I have mentioned, the big question that gives life to this work is, if the times of colonization marked the history of our society in such a bloody and frivolous way, why do we continue perpetuating ideas of exclusion and colonialism through schools? And to arrive at an answer, we must first address what the concept of inclusion really is, which is difficult to see in a way that is not accommodated to the needs of those who profess such a utopian word.

To understand these colonial ideas that have been reproduced through education, concepts such as 'Eurocentrism,' 'epistemic violence,' and the Coloniality of being, power, and knowledge, among others, will be addressed. This will allow me to explain why the recognition and inclusion of diverse ways of knowing and being, regardless of differences, must be addressed as an essential component of epistemic justice in our society.

Considering that, here I deviate from the more accustomed academic formats. My goal is to question the very foundations of inclusion in education, particularly when it comes to colonial legacies. Rather than viewing this as a typical academic thesis, I invite you to approach it as an opportunity to reflect critically on the systems and frameworks that influence how we understand inclusion and exclusion.

Based on a comparative analysis of frameworks, policies, and practices relevant to the education ecosystem, particularly in the Colombian setting. This means examining knowledge around inclusion and bilingualism as the data through a **decolonial theoretical lens**, which

allows for the unpacking and critique of colonial structures within education. lens by asking how these frameworks can function as tools of the intergenerational settler state.

I also use ethnographic methods, including personal reflection, to explore how educators and students see and understand these practices of exclusion in everyday educational contexts. It values lived experience and helps ground our educational practice in local knowledge.

Lastly, the research integrates a decolonial theoretical framework, heavily influenced by authors, to provide a foundation for critiquing the ways in which educational systems reproduce epistemic violence. This methodology helps to examine how knowledge production is influenced by power dynamics and how these dynamics can be disrupted.

This is going to be divided in four chapters and one provisional closure. The first chapter, is about the contradictions inherent in the idea of inclusion. I explore how, more often than not, this concept hides exclusionary practices, especially in the Colombian context. This chapter helps contextualize how even the best intentions and keenest of discourses can reconstruct marginalization, while masquerading fair solutions.

The second chapter focuses on how the “other” is constructed. Here, I examine the ways in which classrooms can become spaces where epistemic and symbolic violence continues to thrive. Such practices render diversity muted and amplify dominant narratives, emphasizing the need to investigate how such dynamics repeat themselves in educational contexts.

The third chapter, in contrast, speaks to a more optimistic perspective. Decolonial education is based on the simple idea that education should be held above dual colonial projects of homogeneity: first and foremost, we should celebrate diversity, as well as social

justice as its vertical extension. It visualizes a school where the different ways of knowing and being are acknowledged and celebrated.

Finally, the fourth chapter offers a guideline for teaching English, according to all the concepts and theory evaluated before. The goal here is to challenge standardized teaching methods and encourage classrooms that respect and value individual differences. My aim is to provide educators with tools to create spaces where every student is seen, heard, and respected.

I encourage the reader to face this document with a critical perspective. This structure and arguments are designed to inspire fresh ways of understanding inclusion, education, and the transformative potential of a teacher.

**1. Inclusion? Or disguised exclusion?**

**Coloniality through concepts**

*‘Decolonization therefore requires a comprehensive rethinking of the colonial situation. Its definition can be found, if one wishes to describe it precisely, in the well-known phrase: ‘the last shall be first.’ Decolonization is the verification of this phrase. Therefore, at the level of prescriptiveness, all decolonization is an achievement.’*

*(Fanon, 1961) (own translation).*

Maybe we really are the damned of the earth, as Fanon says, if we are that group of subjects whose minds have been shaped to believe ourselves insignificant as a society. But, perhaps we have also been condemning others in the midst of our same fear, for example, through schools, which have long been spaces where exclusion operates. Schools perpetuate the idea of what is ‘normal’ and ‘acceptable,’ continuously excluding those who do not fit this standard—this standard that has been sold to us for centuries as the ideal to strive for. It is no longer just about being the white man, the goal to be achieved as a society; now, it must be the white, ‘normal’ functional individual, without any physical, cognitive, emotional peculiarity, or any apparent difference from the European model of the ‘ideal’ man.

Surely the concept of 'inclusion' is permeated and blurred by multiple definitions, contradictory to the recognition of the 'other', as it is transfigured by Eurocentrism, which excludes what does not correspond to its definition of normality. Additionally, the burden or responsibility of this alleged inclusion is directed entirely at the person with a disability, with some exceptional talent or particularity in their learning process, and not towards a society that is not prepared to assume the difference but rather solves this rupture of normality, flattening the differences.

To see the above in detail, I will begin by talking about some particularities of the concept, from different entities and positions.

### **1.1 Imposition of concepts - The chimera called inclusion**

Entering this area, when we talk about inclusion, thousands and thousands of concepts and definitions come to mind that are a bit overused, due to an attempt to argue for exclusion well disguised as inclusion.

For this reason, I attribute the 'chimera' to the concept of inclusion, since the concept has been blurred by the multiplicity of interpretations and meanings attributed to it. Although it is frequently used in educational and social discourses, its implementation often remains at the theoretical level, and as in mythology, it is made up of many parts without having a 100% identity of its own, without reaching concrete solutions or transformative practices. It is an idea that is pursued, but rarely achieved in its full magnitude, becoming a goal that seems unattainable, like a chimera.

To find a possible definition, among many, focused on the field of education, it is necessary to begin by understanding that Colombia has focused on education as a business, but paradoxically, this business is not very profitable for its true 'client': the people. The

growing disparity of strata and opportunities is manifested in an unjustifiable way in the daily life of boys and girls, especially in the educational field. However, the word 'inclusion' appears everywhere, and the question persists: what is inclusion really?

To begin with, one can look for the etymological root of this term, which comes from Latin. According to the dictionaries of the language, it comes from the word *inclusum*, participle of the verb *included*, *includis*, *includere*, *inclusi*, *inclusum* which in turn is summarized as *enclose*, *close*. The verb has the prefix *in-* which indicates penetration or being in and the verb *claudio*, *claudis*, *claudere*, *clausi*, *clausum* which means to close, prevent, enclose. (Etimologías de Chile, n.d.)

If we analyze in depth the historical and linguistic perspective of this term, we can realize that from its root the word expresses the concept of enclosing, preventing or closing, which may also be related to the influence of this term in modern society, in which through this same word marginalization and exclusion have been allowed in our colonial context. This 'colonial context' is essential to understanding how inclusion is often framed in terms of control and power, rather than true acceptance or integration.

Additionally, when we discuss a word that is so widely used in everyday contexts—especially in schools, where 'inclusion' often sounds natural in discourse but not in real actions—it becomes apparent that its epistemological definition of 'enclosing or impeding' can create a perspective of power and domination. The question arises: who holds the power to exclude or include? Perhaps, through this power that seemingly 'includes,' a multitude of exclusions and segregations have been perpetuated.

This etymological definition says a lot about what is seen, to enclose, to close, to prevent.' Inclusion is a rather complex term and mistreated from its deepest roots, but to give it a little more meaning I will develop this concept further below.

When addressing this term, we enter a complex field where individual differences and the specific needs of each human being must be the epicenter of the educational process. According to Martín-Pastor and Durán Martínez (2019), inclusion is conceived as an educational approach that seeks to guarantee equal opportunities in the teaching-learning process for all students, regardless of their differences or needs. Although it sounds promising in theory, the Colombian reality presents a challenging panorama.

Contrasting the previous definition of inclusion, we find one of the apparently most inclusive components of Colombian education, as follows:

In Colombia, the so-called 'PIAR' (Individual Plan of Reasonable Adjustments) was created by Decree 1421 of 2017, in accordance with various articles of the Colombian Political Constitution, Law 115, Law 1098 (Childhood and Adolescence Code), Statutory Law of 2013, and Decree 1075 of 2015. This is based on Article 13 of the Political Constitution, which states:

*'All people are born free and equal before the law, shall receive the same protection and treatment from the authorities and shall enjoy the same rights, freedoms, and opportunities without any discrimination based on sex, race, national or family origin, language, religion, political or philosophical opinion. The State shall promote the conditions for equality to be real and effective and shall adopt measures in favor of discriminated or marginalized groups. The State shall especially protect those people who, due to their economic, physical, or mental condition, find themselves in circumstances of manifest weakness and shall punish any abuse or mistreatment committed against them.'*

It is from this ruling that the aforementioned PIAR is established, which, according to Decree 1075, is:

‘A tool used to guarantee the teaching and learning processes of students, based on pedagogical and social assessment, which includes the reasonable support and adjustments required, including curricular, infrastructure, and all other necessary components to guarantee learning, participation, permanence, and promotion. These are inputs for the classroom planning of the respective teachers and the Institutional Improvement Plan (PMI), as a complement to the transformations carried out based on UDL.’ (Article 2.3.3.5.1.4, Decree 1075 of 2015).

Here even more doubts begin to arise, when these structured definitions that are established as obligatory for all educational institutions are contrasted, but in the reality of education, whether public or private, there is no evidence of physical conditions, trained professionals, training for teachers in general, and much less the intentions of many educational institutions to make these utopian words a reality.

Many private institutions accept and ensure that they are part of inclusive processes in the classroom, in order to increase the annual points that allow them to monetize said inclusion and see the fruitful result in the increase in annual enrollment and their respective monthly fees.

This can be confirmed in the institutional self-assessment published in the ‘EVI’ (Institutional Evaluation and Fees Information System for Private Preschool, Basic, and Secondary Educational Establishments) each year, there the institutions through the document of the Vice Ministry of Preschool, Basic, and Secondary Education (2022), in *Guide 4: Manual for self-assessment and classification of private preschool, basic, and secondary establishments*, this guide evaluates essential criteria for continuous improvement, and one of the points that are evident in different parts of the document is inclusion, where it is usually evaluated in ‘outstanding results’ to raise points and be able to raise prices in pensions.

However, this loses its true meaning when, in reality, many teachers in these institutions—such as myself when I first started teaching—are unaware of key concepts like the ‘PIAR’ or have heard it vaguely at some point in their academic training or work experience.

This lack of information or training about these topics shows a clear lack of information and real follow-up in the country's institutions, and it is a sad panorama, because the average teacher does not have the tools or information, for being part of a process of recognition of differences, but rather fits in with the students, promoting these colonial structures, as equals in a classroom.

To close this part, the term ‘reasonable adjustments’ sounds a bit noisy, as a fundamental doubt arises, the meaning of the term is certainly ambiguous: reasonable for whom or according to whom? Reasonable for the person who presents a specific situation, or reasonable for a society that seeks to hegemonize?

The word ‘reasonable’ is quite subjective depending on who sees it and especially for those who try to implement it. For a teacher or even the whole institution, what is reasonable may be that the student somehow ‘adjusts’ to the cognitive or physical level or to the capacities and skills of his or her peers, to facilitate the process, while for a student with a disability, for example, it may be reasonable to find appropriate strategies to significantly improve his or her process, understanding the particularities of his or her process.

The concept of reasonableness can also be linked to limitations such as economic ones, as opposed to opportunities, which is why it also becomes subjective, depending on the opinion or ethical perspective of the person making the adjustment or the resources—such as time, funding, or institutional support—available to them for implementing it.

Now, continuing with the journey of the term inclusion, we can find that this word has been distorted throughout history, in Colombia and the world, adopting various interpretations. According to the Ministry of National Education of Colombia, inclusion implies allowing the participation and decision-making of those who have been previously excluded, with the fundamental objective of not leaving anyone out of institutions, whether in the educational, physical or social sphere. However, this definition raises crucial questions.

How can participation and decision-making be achieved in a context where the voice of children with cognitive or physical disabilities or exceptional abilities is often silenced? The Colombian reality does not favour genuine inclusion, where educational systems do not allow these children to express their opinions on a curriculum or facilities that do not meet their needs.

On the other hand, it is ironic that the Ministry of Education mentions not leaving anyone out when, in practice, the suicide rate among indigenous youth is growing alarmingly. Colombian Institute of Family Welfare (ICBF) 2020. Are not those who, despite their differences, fight against exclusion and lack of opportunities being left out of this definition?

This example of indigenous communities is brought up, since in practice, inclusion becomes a monumental challenge when educational systems do not adapt to the diversity of needs and realities of students. While the Ministry of Education advocates for non-exclusion, the sad reality shows that indigenous youth, feel excluded not only from educational opportunities but also from society itself.

It is important to mention in this connection also the concept of *negritudes* as seen by authors like Césaire, which is of primary importance. It carries the resonances of Césaire's call to reclaim identity and oppose colonial structures that have historically marginalized Afro-descendant peoples in Colombia, who still suffer from exclusion on educational and social levels, in the present days (Césaire, 2000) .

Looking into this further, we might ask, what better instance do we have than this— how different outside of academia do we view superiority and marginalization. Ideas of superiority and the desire to exhaust others are the main qualities of colonialism that are engrained within our mind. Because as Fanon (1961) puts it, colonizers could not perceive indigenous people as humans but inferior beings. This entire concept, which remained almost unquestioned during colonization itself is what people have been slowly reproducing. In a more insidious manner, perhaps, if one may say so in modern education, so in society.

Continuing with definitions, inclusion as a concept becomes blurred in a complex web of contradictions when the reality of education in Colombia is closely analyzed. The government's definition of 'allowing participation and decision' sounds like a noble purpose, but the disconnect between this statement and the daily experience of students reveals a deep and discouraging gap.

This, in essence, should be a process that encompasses everyone, taking into account the particularities of each individual or community. However, in many cases, it becomes an instrument that is more exclusive than inclusive. The imposition of uniform proposals for diverse societies ignores the specific needs of each student or community. The term has become blurred, so much so that today it is reduced to being a synonym for disability.

'Inclusion must encompass not only special needs, but also issues of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, age, culture, and social class. The fundamental idea is that exclusion from society has a common root in "intolerance of difference."' Hodkinson (2011). The above might come a little closer to a possible definition of what would be ideally understood by inclusion, but there are still some parts of the puzzle that need to be played with.

Additionally, this definition is not part of Colombia, or even Latin America, it is part of the proposal of an English writer, 'from the first world' and from here we see how the

perspective changes according to society, surely, they do not bear the condemnation of being ‘beings without soul.’ Fanon (1967)

As a further illustration of how the previous definition becomes more exclusive is the impossibility of making a comparison between the reality of a student of the private sector in the metropolitan region of Bogotá and that of a child of a rural location with low technological availability. And this is an image of exclusion that is made to look like inclusion where the latter is forced to use technological programs so foreign to their everyday life in order to be taught a different language.

In Colombia, this rural-urban educational difference has been examined by Castañeda (2019) and Gonzalez (2016) who pointed out that poverty and lack of technology in rural areas worsen the education largely ignored in the educational policies. This gap demonstrates how the concept of inclusion in relation to these learners is not only distant from their reality but also how educational systems still uphold the exclusionary practices.

Inclusion cannot be limited to an idealistic statement; it must address inequities rooted in the very structure of the education system. How can we talk about inclusion when the differences between a student from a privileged sector in a cosmopolitan city and an indigenous student in a rural area are so abysmal? The imposition of methodologies and tools without considering the cultural context and local realities undermines the true purpose of inclusion, if there is one at all.

## **1.2 Inclusion summarized in a ‘check list’:**

### **Draft Statutory Law on Education and National Bilingualism Plan**

Now, the most recent statutory bill (2023) proposes the inclusion in Article 5, where the principles are explained, such as: ‘d) Inclusion. The fundamental right to education will be guaranteed through public policies that eliminate any barrier, exclusion, discrimination or

segregation that prevents or hinders any person from accessing, permanence, and enjoying their rights, and additionally proposes: ‘a) Equity. Affirmative actions will be adopted that seek to close gaps in the educational system.’

That statutory draft law speaks on multiple occasions of inclusion for all and the impossibility of exclusion under any circumstances; however, it does not consider how, or through what, this inclusion will be carried out, or how this elimination of ‘any barriers’ is reflected.

We live in a society with abysmal structural gaps, which are very striking when trying to apply any type of ‘equal’ education for all, if we do not consider that not everyone is equal. For example, the teaching of English has been proposed, so that Colombians become bilingual in a specific time, but the child who walks for three hours through unsafe places to get to school, where he will surely spend an entire day without eating, is not taken into account, but supposedly ‘everyone is guaranteed an education in an equitable and inclusive manner.’

Specifically speaking about this topic, and going a little deeper into bilingualism, the draft statutory law mentions the word ‘inclusion’ 23 times in different ways throughout its document, without clarifying what they specifically mean by inclusion, and leaving loose ideas such as the following:

*Article 26: The educational system must strive to instill respect for people with disabilities, fostering their inclusion and human dignity.*

*Paragraph. The Ministry of National Education, in conjunction with territorial entities, will progressively implement inclusive bilingual provision and access to technology for people with disabilities in the country's educational system.*

However, there is not much information about this progressive implementation of the inclusive bilingual offer for people with disabilities, and it is not seen as something serious,

but rather a paragraph that is added to talk about meeting the inclusion quota, but without giving it the importance it requires.

In fact, in the most recent national plan for Bilingualism, '*Colombia Very Well*,' in its 24 pages of explanation or publicity for the project, the word inclusion is mentioned only once, in the section that names social development, and it is very interesting how said development is subdivided into: equity, inclusion, homogeneity and cultural exchange.

And they are absolutely right, there is no talk of being inclusive, there is talk of trying to be homogeneous; that is, that there are no differences, but this is not seen as a friendly project for people with disabilities, on the contrary, this perspective is completely violent.

Likewise, it is difficult to find a definition of a word like 'inclusion' in a national plan for 'bilingualism' that does not even provide a concrete definition of what it means to be bilingual. Is an indigenous person who speaks indigenous languages plus Spanish bilingual? Or is only someone who speaks English, a language much missed by the global market, bilingual?

However, later I will address in depth the epistemic violence that arises through this national plan for Bilingualism, from the teaching of English in the country in general, analyzing other factors that are not taken into account when teaching the language, because 'Colombia must be Bilingual', as the greatest goal in our educational system, not becoming a country that reduces poverty, war, racism, abuse, among other seemingly insignificant things.

### **1.3 Eurocentric inclusion**

Now, we will address the concept of inclusion from a Eurocentric perspective. According to Edgardo Lander, in the text – *Coloniality of knowledge, Eurocentrism and social sciences* (2000), the hegemonic influence of neoliberal thought is addressed, which

presents its historical narrative as objective and universal knowledge, supported by specific historical-cultural conditions.

Neoliberalism is seen as a purified extract of tensions and contradictions, which allows it to constitute the common sense of modern society. This hegemonic effectiveness is attributed to transformations in power relations, including the disappearance of political oppositions such as real socialism.

But, to be clearer with a possible definition of what Eurocentrism is and why it is so important for the present document, it would be the definition offered by Mignolo (2000), in the text *Capitalism and Geopolitics of Knowledge: Eurocentrism and the Philosophy of Liberation in Contemporary Intellectual Debate*, a text in which he compiles what was initially cited in this case, by Khatibi (1971).

*'This people, the North, Europe (and, for Hegel, Germany and England in particular), have, in other words, an 'absolute right' because it is the 'bearer' (Zrdger) of the spirit in its 'moment of development' (Entwicklungsstufe). Against this, no other people can be said to have its own rights, and certainly nothing to raise against Europe. This is one of the clearest definitions not only of Eurocentrism but of the sacralization of the imperial power of the North or the Center over the South, the periphery, the colonial and dependent world of antiquity. Any comment is unnecessary. The text speaks in its cruelty of an unlimited cynicism that masks itself as the 'development' of 'reason' itself,' (Khatibi, 1971).*

As Khatibi (1971) says, it is as if the colonizers of the earth had that absolute right to say and do what they consider correct, with the rest of humanity, and as what is European in this case, is what is 'correct' and 'good', what is not European or bearer of spirit at its moment of development, as the author defines it, simply should not even be observed, it should be relegated.

When we analyze the concept of inclusion that has been presented to us, we realize that it often fails to genuinely consider what is different. A person with a disability, experience of displacement, cognitive differences, etc., is often perceived as inferior through the lens of Eurocentrism and does not fit into the ‘normality’ that societal norms seek to impose.

On the other hand, Arturo Escobar (1995), in ‘Encountering Development. The Making and Unmaking of the Third World,’ criticizes the postwar European development discourse, arguing that it colonizes reality through unequal power. Unequal power is a way of exercising dominance in societies that are not equal or flattened, since neglected difference is easier to dominate.

This concept is very interesting to me, because the more unequal a society is, but apparently homogeneous, so as not to attack its difficulties, the easier it will be to dominate, subdue and enslave the people. This is not different from what happens in Colombia, or I would dare say in Latin America, Africa and all those condemned in the so-called third world.

#### **1.4 Epistemic violence, denial and invention of the other**

Now, continuing with this stain of Eurocentrism in our current concepts, we find epistemic violence and the invention of the other. The author, Castro-Gómez (2005), explores the criticisms raised by postmodern philosophy and cultural studies of Western pathologies, especially the dualistic and exclusionary nature of modern power relations.

The above is shocking when we see that the dualistic and exclusive nature is beneficial for the colonization of knowledge, for the simple and natural domination of a society. This epistemic violence is clearly reflected in a culture like ours, which constantly speaks of

'inclusion' but does nothing to make it really work, or even to really clarify what it refers to, at least in the educational sector.

Castro-Gómez (2005), studies the notion of the 'invention of the other' in the Latin American context of the 19th century, highlighting disciplinary practices such as constitutions, manuals of civility and grammars of the language. These practices are presented as devices of knowledge/power that contributed to the construction of citizenship and the creation of cultural identities, establishing boundaries between those considered modern citizens and those excluded as the 'others.'

The above is a clear example of how these manuals, constitutions and different Colombian documents deepen that invention of the other, creating these limits between what they consider normal and the 'others' who are constantly named as someone who complies with a roll call protocol, but do not review in detail the needs of each individual within the process.

Those 'others' are the ones whose differences are being flattened, as has already been addressed in this search for a meaning for the word inclusion. This invention of the other is seen in our country where a few are seen as a strange part of society, which must be moulded so that we are all equal, but it is not considered.

Furthermore, they are people who are usually called 'disabled, special, different' among other terms that can be heard daily, but they are not seen as human beings with disabilities, not responsible for this, but rather they are blamed for their differences, without seeing that the main culprit is a society that is not prepared to understand that there are 'others.'

Now, continuing with the theme of Eurocentrism, it is interesting to see how for many years authors like Aimé Césaire (2000), Edward Said (1978), and Anibal Quijano (2000),

Fanon (1961), among others, have been writing about this topic, crying out for a change and a counter position to this epistemic violence, imposed by the 'ideal' Europe. However, to this day, no significant difference is seen.

Frantz Fanon (1961), in his book 'The Wretched of the Earth' speaks of the need to create a new man, distant from the one imposed by Eurocentrism, he speaks to the so-called third world countries, so that they can truly recognize themselves through themselves and not through third parties.

Fanon also speaks of the need to dismantle Eurocentric concepts and go against this epistemic violence, which is an imposition of discourses that dehumanize people and justify colonization through power. This means questioning these hegemonic narratives that seek to flatten differences, marginalize some voices, and begin to build a society that understands and creates its own forms.

Now, to see a little more about the concept of inclusion through Eurocentrism, we start from the analysis made by Mignolo (2007), who through his postcolonial critique, tells us about the selective or systemic way in which some concepts operate, according to their need. At this point, if we analyze the word inclusion, we can see that it conveniently shows the acceptance of some and their recognition, while systemically rendering others invisible.

The above is to use a term in such a way that non-Western perspectives can be marginalized, their difference is minimized and they are blamed for their situation, while in a supposedly kind way the selective acceptance and inclusion of a few is made visible.

Analyzing the above, an environment of endocoloniality is created among ourselves, in societies like the Colombian one, which little by little sees everything from a Eurocentric perspective, and tries to judge others who are not considered at its level, it is as if within

Colombia, this endocoloniality arose in which the 'others', the 'non-normal' ones, are included through texts, to be excluded in reality.

The concept of endocoloniality can be observed from the repressive regimes of the 19th century. The processes of modernization and 'civilization' that Latin America went through in our case, brought with them discrimination and domination not only on the part of the colonizers, but also within societies.

Though these discourses were articulated through an imagined hierarchy that was progressively productive, in most cases it was concealing violence. They conceal the forcing of certain ways of life and structure of society that serves the elites or the powerful people and marginalize the inputs of peasants or indigenous people or any who do not fit within the European norm. This advanced the clear demarcation of 'the civilized' and 'the others' to a situation where systemic exclusion and violence were leveled against the other communities.

To explain deeper the concept of endocoloniality, Rosa Luxemburg's comments on her book 'the Bolsheviks in power' (Luxembourg, 1922) that, the societies themselves rather than the opposition leaders who are elected to power tend to be oppressive and abusive to the society that elected them.

This mode of oppression is not peculiar to colonizers or outsiders. Rather than emancipating and liberating the people they govern, even those with internalized governance begin to exploit and enslave the people. This is echoing the colonial scenario where there is the reproduction and maintenance of power relations giving way to a sub-colonization of the same people.

In her criticisms, Rosa Luxemburg pointed out that the Bolsheviks, led by Lenin and Trotsky, had taken authoritarian and repressive decisions that went against the ideals of freedom and socialist democracy that they originally defended. Part of these repressions were

the dissolution of the Constituent Assembly, the elimination of other socialist parties and the concentration of power in the hands of the State and the party. For Luxemburg (1922), these actions not only betrayed revolutionary principles, but also created an internal colonization, where the new government exercised oppressive control over workers and the population in general.

The above is not far from the reality of Colombian society, we went from being colonized, to breathing Coloniality and later to promoting endocoloniality, that is to say that the forms of power and colonial dynamics continue to be manifested within the society that was once colonized, and said colonized people continue to exercise internal domination through power, which can be seen manifested in social, political, economic institutions, etc.... which once again accentuate marginalization and inequality.

Regarding inclusion, endocolonialism is fully evident, and as Luxemburg (1922) criticizes, it also happens in our country, we are colonial within the possibilities that power allows us, to minimize those who are apparently not good within a population like ours.

### **1.5. Who is the other or who are the others?**

Taking all of the above into account, how should inclusion in education work? The concept of genuine inclusion involves recognizing and addressing the systemic barriers that perpetuate inequality. It is an invitation to rethink education from its foundations, considering the diverse identities, abilities and needs of students. It involves a re-evaluation of educational policies, an adaptation of teaching methods and a serious commitment to equal opportunities for all.

This word, overused by so many, should not be a set of empty letters or a label applied superficially. It must be reflected in concrete actions that transform education into a space

where every boy and girl, regardless of their circumstances, finds an environment conducive to their development.

In the Colombian case, this means overcoming the geographical, cultural and socioeconomic barriers that perpetuate exclusion and working towards an educational system that truly fulfills the promise of inclusion for all.

Real inclusion, in the educational context of our country, goes beyond declarations of principles and definitions of inclusion. It implies a profound change in the structure of the educational system, a genuine commitment to equity and adaptation to the diverse realities of students and societies.

The above clearly sounds like a utopia, and I am clear that this requires a thorough review of existing educational policies to ensure that inclusion is not only proclaimed but translated into concrete measures. This includes the allocation of adequate resources to meet the specific needs of students with special needs or exceptional abilities, considering both physical and pedagogical aspects.

Inclusion also involves significant adaptation of teaching methods. It is not simply a matter of applying one-size-fits-all solutions, but of recognizing and respecting the diversity of learning styles, abilities and cultural backgrounds. Educational programs must be flexible and responsive, allowing each student to develop their full potential, regardless of their particularity.

In a broader sense, true inclusion, when seen as a chimera, goes beyond the classroom and extends to society as a whole. It means removing the barriers already mentioned, which limit access to education, whether for geographical, economic, or cultural reasons. This implies a comprehensive commitment to creating an environment that not only tolerates, but observes, respects and contributes to difference.

In conclusion, real inclusion in education implies a fundamental change in mentality and educational practices. It goes beyond words and demands concrete actions that address the inequalities rooted in the system. Only when every boy and girl, regardless of their differences, have the means in every aspect to learn and, above all, access to an education adapted to their needs, will we be able to speak of authentic and transformative inclusion. We will discuss this in more depth in the following chapter, in order to try to understand who the others are or who we are.

### **1.6 What term fits into Colombian bilingualism, inclusion or exclusion?**

"Thus, by imposing a particular notion of bilingualism, the National Bilingual Program does not seem to provide a favorable context for these cultural and language minorities; instead, it seems to continue to stratify and under-appreciate them. Additionally, this policy seems to contribute to the promotion of 'elite bilingualism,' a process that was described by de Mejía (2002) within the context of private bilingual schools, but now seems to expand to the whole nation" (Usma Wilches, 2009, p. 135).

As Usma (2009) mentions in this quote from his text *'Education and Language Policy in Colombia: Exploring Processes of Inclusion, Exclusion, and Stratification in Times of Global Reform'*, the notion of bilingualism that has been imposed is not favorable for the Colombian context, much less the National Bilingualism Project, which seems to stratify those who can access quality education and those who cannot, at least in the teaching of English, the only language that is apparently accepted in order to become truly bilingual.

In chapter two, I will explain in more detail what inclusion or exclusion presupposes for bilingualism in our country, but in general terms, we can open this important episode by talking about how what is imposed in the current language policy in Colombia is completely removed from reality and the Colombian context.

To begin with, we are part of a market that sells international tests as if they were essential for being a suitable professional or student in any institution, making the process of learning a language a very profitable business for a few. However, this approach is demanding and carries a strong component of epistemic violence for others. In other words, the system imposes a standardized view of what it means to be proficient in a language, disregarding the linguistic and cultural realities of those who do not fit into this narrow framework, marginalizing their knowledge and experience.

Moreover, the minimal importance given to indigenous languages in the NBP (National Bilingualism Plan), reveals an exclusion and discrimination by certain cultures, which apparently are not European or important enough for speaking two languages (one indigenous) to be considered Bilingualism, and here we can link it with what was previously mentioned about the Coloniality of power, knowledge and being, in which we are so immersed, perhaps those indigenous peoples are those 'others' that do not matter to Colombia, much less to the world.

Additionally, these are not the only reasons why we observe an exclusive and discriminatory NBP, since the social and economic gaps that exist in Colombia do not allow us to see equal opportunities for students, and the differences do not only occur between rural and urban areas, but within the same capital city like Bogotá, we see abysmal differences.

Continuing with Usma's text (2009), this is not a secret for our society, a private school in the north of a city like the capital of the country, has no point of comparison with the social, emotional, economic and all kinds of needs, contrasted with a public school. According to Usma (2009), the processes of exclusion are not just given at the discursive level, but also through a new set of practices that certify and sort students and teachers, place them in public, private, or bilingual institutions, and offer disparate resources and unequal quality in different school programs.

The above is invisible to the eyes of those in charge of creating the National Bilingualism Plan, since it seems that absolutely each individual learns, knows and lives in the same way, totally ignoring the implacable reality of such an unequal country, and once again affirming that what they seek with their dominance through power is to flatten the differences.

Criticism of the National Bilingualism Plan in Colombia has been explored by several authors who point out the challenges that this plan faces, which affect its effectiveness. Including González (2019), who highlights that there is often a disconnect between educational policies and classroom reality, suggesting that bilingualism initiatives overlook the sociocultural context of students.

Guerrero (2020) also highlights that focusing on foreign language teaching can devalue native languages and negatively affect students' self-image. In addition, Cárdenas (2018) and Correa (2021) underline the importance of critically evaluating the methods used and training teachers who understand the linguistic diversity of the country.

Together, these critical perspectives align with my earlier argument, since, although the goal of being bilingual is striking. Because, while the apparently purpose of bilingualism sounds good in theory, we can see that its implementation needs some serious adjustments if it is going to truly benefit all Colombian students. If not, it risks perpetuating the exclusion that already exists in our society.

If we look deeper into how these policies are put into practice, we will start to see how they affect different communities, especially those in rural areas. As I said before, students in these places often do not have the resources or opportunities needed to meet the high expectations set by these policies. Plus, the way bilingualism is defined and applied in schools often leaves out indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities, whose languages and cultural identities are frequently ignored or undervalued.

## **II. Who are the ‘others’?**

### **Observing the invisible in classrooms**

**"El poder se ejerce sobre los cuerpos y las mentes, definiendo al 'otro' como lo anormal, lo enfermo, lo criminal. La otredad es una categoría creada por las estructuras de poder."**

**— Foucault, 1975**

Now, after making a brief overview of some of the inconsistencies in the term 'inclusion', in this chapter I will focus on those particular factors that are not normally considered when talking about inclusive education in our country, without this generating a utopian confusion for those who read me.

The above, taking into account that it is not foreign to me or to any other teacher, the dynamics that we face in a classroom, which make it difficult to really talk about real inclusion, the social, economic and emotional context of the students, are just some aspects that could contradict when applying this in a classroom.

However, it is even more difficult to believe that there is simply resignation towards the fact of seeing the other, and that a Coloniality of which we are a part, clouds our reason to even begin to change a reality that is unfavorable for many, even from something minimal.

Foucault (1975) shows that this need to close our eyes to difference is nothing new for our society, so we are determined to claim that we are equal:

An old legacy of the dungeons of the Middle Ages? More like new technology: the development, from the 16th to the 19th century, of a true set of procedures for zoning, controlling, measuring, channeling individuals and making them at the same time ‘docile and useful.’ Surveillance, exercises, maneuvers, qualifications, ranks and places, classifications, exams, records, a way of subduing bodies, of dominating multiplicities of humans and manipulating their forces, has developed over the course of the classic centuries, in hospitals, in the army, schools, colleges or workshops: the discipline (p. 5).

From this quote, I find the section ‘dominating human multiplicities and manipulating their forces’ particularly interesting, because as we have seen before, it is easier to have a docile and submissive society, which clearly does not recognize the difference but rather minimizes those who are not the ‘ideal’ man, because that way, it will be a much easier society to mould and dominate.

The term endocoloniality, discussed in the previous chapter, is somewhat related to ‘mimicry’ which, although not identical, speaks of those power structures that are replicated in the colonized and are perpetuated by the colonized, generating a cultural ambivalence. ‘Mimicry is not a simple reproduction of colonial discourse. It is the process by which the colonized subjects are ‘reformed’ and ‘improved,’ but in such a way that the new social form is always, as it were, inappropriate’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 122).

Bhabha (1994) speaks about this term ‘mimicry’ in a critical and timely manner, showing how colonized subjects try to adopt and reflect specific behaviors, attitudes and characteristics of the colonizers, in order to then exercise a certain Coloniality of power, knowledge and being within their own society: *‘Mimicry emerges as one of the most elusive and effective strategies of colonial power and knowledge. It is the sign of a double*

*articulation; a complex strategy of reform, regulation, and discipline, which 'appropriates' the Other as it visualizes power' (Bhabha, 1994, p. 126).*

Therefore, the intention of this second chapter is nothing more than to understand that breaking this endocoloniality, mimicry, and other barriers that were imposed on us at the time, but that we still reproduce, is something that will surely take centuries, if it ever becomes a reality, but there is no other way than to start right now. Therefore, the question to be addressed during this chapter is, What should really be considered when talking about inclusive education?

## **2.1 Epistemic and cultural diversity - decolonizing the classroom.**

To begin to address this topic, we will talk about the meaning of the term 'epistemic diversity' based on the text 'The decolonial turn', where Castro-Gómez and Grosfoguel pose epistemic diversity as the variety of knowledge and ways of interpreting the world, especially those that go beyond the dominant visions imposed by Eurocentrism and Western modernity.

Epistemic diversity, then, is understanding the importance and appreciating different traditions of knowledge, especially those that have been ignored or marginalized.

In the text, the authors also relate epistemic diversity as a way of fostering a fairer dialogue between different forms of knowledge, which allows for a more complete and profound understanding of reality. This implies not only conventional academic knowledge, but also indigenous and local wisdom, as well as other forms of knowledge that can provide valuable perspectives to address current problems. 'The recognition of epistemic diversity leads to conceiving the concepts of decolonization as invitations to dialogue, and not as impositions of an enlightened class' (Castro-Gómez & Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 162).

Continuing a little with this type of styles, which are not taken into account in our society—such as all those ancestral knowledge and cultures that seem so far from the European one—we find the author Walsh (2012), who, in her text *Critical interculturality and decolonial thought*, speaks of those processes of hierarchy of knowledge. For example, Afro-descendant or indigenous knowledge is minimized. There is also talk of the coloniality of knowledge through these dynamics, where it is not considered that there are different cognitive styles, and that not everyone knows and/or learns the same thing. And why not? It is not useful for everyone to learn the same thing within their context.

Also, Walsh (2012) speaks of the term ‘cultural diversity’ which I find very striking when it comes to establishing a more inclusive dialogue within the classroom, because we talk about the different learning styles, and those specific knowledges that are relegated, but we rarely talk about the cultures from which teaching and learning should also start, one should not teach in the same way when the cultures themselves speak a different language.

In the section ‘(Re)Coloniality, neoliberal reason and multicultural politics’ Walsh (2012) talks about the physical and intellectual struggle that social-ancestral movements have waged for years and years to be considered and enjoy rights and recognition in a society that has always marginalized them.

In the history of Colombia and the world, there has been evidence of classification and social control based on the idea of ‘race’ that one has, marking those ‘others’ ‘non-Europeans’ and even worse for many, blacks or indigenous people, as those silenced in terms of education and knowledge.

The curricula I have been able to work with throughout my professional career, in institutions whether district or private, do not take into account that diversity of knowledge, since the most important is to comply with Basic Learning Rights, which always point to those ‘basic or fundamental areas or disciplines’ of knowledge.

The terms mentioned above already create confusion in this case. What is the basic or fundamental thing that should be learned in life? And according to whom?. Why does a person who belongs to an indigenous community, with years and years of alternative medicinal traditions, have to be judged in a classroom and excluded? Because this knowledge has nothing to do with what for some, is the basic or fundamental.

With the above, I do not want to affirm that these subjects mentioned in the curricular guidelines are not necessary or important in the education of our country, but perhaps they are not the only approach or should not be closed to that cultural dialogue that the school should assume.

In this part, we can start to involve the term ‘interculturality,’ which, according to Walsh (2012), is:

Understanding interculturality as a process and project directed towards the construction of ‘other’ ways of power, knowledge, being, and living allows us to go far beyond the current assumptions and manifestations of intercultural education, bilingual intercultural education, or even intercultural philosophy. It is not about arguing from the simple relationship between groups, practices, or cultural thoughts, for the incorporation of those traditionally excluded within existing structures (educational, disciplinary, or thought), or only from the creation of ‘special’ programs that allow ‘normal’ and ‘universal’ education to continue perpetuating racialized and exclusionary practices and thoughts (pp. 11-12).

This term, as explained by the author, has a lot to do with the construction of knowledge from those who have no direct relationship with our customs and ideas of seeing the world. But educational structures as named in the quote, sometimes tend to fill requirements and programs that are apparently inclusive in schools, for example the PIAR and the DUA in our country, but which continue to perpetuate exclusionary practices.

Additionally, according to DANE (2023), the migration figures to Colombia from other countries in the world have grown enormously, giving home to many people of different cultures and worldviews, who although they often speak the same language as us, there is a gap between them with multiple differences that sometimes do not allow us to understand certain things in the same way as those of us who have lived in this territory all our lives, but are often invisible to a curriculum and its planning.

It is there where this epistemic diversity, which is permeated by interculturality that is often ignored or made invisible, is one of the main factors to review when teaching languages or any subject or discipline in our country and in the world.

Anyone reading this document may wonder what the teaching of foreign languages, or specifically English, has to do with ancestral knowledge, indigenous culture, among others? The answer is everything. Language should be a bridge that connects ideas, people, cultures, knowledge, not something that tries to dissipate differences and flatten everyone's thinking, molding it towards the Eurocentric, or towards those norths that have apparently already adapted to its model.

## **2.2 Cognitive styles and learning styles**

To begin talking about cognitive styles, Tennant (1988) defines cognitive style as "a person's usual or typical way of solving problems, thinking, perceiving, and remembering." However, for a long time, in universities, schools, and from those discourses of power, cognitive styles have been discussed, but this is not considered when facing a classroom with a group of students who are always diverse and different, even if we force ourselves to call ourselves all 'equal.'

And it is often heard in the classrooms of teachers in institutions, or at least I have heard it, that these kids, no matter how many tricks I do, do not learn. And I, as a teacher of English and Spanish as a foreign language for about 8 years, have often struggled with that intrusive thought that whispers in my ear that even though I think my class is great, the students really do not seem very consistent with what I think, and apparently do not seem to learn what is being conveyed.

But few times, on the contrary, I had sat down to review what happens with the styles of each one of them, which apparently are very distant from my standard teaching model, but to understand a little more about this I will review a little more what this topic is about.

Professors Hederich and Camargo (2000) have spoken in their different texts about cognitive styles and their importance within an educational context, mentioning how this comes from "the theory of psychological differentiation." The above, after analyzing how studies are conducted to talk about academic achievement, looking for the variables that allegedly influence it, but in this academic achievement, the cognitive style is not taken into account, which, according to the authors, is something individual: "the cognitive style is an individual characteristic, of a psychological nature, closely linked to cognitive functioning, and therefore, to the learning process" (Hederich & Camargo, 2000, p. 2).

As the authors also mention, this sounds simpler than it seems. It is not about the content or the knowledge that we want the student to achieve, but rather how this learning process occurs, which cannot be hegemonic in a context such as that of Colombian schools where students are so different, even in the same classroom and place.

Although it is said that cognitive style is an individual characteristic, it arises as a result of the interaction of family and cultural variables (Hederich & Camargo, 2000). This further widens the difference or variety in a classroom, understanding the very distant family and cultural contexts that can be found in the same classroom.

Moreover, Mayer (2009) talks about the need in education to understand how information is processed according to the cognitive styles of learners, speaking of the important role of the teacher in creating materials that enhance the retention of information and its understanding, based on the different styles that can be found in the population in which it is applied.

Mayer (2009) also talks about the reduction of unnecessary cognitive load in the teaching and learning process, which can interfere with learning in a negative way. Overstimulation in children currently has a great impact; we are in an era in which information comes from everywhere and with little filtering, which is why this theory can be very effective in the educational context.

To go into more detail, Mayer (2009) emphasizes the importance of what he calls the "interaction between learning modalities." As he explores, a key example to clarify what cognitive style refers to is how the way of presenting information can either favor or hinder the student. For instance, presenting data visually may not be as effective for someone with a verbal learning style, and vice versa.

Professors Hederich and Camargo (1999) also spoke about the above when they explained cognitive styles according to the information processing modalities, depending on the individual processes that each person uses to process and store the content to which they are exposed.

Likewise, Hederich and Camargo (1999) speak of the importance of knowing these styles in the educational environment, to facilitate more effective learning. But the authors throughout their extensive career have not only spoken of cognitive styles, but also of learning styles.

For some authors, learning styles have been interchangeable with cognitive styles. For example, Dewey (1938) speaks of a need to adapt education to the specific needs of each individual, taking into account their cognitive and learning style, which reveals an air of similarity between the two terms.

For his part, Fleming (1992) with his VARK model classified learning styles between: (Visual), (Auditory), (Read/Write) and (Kinesthetic), seeing them as the way in which the learner processes information through these styles, which also makes it look very close to cognitive styles.

But to understand a possible difference between both concepts, we could take into account, on the one hand, Witkin (1962), in his theory of field dependence/independence, which is also discussed by the authors Hederich-Martínez, Camargo-Urbe, Taborda-Chaurra, Tobón-Vásquez, and Zuluaga-Valencia (2023), said theory refers to how people understand and process information according to their context or environment.

On the one hand, people dependent on the Witkin (1962) field require more specific guides or those with delimited structures and find it more difficult to divide a problem or situation into small parts. In contrast, people independent of the field find individual work easier and do not need as much external guidance to analyze or separate the information they receive.

The above is important in the field of cognitive styles, as it shows that one must take into account how the student understands the concepts or knowledge according to their way of seeing the world or understanding their environment.

Also, learning styles focus more on the strategies that individuals use to acquire new knowledge or skills, and speak in more detail about the types of assimilation and accommodation of knowledge according to each student, such as the visual, auditory,

kinesthetic and reading/writing dimensions Kolb (1984), which should be taken into account in the teaching/learning of any discipline.

According to what I can see, between what has been read and my experience in the classroom, cognitive styles go more to the way the world is seen, and how the student perceives and understands the information, this is permeated individually and socially at the same time, while learning styles go beyond what strategies the individual develops, according to their cognitive style, to assimilate and understand the information to which they are exposed, so in my opinion, although different, they are very related and it is functional to understand the need for the accompaniment of both in the classroom.

When we are in an EFL class, for example, it is important to understand that if we work with 20 classes, 19 with textbooks, and we do 100% visual exercises, at first they will be repetitive but beyond that, they will translate into much more effort for those students who are auditory or kinesthetic, also speaking of the cognitive style and learning style that each student has, no class should always be guided with the same didactics, if what is wanted is a more inclusive class for everyone.

### **2.3 Symbolic violence in the classroom**

“Symbolic violence is the form of violence that is exercised through the imposition of categories of perception and evaluation, which are presented as natural and obvious to all, but which in reality reflect and reproduce relations of domination. It is a violence that acts on bodies and minds, through classification systems and cultural norms that naturalize and legitimize social inequality” (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 19). (own translation)

Continuing with the tour of important concepts to take into account when talking about a possible real inclusive education that meets the needs of students in schools, we find symbolic violence.

As Bourdieu (1979) mentions, symbolic violence is exercised through the imposition of social categories and standards that, in an apparently silent and naturalized way, adapt to society as fair and unequivocal, exercising relations of domination and power, as was discussed a little in the first chapter, of those differences and gaps in ‘social strata’ that exist within our country and the world.

I say our country and the world, because perhaps in a city like Bogotá there is a north and a south, a north condemned to success and a south condemned to apparent failure, but before the world, all of Colombia and Latin America is that south condemned to failure on a global level, reproducing symbolic violence in different dimensions and volumes.

Of course, this violence is not foreign to all the Coloniality that we have been talking about throughout this document. It is not necessary to use violence through blows or direct words, when in our society some have rights at birth that others will never be able to live, just because they are of one class or another.

Bourdieu (1979) speaks of ‘taste’ in social terms, not as a decision, but as an imposition according to the hierarchy and social classes in which we live. We often think that we like this or that by choice, but in reality, there are an endless number of symbolic relationships, which from the moment we are born, are imposed according to what we apparently deserve socially.

Quality art, ‘good music’ and what is socially labeled as cultured or of good reputation, what Bourdieu (1979) calls cultural capital, do not belong to everyone, they belong to a few who can thus stand out in society as being as close to European as possible,

through practices of social hierarchization to which we become accustomed: ‘Cultural capital is a resource that, like economic capital, can be accumulated, transmitted and used to maintain or improve social position in the cultural field’ (Bourdieu, 1979, p. 90)

The ‘habitus’ that Bourdieu (1979) talks about is closely related to education, since it is that set of ideas, knowledge, skills, which are transferable according to the social position of the individual. A clear example of this could be seen in a striking way, at the time that one enters a public school in Bogotá, and then one observes the dynamics of a private school in the north. They are fields with abysmal differences in teaching, as if some deserved less by nature than others.

In this space, I find it relevant to include the term ‘intersectionality’, a term that was introduced by the author Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, who speaks of those anti-discrimination laws or policies that cannot sometimes fight against specific exclusions of ‘minorities’ that are not only part of one form of possible discrimination but of several.

Being Black in a country like Colombia is one thing, but it represents a certain type of segregation—something we may try to deny, but which is still present, and another thing, more worrying, is to be a woman, black, and from a low socioeconomic stratum in a country like ours, it is very certain that these women live daily challenges and barriers much greater, within a system that does not take into account this type of marginalization and the lack of empowerment that education in Colombia cries out for, for the ‘others.’

We have surely also felt this symbolic violence, simply because we graduated from public universities in the country, where there are surely normalized and socially accepted concepts of people who deserve less than many of those who are part of other institutions with greater economic prestige, and we have to fight for years to build a profile that changes those tastes that were imposed on us and allows us to live in a society that is a little more just, fought for with much effort, painful effort, that is often romanticized.

Now, in his book *La domination masculine* (1998), Bourdieu speaks of symbolic violence through sexist practices, which are still recurrent today but are sometimes difficult to see as part of the problem. Women have long been legitimized as beings who deserve less than men; endocoloniality is still reflected here; during colonization we were taught that men were always deserving of good jobs, positions, places within society, and women had to serve, and today we continue to perpetuate, albeit at different levels, this same perception.

*'Male domination is exercised not only through the imposition of an obvious power relationship, but also through symbolic violence, which manifests itself in the unconscious acceptance of patriarchal norms and values' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 23).*

For many, nowadays we no longer have to worry about these practices of domination and discrimination towards women or other genders other than the 'male', and machismo is an invention of many to attract attention. But, speaking specifically about the teaching of foreign languages, in this case English, in the country's schools, it would be interesting to just take a look at the textbooks that publishers offer for teaching the language.

Education, I would dare say, is one of the greatest sources of promotion of these exclusionary practices and imposition of power in the world, 'Social institutions, such as the family and the educational system, play a crucial role in the reproduction of male domination by transmitting and reinforcing gender norms and expectations' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 102).

In Colombia, authors like Ruiz (2017) and Cortina (2003) have critically examined how gendered structures are embedded in education, pointing out how institutionalized practices continue to perpetuate these gender roles. Ruiz (2017) invites us to look closely at how, in the classroom, the roles assigned to men and women are not just a reflection of society but are reinforced through small but powerful everyday practices.

In our society it is still common to see professions, or roles like engineering or medicine as something just for men while women are often relegated into roles related to the home or caregiving. Now, I am not saying that these roles do not matter, the problem is how society has been divided by what jobs matter, and even worse how we have normalized this. Ruiz (2017) talks about how these everyday practices do not just keep inequality alive—they actually set up invisible walls for future generations. Especially young girls, who grow up surrounded by these stereotypes without ever thinking to challenge them. As a result, they limit their own potential, without even realizing it.

This dialogue is extended in Cortina (2003). She believes simply acknowledging these inequities is insufficient. According to her the real challenge lies in actively dismantling them. In her work, she introduces the idea of an ethics of equality, which emphasizes that it's not enough to acknowledge that inequality exists—we must change the structures that make it possible. She calls on us to rethink education as a space not only for providing equal opportunities, but for challenging and removing the discriminatory practices that have been woven into its very fabric.

Both authors invite us to consider how education, far from being neutral, plays a key role in reinforcing gender roles. The classroom does not just teach academic content; it is also a space where identities are shaped, and stereotypes are reinforced (or challenged). That is why their work calls us to rethink education from a critical perspective, one that doesn't just address surface-level issues but works to transform the structures that continue to limit so many, especially women.

We as teachers are daily part of the reproduction of such symbolic violence, and almost innocently we normalize it without seeing these patterns that continue to sink that real inclusion, or that respect for the other regardless of their gender, stratum, or physical or cognitive condition, as expressed by the author I have already mentioned: 'The masculine and

feminine habitus is formed through early socialization and shapes gender perceptions and expectations in a way that reinforces the patriarchal hierarchy' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 56).

The above, although it may sound insistent, has everything to do with the Coloniality of power, of knowledge, of being; a society that is more unbalanced and unjust will unequivocally be easier to dominate, and if we perpetuate this inequality among ourselves, we make the path to exclusion much easier.

Just talking about the imposition of gender standards in schools could take us a lot of research from scratch, but it is a clear example that our society does not address these cases as something that should involve real inclusion, or the recognition of the other in educational practices.

Everything previously mentioned about symbolic violence is well summarized in *The Heirs: Students and Culture* by Pierre Bourdieu (1964). Reflecting on the year of publication, it is striking how the author addressed this topic 59 years ago, yet his observations remain relevant to a society that claims to be much more just.

This book talks about how inequality is born or accentuated in school, and how symbolic and cultural capital play a very important role. As we have already mentioned above, education and accessibility to its quality depend on social class, and in each sector the difference in the type of teaching offered is very evident.

Some are 'educated' to be bosses, leaders and owners of their own companies, while others, depending on their social class and position, are guided to serve, to be part of the cheap labor that feeds the economy of the first mentioned.

Perhaps talking about this social imposition through education sounds a bit like self-criticism, because I am clear that I have also been and surely am part of this process of

perpetuating domination and imposition, but it is a bet, and a call to recognize the problem from within us, in order to begin to change these dynamics little by little from the classroom.

## **2.4 Epistemologies of the South**

In order to discuss in this section, the epistemologies of the South, which have already been addressed in a somewhat superficial way throughout this document, we must return to the concept of Eurocentrism, which was explained during the first chapter.

De Sousa Santos (2014) argues that ‘important’ knowledge for the world has always been directly related to Eurocentrism, which has led to an invisibility of non-European knowledge. In order not to go into this term, which has already been quite explicit and was fundamental to start this journey towards inclusion, we will speak directly about what the epistemology of the South presupposes in the Colombian classroom.

“Incorporating epistemologies of the South into educational practices is not merely about adding new content but about reconfiguring the entire educational process to be more inclusive and just. This means acknowledging the historical and ongoing exclusions of non-Western epistemologies and actively working to remedy these injustices within educational contexts” (Santos, 2014, p. 102).

The above quote is very important if we want to talk about inclusion in schools, because as I have already mentioned, inclusion is not just established in a document that there are students with limitations of any kind who are accepted in an institution.

To support this statement, studies such as Santos (2014) highlight that the educational system reproduces a cultural hierarchy that privileges epistemologies and values from the Global North. Additionally, in my teaching experience, I have observed how curricula focus on external references, and many students associate success with emigrating to Europe or

North America. This is also reflected in youth migration data and direct comments from students who express this aspiration. In addition, in schools usually the methodologies or pedagogical focuses, are from the United States or Europe, and the local studies are not taken into account that much.

By this I do not mean that it is disproportionate to see oneself in other places in the world, or learning from other settings, but it should not simply be a daydream of a better life, because ours is not enough. According to De Sousa Santos (2014), ‘the epistemologies of the South seek to challenge dominant knowledge and give value to non-Western ways of knowing’ (p. 25). Eurocentrism should be understood as a form of minimizing what is ours; in schools we should work more to emphasize that the ‘South’ also has, by itself, equally valuable traditions and knowledge.

De Sousa Santos (2014) speaks of a necessary social and political transformation, since in order to achieve significant changes in the educational and social progress of our country, we need to recognize and give value to the different forms of knowledge and to those non-Eurocentric ‘souths’ to which we belong, and from which we sometimes want to escape.

For his part, Arturo Escobar (2015) also speaks of the imposition of European knowledge as the only valid or certain one, and how the importance of one's own knowledge has been left behind, that local knowledge that in the eyes of many, is no longer valid.

We, as English teachers, have often been part of this questioning, when we have become so blind to seeking ‘real knowledge’ in other countries that are apparently more valuable than our own. For example, I was immersed in the culture of the United States for three years, that is to say, I am not talking about it by exemplifying it from the ‘others’ as if it were wrong, I am mentioning it from my own experience, in which for many years my country did not have the same cultural and academic value as other ‘northern’ or more ‘European’ countries.

Escobar (2015) also mentions that ‘Development, as it has been conceptualized in Western modernity, has been a force that has displaced and reconfigured local forms of knowledge and practices related to nature’ (Escobar, 2015, p. 30). From school, many thoughts of Coloniality of knowledge are imposed, and while it is true that I do not intend to say that what is European or the North is not valid, local knowledge and know-how should be given the importance it deserves. We must dream less about the North, and embrace those so-called Souths with ideas of real, positive progress and recognition.

## **2.5 Construction of alternative identities**

Now, the construction of alternative identities is closely related to the coloniality of being and the response to it, which generates discourses of opposition to the imposed hegemony. For authors such as Mignolo (2011), in his book *The Darker Side of Western Modernity: Global Futures, Decolonial Options*, this can be understood as a form of resistance and reconfiguration against the power structures that shape society.

These forms of constructing or reconstructing identities are becoming more and more common in classrooms, but they are the first ones we try to extinguish, so as not to lose ‘control’ of the hegemony that is often sought in an educational community.

For his part, García (1990), in his book *Hybrid Cultures: Strategies for Entering and Exiting Modernity*, discusses "cultural hybridization" as a phenomenon emerging from the context of globalization and modernity. He explains how the reconfiguration of identities serves as resistance to global and hegemonic pressures.

This term is necessary when talking about what we must take into account when talking about inclusion, since when we face this type of resistance, we often try to silence it, again, mold and adjust those differences, to pretend to be equal.

The world is becoming more and more heterogeneous, students in classrooms are not the same, they were not allowed to speak more than normal because it was not well seen, and it is our job to respect and ensure that those alternative identities that emerge day by day are not excluded.

One of the clearest examples of alternative identities has been the great growth of diversity in terms of 'Gender coloniality' that authors such as Lugones (2007) express as the imposition of the standard since colonization, and that we still maintain as the way things should be.

In a lot of schools, I would dare say that even in most schools in the country, although they claim to speak of a broader idea of understanding education, they continue to limit students a lot in this creation of identities, without allowing them to be who they consider they should be. My claim is based on both personal experience and academic literature. For instance, Freire (1970) critiques how education systems often prioritize conformity over critical thinking, limiting students' ability to construct their own identities. This has always tried to protect that 'equality' that is intended, to standardize them all the same in order to dominate in a simpler way, pigeonholing individual thoughts into what is socially acceptable or permitted.

On the other hand, the construction of alternative identities is also related to the promotion of epistemic plurality (Santos, 2014), which would be a response to what I have already mentioned before about 'epistemic violence', this implies the acceptance of cultural and epistemic diversity, which is closely related to what we have been working on throughout this chapter, it is in some way allowing our students to emerge from different points of

enunciation, after the imposition of a colonial system for years, without limiting them and wanting to regulate their thoughts.

This term fits perfectly with all the concepts previously mentioned in this web of information. I believe that the creation of alternative identities perfectly encompasses each of the terms that we have already been exploring. One very interesting that has been seen lately, and which should not be silenced, is the reconstruction of identities from the global south. As we mentioned earlier, our culture and our society are as valuable as any other, without the need to claim to be European.

In a perhaps idealized world, these constructions of alternative identities would also help to recover and revitalize ancestral knowledge and that of indigenous peoples, which have been so rejected by colonialism, which would be a way to bring back those customs and roots that have been weakened over time.

To close this chapter, I repeat that what I write is not just a utopia, it is a denunciation of my own way of seeing the world, and that of many, who for years have perpetuated coloniality and endocoloniality. Education must finally stop being a mechanism for reproducing forms of power and oppression and must begin to see the other. And so, who is the other really, who are the others?

Enrique Dussel (1996) argues that otherness is a key concept in both ethics and politics. For him, it is essential to recognize the other not as a mere object to be dominated, but as a human being who deserves dignity and respect. This approach highlights the importance of understanding the exteriority and suffering of victims, arguing that recognizing the pain of the other is essential to achieving liberation and justice. In this sense, Dussel invites us to build more just and equitable relationships, where mutual recognition is the basis of coexistence.

The above is vital, since we speak of the ‘other’ as someone with a disability, with a social stratum other than the ‘cultured’, with exceptional talents, the non-European from any angle, the black woman, the white woman, the indigenous person, the migrant, absolutely everyone, as part of a society that cries out for change, that denounces the need to be observed and heard, and we must begin to change that Eurocentric view, which in some way gave us authorization to minimize the ‘others’.

Education cannot be anything other than a helping hand for the progress of a more just society. When teaching English, or any other discipline, we must begin to understand that there is epistemic diversity, symbolic violence, cognitive styles, learning styles, epistemologies of the south, the creation of alternative identities, in short, that the others exist.

### **III. How to see the ‘others’?**

**Reimagining education and decolonizing the curriculum and its methodologies.**

*“Considered in this way, decolonial pedagogy, like critical pedagogy, is ‘ultimately a dream, but one that is dreamed in the sleeplessness of praxis. This is because an individual cannot say that he has achieved critical pedagogy (or decolonial pedagogy) if he stops striving for it’” (Walsh, 2012, p. 16).*

Pedagogy, then, should be a bridge to achieve that dream that Walsh (2012) speaks of. For me, to stop fighting at this moment would be to not denounce in some way what I see as unjust or inequitable for a society that has suffered for a long time, a segregation and discrimination that, according to some, has improved, but when one enters a classroom one realizes that it continues, and even worse, it has metastasized.

This last chapter will be a closure or thread in which everything previously mentioned gives us a light, perhaps through the injustice that I name, we can begin to entail a possible proposal of what would be to decolonize the concept of inclusion, in this case, when teaching

English as a foreign language, without forgetting that there are others, and that we do not live in a homogeneous society as they try to convince us.

The more I am confronted with all this information, which above all speaks of violence and colonialism, of being, power and knowledge in our daily lives, I realize that in one way or another I have been part of these processes of imposition and ignorance, that I have promoted discourses that were not necessary but that I also believed at some point, such as transmitting to children in schools that without English ‘they will hardly achieve many of the things they want,’ as if learning this language were everything, and I have been unaware of the thousand other aspects that make up a being.

So, as we approach the end of this document, I would like to present the points that I consider important to promote change, from an individual perspective, each teacher in each classroom, since at a political and social level there is still a lot of help lacking in this field.

When I started this research, or this set of disappointments, I remember that someone with many years of experience in the field of education asked me, ‘Why are you going to do research about inclusion practices in a master’s degree in foreign language teaching? – that would be more of a thesis for special education teachers.’ That phrase marked a before and an after, and gave much more strength to my interest in talking about this topic, and that is that talking about equity in education, understanding that there are learning styles, teaching styles, cognitive styles, understanding that we promote a Eurocentric discourse, noticing that perhaps unintentionally we promote epistemic violence on a daily basis, and seeing those who have always been hidden or segregated, does not correspond only to a specific major or discipline, it corresponds to absolutely all of us.

### 3.1 Decolonizing the curriculum

The first thing we must begin to observe in our educational environments is how the curriculum is constructed. Criticizing the process does not mean that we should stop teaching it, or that English is no longer important, but what is the approach given in theory to teaching foreign languages? Understanding that it is our responsibility to begin to change the approach to it is fundamental in this process.

According to De Sousa Santos (2016), there are several factors that must be considered when addressing the decolonization of the curriculum, the first of which is the detachment from Eurocentrism, which, as discussed in the first chapter of this document, leaves aside the validity that we have as a society.

This can also be linked to what we have already mentioned about the epistemologies of the South, where people begin to fight to recognize what is their own, to understand that we are also subjects with knowledge, know-how and dynamics worthy of being studied. 'Eurocentrism not only prevents the recognition of cultural diversity, but also perpetuates inequalities by considering European experiences as the standard for evaluating all others' (De Sousa Santos ,2016, p. 45).

As the author points out, we are perpetuating inequalities when we recognize what is European or what is from the North as the only thing that can be recognized as something of quality, including people. And this message must be eradicated from school, and this does not mean that we are going against Europe or the North (as they are called), but that we value what is external, but also what is here in our society, and within ourselves.

Likewise, authors such as (Mignolo, 2010) in his text *Epistemic disobedience: rhetoric of modernity, logic of coloniality, grammar of decoloniality*, mention how modern knowledge

and know-how are related to colonialism, speaking of the need to give voice to other epistemologies. In some way we must begin to decolonize the curriculum in schools.

If we notice, Colombia has taken the ‘easy’ way out for years and years, which has been to adopt pedagogies and models from other countries, especially European countries and the United States, where a model that apparently worked there 30 years ago but was discontinued for being obsolete at one point, is adopted in our country, so, on the one hand we are not working in a contextualized way, and on the other hand, we are constantly adopting what is European or from the north as the only good thing, even if it happened there centuries ago.

Criticisms of the above have already been made previously, for example in the online magazine *La silla vacía*, there has been talk about Pedagogies adopted from abroad, so questioned for their obsolescence and lack of adaptation to the local context, which has generated a lag compared to other countries in the region (Lenis Mejía, 2024). The above is worrying, in this case as they say, for being behind compared to other countries, but for me even more worrying is the need to copy models and thus perpetuate Eurocentrism.

Along the same lines, other authors such as Smith (2012) have already spoken of the decolonization of methodologies. This author of Maori origin speaks of the importance of research and knowledge through indigenous knowledge and expresses the need to decolonize the curriculum and give it the value and importance that indigenous and local knowledge have, challenging Western impositions. She proposes an approach that includes in the construction of the curriculum the voice of those who have been marginalized for centuries and that also questions the methodologies and epistemologies that have been superimposed by our own throughout history.

The above would be vital to start talking about real inclusion, and in this case, as I have already made known before, I am not referring to the inclusion that has been painted for

us by making a person with a disability appear in papers and theories that are far from practice, but rather including them and absolutely everyone who has not or has not been seen.

### **3.2 Epistemic justice**

Continuing the discussion on our responsibility to ensure justice in the classroom, especially for those who have been historically marginalized, epistemic justice provides a vital framework for tackling the exclusion and devaluation of knowledge that exists outside the Eurocentric perspective. This type of epistemic violence has a profound effect on communities, particularly students from non-Western backgrounds or those who do not fit the European model, as it invalidates their knowledge and experiences.

As Ortega (2020) points out, educational practices frequently push these students to the margins, perpetuating systemic inequalities. His research advocates for a reevaluation of educational systems to not only acknowledge these diverse forms of knowledge but also to actively integrate them into the learning experience, thereby challenging the dominant narratives that have traditionally sidelined them.

Fricker (2007) argues that epistemic injustice manifests itself in testimonial and hermeneutical ways, two forms of exclusion that are evident in Colombian classrooms. In this case, testimonial epistemic injustice translates into all these stories, experiences and testimonies, which are not taken into account due to a person's racial identity, gender, social stratum, physical or cognitive condition, among others. An example of this is how today we still see Afro-descendant students who, when talking about their experiences or knowledge, are ignored or invalidated in front of others, not only by their classmates but sometimes by teachers themselves, as if their voice were less important than that of others.

Hermeneutical injustice, on the other hand, speaks of the lack of conceptual resources, which is a critical aspect that many students face in the classroom, especially those who come from communities with different ways of knowing. Fricker (2007)

With this in mind, I think of a student from an indigenous community, for example, who comes to class filled with rich and valuable experiences, but is faced with a curriculum that does not reflect his reality. Instead of seeing his culture and way of learning as something meaningful, the classroom can become a place of disconnection, where he feels that his story has no place. This student, hearing words and concepts that are foreign to him, may feel lost, as if he were trying to fit a puzzle piece into the wrong place.

Education should be a bridge that helps you make sense of your life and experiences, not a barrier that further marginalizes you. If the curriculum does not validate and celebrate your way of understanding the world, your self-esteem and motivation are likely to suffer. Recognizing and validating these diverse experiences is not only essential for your personal development, but would also enrich learning in the classroom, creating a space where everyone can learn and grow together.

Thus, it becomes clear that there is an urgent need to rethink our educational practices, ensuring that each student feels seen and validated in their individuality, so that their educational experience is truly meaningful. From my perspective as an educator, I have seen firsthand how many students are limited by these biases.

Exclusion is not just a theoretical issue, but a daily reality for those who try to assert their ways of knowing. Although intercultural teaching is promoted in some spaces, what prevails is a worldview that privileges Western knowledge. In this sense, it is essential that schools and teachers take an active role in creating spaces where students can share their knowledge and be heard without prejudice.

To achieve this, I believe it is crucial to develop mechanisms to ensure that all voices have a place in the classroom. In particular, it would be ideal for schools to develop forums for intercultural dialogue or more constant debates, where students can share their ancestral and local knowledge with the rest of the school community.

Not only would this allow for greater visibility of marginalized knowledge, but it could also contribute to dismantling the power structures that perpetuate epistemic exclusion. As Spivak (1988) points out, ‘the subaltern cannot speak’ in contexts where their voices are systematically ignored or reinterpreted from the point of view of the dominant power. Creating these spaces would mean allowing students to speak with their own voices, not only within the margins imposed by the hegemonic system, by actively involving students in the design of these forums and encouraging teachers to act as facilitators rather than authoritative figures, the classroom environment would become a space for co-creation of knowledge, where all epistemologies are valued equally.

In terms of bilingual education in Colombia, this is an area where epistemic injustice is clearly evident. Indigenous and Afro-descendant languages have been relegated to the realm of ‘folklore’ and have been denied the status of valid knowledge in the formal curriculum. To address this reality, language learning cries out for a focus not only on English as a tool for global success, but also on the strengthening and preservation of indigenous languages. Here I bring up again Mignolo (2000), who points out that the coloniality of knowledge is kept alive largely through the imposition of a single dominant language. By giving space to other languages, not only would greater linguistic inclusion be promoted, but it would also contribute to decolonizing the curriculum as a whole, doing real epistemic justice.

Finally, teacher education programs should include modules on these topics. Teachers, as mediators of knowledge, need theoretical and practical tools to identify and combat our

own biases. Learning about decolonial pedagogy, understanding something as crucial as this, that we have perpetuated discourses of discrimination and epistemic injustice without realizing it, would help us avoid the reproduction of these exclusions, allowing our classrooms to be places where multiple forms of knowledge are legitimized and where all students feel valued.

### **3.3 Educational Justice**

Educational justice is not a single-dimensional concept; it embodies a broad, intertwined framework that seeks to address both the recognition of diverse identities and the equitable redistribution of resources. As educators, our role goes beyond merely imparting knowledge. We have a duty to ensure that the classroom becomes a space where every student feels valued, respected, and provided with the necessary tools to succeed. This requires us to think critically about the structures that perpetuate inequality within our educational systems, particularly for marginalized communities.

As Nancy Fraser (1995) argues, justice cannot be fully realized without addressing both recognition—the acknowledgment and appreciation of students’ identities and cultural backgrounds—and redistribution—the fair allocation of resources that ensure all students have access to quality education. In the context of Colombia, where educational disparities are deeply rooted in geographic, economic, and cultural divides, achieving justice requires a multifaceted approach that bridges both cultural and material inequalities. In this section, I will explore how recognition and redistribution intersect, shaping the experiences of Indigenous, Afro-descendant, and other marginalized students in our education system.

#### **3.3.1 Recognition: The Cultural Dimension of Educational Justice**

Recognition justice, as described by Fraser (1995), is central to addressing the cultural inequalities that persist in the classroom. Lack of recognition is a form of cultural violence,

where the identities, histories, and contributions of certain groups are ignored or diminished. In the Colombian context, this injustice is glaringly apparent when we examine the treatment of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities in educational materials. As I mentioned earlier, these communities are often portrayed through a narrow, stereotypical lens, which exoticizes or oversimplifies their cultures without giving them the agency or respect they deserve.

In our classrooms, the curriculum often fails to reflect the diverse epistemologies and knowledge systems of these communities. Instead, it reinforces an Eurocentric model of education that prioritizes Western knowledge over Indigenous ways of knowing. Charles Taylor (1992) emphasizes that recognition is not just about individual respect but is deeply tied to collective dignity and well-being. When students from marginalized backgrounds do not see themselves represented in the curriculum, they experience a form of alienation that affects both their academic performance and their self-worth.

This failure to recognize diverse epistemologies within the classroom is also closely linked to the concept of epistemic injustice, which I have discussed in previous chapters. When the knowledge of Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities is excluded or tokenized, we are not only denying students access to their own cultural heritage but also reinforcing the idea that their ways of knowing are somehow inferior to those of the dominant culture.

As I argued earlier, addressing this injustice requires more than symbolic gestures. It is not enough to add a single unit on Afro-Colombian culture or Indigenous practices into the curriculum. Instead, we must fundamentally rethink the way knowledge is structured within our education system. As Fraser (1995) stresses that genuine recognition requires structural change, so this could involve integrating a different curriculum that reflects diverse

epistemologies, such as Afro-Colombian and Indigenous ways of knowing, throughout all subjects rather than as isolated topics.

We need to work with communities to co-create curricula that reflect their lived experiences, histories, and ways of knowing. This means shifting the power dynamics in educational institutions, ensuring that Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities have a say in how their cultures are taught and understood. Only then can we move beyond superficial inclusion towards a more authentic recognition of these communities and their knowledge systems.

Bhabha (1994) adds that recognition also involves an openness to hybridity—to the idea that new forms of knowledge can emerge from the intersection of different cultures and traditions. This hybridity is not something to be feared, but embraced, as it can enrich the educational experience for all students.

Considering the above, when we allow different epistemologies to coexist and inform one another, we create a more dynamic, inclusive learning environment that benefits everyone. Recognition, therefore, is not just about ensuring that marginalized students see themselves in the curriculum—it is about transforming the entire educational experience to be more reflective of the diverse world we live in.

### **3.3.2 Redistribution: Addressing Material Inequities in Education**

While recognition of justice focuses on cultural and epistemic inclusion, redistributive justice addresses the material inequalities that exist within the education system. Nancy Fraser (1995) argues that without equitable distribution of resources, recognition alone cannot fully address the structural barriers that prevent marginalized communities from accessing quality education. In Colombia, these barriers are stark, with economic and geographic divides creating significant disparities in educational outcomes.

In my experience, the lack of redistributive justice is most evident in rural and Indigenous communities, where schools are often underfunded, understaffed, and lacking in the most basic resources. While urban schools may have access to technology, extracurricular programs, and well-trained teachers, students in marginalized areas struggle with outdated textbooks, insufficient infrastructure, and a lack of support services. This inequity is not just a matter of physical resources, it also reflects a broader failure to acknowledge the specific needs of these communities.

One of the most pressing issues is the linguistic and cultural gap that exists in many bilingual programs. As I mentioned earlier, the focus on teaching English in bilingual programs often overlooks the importance of preserving and strengthening Indigenous languages.

This is not just a linguistic issue, but a matter of cultural survival and identity. Fraser (1997) points out that redistributive justice must involve a restructuring of institutions to ensure that resources are allocated in ways that support the specific needs of marginalized communities. In this context, redistribution is not just about providing more books or better infrastructure—it is about ensuring that the educational experience is culturally relevant and responsive to the diverse backgrounds of students.

To achieve this, educational policies must go beyond merely providing equal access to resources. We need to recognize that different communities have different needs, and redistribution must take these differences into account. For example, rather than investing solely in teaching English, resources should be allocated to strengthen Indigenous and Afro-descendant languages. This would not only promote cultural preservation but also provide students with a deeper connection to their identity, which research has shown can improve academic outcomes.

Another key aspect of redistribution is ensuring that teachers themselves are representative of the communities they serve. As bell hooks (1994) argues, students need to see themselves reflected in positions of authority and leadership within the classroom. This not only provides role models for students from marginalized backgrounds but also challenges the power structures that have historically excluded certain groups from teaching. By ensuring equitable representation of the teaching staff, we can create a more inclusive and empowering educational environment for all students.

Finally, redistributive justice requires a long-term commitment to addressing the deep-seated inequalities that exist within the education system. This includes creating scholarship and aid programs for students from marginalized communities, as well as developing educational plans that are tailored to the specific socioeconomic realities of these students. Redistribution, therefore, is not just about equal access, it is about ensuring that every student has the resources they need to succeed, no matter where they come from or what their background is, and of course it implies also permanence.

### **3.4 Plural epistemologies: challenging the monoculture of knowledge**

The integration of plural epistemologies into the curriculum is another of the fundamental pillars of my proposal. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (2009) speaks of the "ecology of knowledge" as an approach that challenges the hegemony of Western scientific knowledge, advocating for the coexistence of multiple forms of knowledge. This concept is key to understanding the need to include indigenous, Afro-descendant, and local epistemologies on equal terms with Western knowledge. It is not a simple symbolic inclusion, but a structural transformation in the way we understand and teach knowledge (Santos, 2009, p. 53).

Furthermore, authors such as Walter Mignolo (2000) and Catherine Walsh (2007) have worked extensively in the field of decolonization of knowledge in Latin America. Walsh

(2007) highlights that in order for non-Western epistemologies to coexist without being subjugated by dominant knowledge, it is necessary to create pedagogical spaces that value and respect them. This idea is essential to the proposal that I will address later, because we cannot continue to see the curriculum as a space of cultural imposition, but rather as a space of intercultural dialogue, where all forms of knowledge are recognized and valued.

Enrique Dussel's (1995) proposal on *transmodernity and interculturality* also plays an important role in this debate. Dussel proposes a vision of the world that transcends the divisions between modernity and subaltern epistemologies, proposing a dialogue that recognizes and values differences without hierarchizing them.

In practice, this would involve redesigning educational texts and teaching methodologies to reflect multiple ways of seeing the world. From the inclusion of oral narratives, art and community practices to the redesign of curricula in areas such as social sciences, my proposal seeks EVERYONE to be seen in the educational field, without exceptions, there is no other, we are all the others, and we deserve to be seen.

Building a curriculum that truly recognizes the diversity of knowledge and experiences implies moving towards what De Sousa Santos (2014) calls cognitive justice. This justice not only involves recognizing epistemological diversity, but also redistributing the power that has traditionally been concentrated in the hands of those who control dominant knowledge. From this perspective, the curriculum ceases to be a space of cultural imposition and becomes a place where knowledge is built collectively, in constant dialogue between different forms of knowledge.

My proposal, then, is based on the idea that true educational justice requires both recognition and redistribution. We must move towards an education that understands that we are heterogeneous, that respects and values the diversity of knowledge and experiences

present in our classrooms, and that guarantees that no student is excluded or marginalized because of their cultural or linguistic origin.

Thus, I reaffirm the need to continue reimagining and decolonizing the curriculum and educational methodologies, to build an education where diversity is not only celebrated, but is at the core of our educational system. This is not an ideal, but an urgent necessity if we want to move towards a more just and equitable society. As Fricker (2007) suggests, epistemic justice cannot be an exception, it must be the norm if we want to combat marginalization in our classrooms and beyond.

### **3.5 Representation in the Teaching Staff**

Another component of my proposal is representation. As we have mentioned before, it is not enough to redesign the curriculum or redistribute resources. Students also need to see their identity reflected in the authority figures they encounter in the classroom. Here, teacher representation is fundamental.

Currently, in some parts of Colombia, especially in rural areas, there is a severe lack of teachers who represent local cultures and languages. This not only reinforces the idea that Eurocentric knowledge is the only valid knowledge, but also deprives students of role models who can inspire them. Teacher recruitment policies need to be revised to promote greater diversity in the teaching staff. It is also crucial to offer continuing education opportunities for teachers to learn how to work in multicultural and multilingual contexts.

Authors such as bell hooks (1994) highlight the importance of creating ‘engaged’ educational spaces, where teachers see themselves not as repositories of knowledge, but as facilitators of collective learning. hooks underlines the importance of transformative education, in which the teacher is committed not only to the transmission of content, but also to the emotional, cultural and social well-being of students. Along these lines, teacher training

programs should incorporate modules on critical and decolonial pedagogy, so that teachers are equipped to teach from an inclusive and empowering perspective.

### **3.6 Cognitive and learning styles in the classroom - Breaking the illusion of homogeneity in the classroom**

Having explored the relationship between cognitive and learning styles in the previous chapter, it is clear to me that there is a significant disconnect between what educational institutions consider 'inclusion' and what actually happens in the classroom. Despite the fact that the importance of cognitive diversity is recognized, at least theoretically, it is not given a central place in daily pedagogical practices. My experience as a teacher has shown me that without attending to these differences, the teaching-learning process remains unbalanced and, in many cases, exclusionary.

Throughout the previous chapter, in the point about cognitive and learning styles, I referred to authors such as Tennant (1988), Hederich and Camargo (2000) and Mayer (2009), who provide valuable perspectives on how cognitive and learning styles directly influence the way in which students acquire knowledge. This leads me to formulate a proposal that not only recognizes, but puts these theories into practice, considering the epistemological and methodological orientations that will be developed in the last chapter, seeking to make the classroom a more equitable and respectful space with the particularities of each student.

#### **3.6.1 First step: Diagnosis and in-depth knowledge of students**

The first point is based on an idea that seems obvious but is often not carried out in the necessary depth: getting to know the students. It is not enough to superficially observe their behavior or academic performance; it is essential that we take the time to identify their cognitive and learning styles from the beginning of the academic year.

This diagnosis could be based on simple tools, such as Fleming's VARK questionnaire (1992), which I already mentioned in the previous chapter, or even personalized interviews in which the students themselves can share how they prefer to learn and what type of activities are most accessible to them, or there are countless free tests that have a good approach to how the student learns, and additionally in the day-to-day in the classroom it should be our obligation to understand how learning is made easier for each one.

This initial diagnosis would allow us to plan not only the content of the classes, but also the teaching strategies in a more precise way. Because, as I pointed out previously, one of the main problems I have observed in educational practice is that we insist on applying the same methodologies to all students, without considering individual differences. And although it may seem like an arduous task, I firmly believe that this deep knowledge is the basis for generating real change in our classrooms.

### **3.6.2 Diversification of methods and materials**

Once we have a clear idea of the styles present in the classroom, the next step is to diversify our teaching methods and materials. As a teacher, I have often fallen into the trap of using the same teaching tools over and over again without asking myself if they are really benefiting all my students. But as I mentioned in the previous chapter, Mayer (2009) reminds us that we must pay attention to how we present information and avoid unnecessary cognitive overload.

Rather than resorting to a uniform approach, one should think about an intentional alternation of activities that cover different learning styles: from visual materials, to auditory, kinesthetic and reading/writing activities. For example, in an English class, one could combine the use of graphics or infographics for those who are more visual, with auditory exercises such as recordings or podcasts for those who process information better through

hearing. At the same time, one could include group dynamics for more kinesthetic students, who need to physically interact with the content to internalize it.

I know this may sound idealistic in a context where time and resources are often limited, but it is not about redesigning every lesson from scratch, but rather being conscious and flexible in our planning. It is about introducing small adjustments that, taken together, can make a big difference in how students feel and develop in the classroom.

### **3.6.3 Fair and flexible evaluation**

Another aspect that I think is essential is to rethink the way we assess students. As I mentioned in the previous chapter, traditional assessments tend to favor those who fit certain learning styles, but leave aside those who require other modes of expression. If we really want to talk about inclusion, we cannot continue measuring everyone's learning with the same yardstick.

I propose the implementation of more flexible assessments, not only for students who need PIAR (individual plan for reasonable adjustments), which we will also talk about later, but also to rethink the way in which everyone can demonstrate what they have learned. They could choose to do a presentation, a practical project, or an essay, depending on their abilities and preferences.

This flexibility will not only allow them to express their knowledge in a way that is more comfortable for them but will also reduce the anxiety that often comes with traditional tests, especially for those who have more field-dependent cognitive styles, as suggested by Witkin (1962).

### **3.6.4 Individualized and reflective accompaniment**

On the other hand, at this point, something that cannot be overlooked is the importance of individualized support. Learning and cognitive styles are not fixed; they change

over time and circumstances, and we, as teachers, must be aware of these changes. It is not enough to make a diagnosis at the beginning of the course and forget about the subject; it is crucial to maintain constant observation and offer support to students throughout the process.

This is where flexibility and reflection come into play. Sometimes, no matter how carefully we plan, students' needs will change, and it is our responsibility to adjust to these new realities. This means being in constant dialogue with them, listening to their concerns and adapting our strategies when necessary. Because, at the end of the day, what we seek is not to impose a teaching style, but to build a space in which everyone can learn in the way that best fits their abilities and ways of seeing the world.

All of this has a close relationship with the PIAR, that we will consider next.

### **3.7 Reforms to the PIAR (Individualized Reasonable Adjustments Plan)**

Throughout these chapters, I have exposed some of the structural flaws I have observed in my experience with the PIAR as a tool. While it is presented as an inclusive mechanism, in reality, it becomes an empty promise, as institutions boast about this document, claiming inclusion that, in the end, still leaves many students behind.

The PIAR, as it is currently designed, seems to cater more to the needs of the system than to the real needs of the children who, day by day, navigate an educational environment that neither sees nor truly listens to them. How can a plan born from bureaucracy and uniformity capture the richness of students in situations of disability, exceptional talents, and others, who are simply seen as just another number?

The true improvement of the PIAR is not just a technical matter; it is a matter of justice. We are not just talking about adjusting curricula or infrastructure; we are talking about adjusting the system itself, making it truly inclusive—not just on paper. We need a PIAR that

stops being an administrative checklist and becomes a living tool, a genuine reflection of the needs and knowledge of our students, their families, and communities.

As I mentioned earlier, the ‘epistemologies of the South’ that Boaventura de Sousa De Sousa Santos (2014) advocates for invite us to question the imposed frameworks of knowledge and to recover the wisdom that resides in our own cultures. And that means reimagining the PIAR from a deeper perspective, from what each student truly needs, rather than forcing them to fit into a structure designed for them to adapt to a European standard or norm that does not represent them.

The PIAR, as I have seen it applied, is not based on the daily realities of students. It is a document that we teachers often fill out without it translating into real change in the classroom. The inclusion it promotes remains superficial, designed to make the student fit into the system rather than transforming the system to embrace each student.

As I have argued throughout this work, the goal is not to see difference as an obstacle, but as an opportunity to enrich the educational process. Instead of applying the same model for everyone, the PIAR must be flexible, contextual, and, above all, participatory. We can no longer make decisions from behind a desk without listening to those who truly understand the needs of the student: their families, their communities, and the children themselves.

As I have already expressed, the PIAR must go beyond universal solutions, and this requires a shift in the role of the teacher. It's not enough to fill out forms or attend training sessions just to meet requirements. Teachers need training that allows us to see each student as a unique individual, with a story, a culture, and a way of learning that deserves to be recognized and valued.

Paulo Freire (1970) spoke to us about the need for a liberating education, where the teacher is not the one who ‘teaches’ but the one who dialogues, listens, and accompanies. The

PIAR should be an extension of this principle, a tool that enables dialogue between the realities of the classroom and the structures of the system.

In my daily practice, I see how children who do not fit the system's norms end up being labeled as 'special' or 'the odd one out,' among countless other names. They are considered 'the other,' a concept I have already discussed in depth. The coloniality of being, as described by Walter Mignolo (2009), is evident in how the system treats these students. The PIAR should be a response to this marginalization, but instead of transforming it, it seems to reinforce it when real structural changes are not applied.

Improving the PIAR, then, means breaking with that colonial logic and creating an environment where difference is not an anomaly to be corrected but a richness to be integrated. A space where every child is seen, heard, and truly included. Where the infrastructure is genuinely designed with everyone in mind, where learning materials are accessible to all, and where students can demonstrate their learning in different ways, not simply ensuring reasonable adjustments that are often reduced to 'helping' because the 'other' is slow to learn.

This study does not simply aim to point out what is wrong. My experience, my learning, and the voices I have heard over the years have shown me that the PIAR can be a transformative tool, but only if we manage to decolonize our understanding of education and, most importantly, our understanding of those in particular situations that affect their learning processes. It is time for the PIAR to become a true reflection of what education should be: a space of possibilities where diversity is the driving force of learning, not a barrier we must overcome.

Improving the PIAR is not an option; it is a necessity. Education cannot continue to be a privilege for those who fit into predefined molds. Education must be a right for all, and improving the PIAR is a crucial step to ensuring that this right is fulfilled in all its magnitude.

## **IV - THE PROPOSAL**

### **Pedagogical Guidelines for Teaching English as a Foreign Language.**

**‘The critically reflective teacher constantly examines his or her own assumptions and remains open to change. This professional development is not optional; it is a moral and ethical obligation in the pursuit of effective teaching.’**

**— Stephen Brookfield (1995)**

For this chapter, I will focus on a proposal gathered after everything discussed in the previous sections, where I have already addressed what I consider important yet often overlooked when we talk about inclusion. I want to clarify again that inclusion should be for absolutely everyone, and we must learn to view the educational process through the lens of the valuable differences that exist among human beings.

In this chapter, my voice will be 100% from the perspective of a coordinator, teacher, and above all, a student who wishes to be acknowledged and not minimized as that ‘other’ who is deemed unimportant. I have already presented various authors to show that I am not

alone in this; there are many out there who also expect a change in education. Therefore, I will propose some pedagogical orientations that can or should align with the guidelines outlined in the Curricular Guidelines for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (Ministry of National Education of Colombia, 2006), with the aim of considering all students within the classroom.

In the document of the Curricular Guidelines for the Teaching of Foreign Languages, it is stated, ‘The purpose of this document is to present basic ideas that serve as guidance and support to second (foreign) language teachers in their definitions regarding curricular development within institutional educational projects’ (Ministry of National Education of Colombia, 2006). Thus, upon reviewing this document, I found many interesting elements that can be useful in teaching a foreign language, such as the concept of interculturality. However, while the document mentions and seeks to define this concept, it does not delve into how to bring ethnic and cultural differences, along with various native languages, into the classroom. These elements are merely acknowledged, as I pointed out in previous chapters, rather than explored in depth, almost as if checking off a list.

That said, the document discusses important topics, like various strategies for teaching a foreign language, such as memory strategies, comprehension strategies, metacognitive, affective, and social strategies. However, it consistently focuses on a unified teaching style that never considers the learning styles of the students.

These are just two examples from this document, which, while useful in terms of conceptualization and methodological and pedagogical recommendations, fail to reflect what I have discussed throughout this paper: the need to truly understand differences and support them in the classroom.

Taking this into account, I will present a proposal for pedagogical orientations that should be integrated into the document of curricular guidelines for the teaching of foreign languages, considering a decolonial perspective: epistemological orientations, methodological orientations, curricular strategies, and a decolonial approach to teaching.

#### **4.1 What is this proposal for?**

The main aim of this proposal is to tackle the exclusionary practices that have long been prevalent in education, especially in language learning. While I started this document by criticizing how the concept of inclusion has often been misapplied in classrooms, this proposal aims to provide specific steps to rectify these issues. By emphasizing epistemic justice, it seeks to acknowledge and appreciate the varied knowledge that students bring, particularly those from underrepresented backgrounds. This approach is designed to challenge not only the Eurocentric basis of traditional curricula but also the systemic exclusion that frequently diminishes students' cultural identities and prior knowledge.

Through these teaching guidelines, I aim to encourage an inclusive, thoughtful, and adaptable approach that facilitates the genuine integration of diverse ways of knowing, especially in foreign language instruction like English. This proposal is not merely theoretical; it is a practical effort to transform the educational setting in a way that actively dismantles the exclusion of students' cultural and epistemic backgrounds. By recognizing and valuing students' experiences and knowledge, these guidelines strive to create a truly inclusive environment where all students have an equal chance to succeed without facing marginalization.

I do not mean this in a pretentious manner or as if I had the magic formula to teach well, but rather in the spirit that these guidelines or orientation may be part of the guidelines for the teaching of English as a foreign language in Colombia which:

1. Foster epistemic justice, this is to acknowledge and value local knowledge and the indigenous languages, between others.
2. Integrate the cognitive and learning styles of students stimulating pedagogical flexibility.
3. Apply a decolonial approach that displaces hegemonic and Eurocentric paradigms for more equitable language education.

## **4.2 Axes of the Proposal**

When developing this proposal, I will focus on four axes or core aspects, that are designed to address the limitations and barriers within traditional educational frameworks and push for a more equitable approach. My aim is to invite to each teacher or person who reads me, to create educational practices that do not merely recognize diversity but actively embrace and celebrate the unique qualities each student brings.

The first element I will discuss is what we define as foundational epistemological orientations. This approach seeks to cultivate an appreciation for a variety of viewpoints, with a strong focus on achieving epistemic justice. At its core, this principle emphasizes the significance of recognizing and valuing diverse knowledge systems and cultural backgrounds, which are often overlooked or marginalized within conventional educational frameworks. This axis advocates for recognizing and validating the knowledge and experiences that students bring with them, especially those influenced by non-Eurocentric traditions.

By acknowledging the value of local and indigenous knowledge, the goal is to create a learning environment where all students' cultural identities are not just recognized but actively celebrated. This goes beyond token acknowledgment; it is about integrating diversity into the teaching practices in a way that makes all students feel seen and valued for who they are.

The second axis addresses methodological orientations, proposing an approach that embraces a wide range of cognitive styles and learning preferences. Education should not be a 'one-size-fits-all' model. We must adapt to the different needs of students to ensure that no one is left behind. This line emphasizes on the adaptability of instructional approaches, improving the learning process for everyone and promoting an environment where each student can discover their individual path

The third axis deals with curricular strategies, calling for a curriculum that is more open and flexible, one that integrates a variety of cultural perspectives. This means not only including the formal study of foreign languages but also recognizing the value of native languages and cultural narratives.

This aims to counter marginalization of non-Western knowledge and to create a space that accepts all forms of knowledge. We also need to rethink assessment and move away from the narrow definition of success, assessed by standardized measures. Schools must rethink what success is in education to recognize the vast plethora of cultural contributions to learning.

The fourth focus, which I refer to as the decolonial perspective, calls us to change the way we think about learning. It challenges the firmly established Eurocentric educational framework and advocates for a more inclusive, pluralistic, and equitable methodology for imparting and acquiring knowledge. This angle goes beyond simply recognizing the marginalization of oppressed groups by actively striving to correct this exclusion, identifying the historical neglect and undervaluation of diverse cultures, knowledge systems, and identities.

This shift is not merely theoretical—it is a call for tangible change in how we engage with and empower all students, particularly those who have long been marginalized within

traditional educational frameworks. Together, these four axes aim not only to offer alternatives to the traditional dichotomy of exclusion/inclusion but to actively engage with and celebrate diversity in a more holistic, practical, and inclusive manner. They present strategies for incorporating students varied epistemic backgrounds into the classroom, directly addressing the exclusionary practices that are so prevalent in conventional educational environments.

### **4.3 Epistemological Orientations - Epistemic Justice in the Classroom**

First of all, it is necessary to address the relevance of the teaching of English in the Colombian context, not only seen as it has been sold throughout history that it is a ‘necessity’, or an unquestionable door to success or failure, but also as an opportunity for cultural empowerment of our students, and epistemic justice becomes a fundamental step to achieve it.

For these pedagogical orientations, it is necessary to understand the role that Epistemic Justice plays in a classroom where English as a foreign language is taught, epistemic justice in any educational setting, implies a conscious and constant effort to recognize and value the knowledge of each person on equal terms, without pretending to see them as equals.

For the English teacher in this case, this means opening space to the knowledge and practices that are meaningful to the students, especially those linked to their experiences and cultural contexts. This critical understanding not only contributes to learning, but also builds an environment of respect and belonging, where each student can feel that their roots and previous knowledge are also relevant in this process, that is, English does not come to replace anything that is already built, culturally speaking.

To clarify, after all that has been seen above, these guidelines will describe epistemic justice, after all that has been discussed in the previous chapter, as an act of deep respect for

the knowledge, cultures and experiences that each student brings with them to the classroom, and that are often overlooked in traditional curricula. As teachers, we have the power, and the responsibility, to create spaces where each student feels valued, where their prior knowledge and cultural identity are recognized and celebrated.

With this vision, the pedagogical approach in English must go beyond traditional practices that often favor a Eurocentric perspective and the minimization of epistemologies that do not belong to that perspective. Here a critical and reflective pedagogy is required, where the teacher questions his or her own assumptions and is open to reorienting them. Brookfield (1995) suggests that this process of self-criticism is a moral responsibility in education.

Therefore, as a teacher, having epistemic justice in the classroom is not only a methodological option, but also an ethical duty that allows each student to develop with equal opportunities and dignity, without flattening differences, but recognizing them.

Now, the epistemological approach to teaching English in Colombia requires the teacher to actively value the knowledge and skills that each student brings to the classroom. This includes their mother tongue, their cultural identity and their worldview, which constitute a fundamental basis for constructing new learning. This teaching does not seek only for students to acquire a second language; rather, it aspires for them to develop a critical and empowered vision that allows them to interact with the world without losing their values and roots.

The following are some pedagogical practices for integrating this epistemic justice into the teaching of English as a foreign language:

#### **4.3.1 Acknowledging and Valuing Prior Knowledge**

An important element when thinking about a more equitable education and dynamic learning environment is recognizing and valuing the knowledge that students already possess. This includes their histories, cultural backgrounds, lived experiences, and unique abilities or disabilities. These aspects influence how students perceive and engage with the world around them, and when actively acknowledged, they enrich the learning process. When you recognize and incorporate this prior knowledge, you can bridge the gap between what students already know and new concepts they are expected to learn.

Rather than adhering to the traditional view where the teacher is the sole knowledge-holder and students are empty recipients, I invite to see students as active contributors to their learning process. At the beginning of each lesson or unit, engaging students in discussions where they share their personal experiences, or cultural knowledge can create a deeper connection to the new material. For example, when studying a new topic in English, students can share personal or community stories, which can serve as a natural entry point to the lesson's theme.

This not only activates prior knowledge but also validates students' identities, voices and backgrounds. It disrupts the traditional model, which sees differences as hindrances, and instead views these differences as strengths that contribute to a richer classroom environment. By connecting students' lived experiences with new content, teachers foster an atmosphere of trust and respect. This makes students feel seen and heard, not just as learners of a particular subject, but as individuals with unique perspectives and valuable insights. Importantly, this approach demonstrates that their differences and prior knowledge are assets, not barriers.

#### **4.3.2 Integration of Local Cultural and Linguistic Practices**

To make learning better and tied to your students' lives, use the cultural wealth they bring into the class. Begin by adding topics, samples, and things that show their local places

and traditions. For instance in a lesson on describing in English ask students to share parts from their neighborhood—be it local sites, dishes or old tales. This way helps students view language as something important to their own world not just as a far-off extension of English-speaking cultures.

If your kids speak two languages, you can look at the links between their home tongue and English, checking out sayings or cultural ideas. This not only shows how words meet but also proves that their own language and culture is just as important in the class. You can go a step beyond by letting them find out about and share parts of their culture in English—whether it's a local festival, a historical figure, or a community tradition. This helps them practice the language while grounding their learning in something familiar and meaningful.

Organizing group discussions where students share local customs, personal experiences, or even invite community members or cultural leaders to talk in English about their traditions can also make the learning experience more authentic and engaging. If possible, field trips or virtual tours to museums, cultural centers, or historical sites can provide opportunities to practice English in real-life contexts while deepening their connection to their culture.

Using real-life scenarios that tie directly to what they know—like describing local practices or foods—makes learning feel more natural. And, of course, fostering a classroom environment where students feel comfortable sharing their cultural identities encourages them to use English as a tool for self-expression.

By this, you are promoting place-based and community-based pedagogies by doing that, which stress the use of students' cultural backgrounds and immediate environments as teaching resources. When you ask students to describe elements of their local environment or

traditional stories, you are using these pedagogies in your example by connecting the course topic to their lived experiences and the knowledge they bring from their communities.

Because of all of this integration, English is no longer merely a continuation of the English-speaking culture as the only legitimate one, but rather a way for them to communicate their reality and culture, which makes learning more meaningful and anchored in their identity.

### **4.3.3 Promoting Respect and Appreciation for Linguistic Diversity**

Rather than requiring students to stop using their native languages (translanguaging), whether indigenous languages, Spanish, French or any other language, foster an environment where all languages presents are respected and celebrated. For example, allow moments in which they can translate sentences from English to their mother tongue and vice versa, or use their mother tongue to support the learning process of the foreign language, without this being a problem or something punishable, on the contrary, celebrate the progress that is made from the mother tongue, with respect.

When you apply the above with students, you will allow students to understand that their languages are valuable and that learning a foreign language does not require abandoning ties to their own culture.

### **4.3.4 How to Implement Epistemic Justice - Recognition of the Other**

Also, to make the curriculum a tool that promotes epistemic justice, it is essential that it adapts to the diversity of students and offers them the possibility of being seen and heard in their realities. Here we suggest some key principles to strengthen curriculum design from this approach:

***Contextualization of Content:*** Choose topics that are not only relevant from an Anglo-Saxon perspective, likewise the materials you use in the classroom, on the contrary, look for alternatives that also resonate with the cultural identity of your students. This may include texts or content that lead students to reflect on the similarities and differences between local dynamics or dynamics that make sense in their daily context and those of English-speaking countries.

In this way, learning English not only becomes a space for contact with the language that has resonated as a ‘necessity’, but also opens the way to an intercultural dialogue where students can reflect on their own experiences, without proposing a Eurocentric culture as superior to their own.

Perhaps another document could be done just with this topic, since it is evident the lack of contextualization in most of the use of the materials, it is difficult for students to talk about some seasons, sports or professions, which are nonexistent in their close context, but that they observe in their textbook so far from reality.

Not because of the above, do I encourage you to ignore this type of vocabulary; rather, I invite you, as a teacher, to contextualize it and contrast it with what is closer to the students’ reality, so that they can learn from meaningful experiences rather than from what, for many, represents the ideal of a society that feels distant from ours.

### ***Teaching Strategies for Intercultural Dialogue***

Encourage spaces where students not only learn English, but also where they can explore and express their cultures in comparison to the English-speaking language and culture. For example, activities such as debates or presentations on local customs in English

not only strengthen their language skills, but also help them develop intercultural competence by understanding how their cultural realities relate to others.

In some institutions, events like the ‘English Day’ are focused 100% on exposing the English-speaking culture and pretending to be others for a day, through English, but how interesting it would be for you, from the classroom, to propose events like this, where English is a bridge to talk about your own culture or cultures, being English a means, but not the end of learning, an end that always ends up directing us to the United States and Europe.

The above, as an example of how the teacher can be part of the change of perspective about English, proposing it as a safe space for the exchange of knowledge and not as an imposition of cultures to which one does not belong.

To conclude this part, each teacher is invited to review if he/she is observing each student in his/her class, from his/her knowledge, equally valid as the ones we bring in mind in the syllabus between A1 to C2, and that will complement in a significant way the learning of English as a foreign language, without imposing it as the absolute truth of success, but rather as a bridge to reach knowledge and cultures from any part of the world, and above all to share his/her own identity and culture, without disguising it as any other.

#### **4.4 Methodological Orientations - Cognitive and Learning Styles**

Let’s explore some of the methodological orientations that are often overlooked in daily teaching practices and rarely addressed in teacher training, yet are critical in ensuring we don’t unintentionally exclude students.

As teachers, it’s easy to fall into the belief that certain teaching strategies or course materials simply aren’t effective, thinking the problem lies with the students themselves—perhaps believing they are ‘not good at English’ or that ‘English is too hard.’ However, this

perspective rarely considers whether the teaching style we are using actually aligns with the students' cognitive and learning styles.

To put this into context, cognitive style refers to the habitual way a person processes information—how they typically approach problem-solving, thinking, perceiving, and remembering (Tennant, 1988). It's important to remember that every student has their own unique cognitive profile, which can affect how they learn. Understanding the unique ways in which each student learns is essential to adapting teaching methods that truly meet their needs. There's no one-size-fits-all approach, but instead, a variety of strategies that teachers can tailor to their specific classroom context.

For instance, some students might do better with visual aids like charts, diagrams, or videos, while others might thrive through hands-on activities, storytelling, or listening exercises. Some may need more time to absorb information, while others might prefer a more fast-paced, interactive approach. The goal isn't to find a single 'perfect' teaching method, but to recognize that a mix of strategies can help support different learners in different ways.

By adjusting their teaching methods to align with students' individual cognitive and learning styles, teachers can create a more inclusive classroom environment—one that recognizes each student's strengths and challenges. This way, learning becomes more accessible, engaging, and meaningful for everyone.

**Diversification of methodologies:** According to the document of the curricular guidelines for the teaching of foreign languages (Ministry of National Education of Colombia, 2006), the teaching of languages should be flexible and adapted to the needs of the students, here strategies will be established from the different cognitive and learning styles, to be applied in the classroom in a more equitable way and that respects the pace and process of each of the learners.

Professors Hederich and Camargo (2000), speak about cognitive styles as an individual characteristic, with a psychological nuance that goes hand in hand with the learning process. This should be taken into account when entering the classroom to teach a foreign language. The first thing we should look at when starting a course or class is not only the language level of the students, but more importantly, how they learn, what their cognitive style is to help them better internalize the information they receive.

Teachers must take into account these cognitive styles, also to choose the material and the type of activities to be implemented in the classroom, so we will focus on the most relevant styles and some strategies for their implementation, taking into account that this is a basis for everything that can be worked from this approach.

Before continuing with the strategies, it is important to keep in mind that in the teaching of English as a foreign language, we must open the perspective to a more personalized or individualized work with the students, depending on the styles of each one of them, understanding that it is difficult to talk about this in a group with many students, but it is not impossible to do, because what may take perhaps more time, should generate better results.

#### **4.4.1 Field-dependent and field-independent students (Cognitive styles):**

Cognitive styles, may seem more difficult to be differentiated in the classroom than they are, according to the author Witkin (1962), there are students who are more dependent and others more independent of the field, this means that in the first case, students require more support in the process or detailed guides of what to do, with much more specific details and processes, while students independent of the field, do not need so much accompaniment in the process, and feel in some cases calmer working autonomously.

This is very important when we talk about cognitive styles, since it is vital to look in detail at how each student internalizes or processes the information, we cannot give the same indications in a general way, in a single way, and pretend that everyone will assimilate it instantly or accurately,

To deal with this in the classroom, when teaching English knowledge or topics in the classroom, first identify which students can receive the information in a generalized way and provide it to them in a concrete and organized manner, but allow them to work autonomously to the point where they require support.

On the contrary, those students who are more dependent on the field should be given information in a much more detailed way, understanding that they will need a more personalized approach, and that they require constant support from their tutor or teacher.

Thus, as mentioned by the authors Hederich and Camargo (1999), who have talked a lot about the subject, it is very important to know these cognitive styles in the classroom, to facilitate a more successful learning process. It should also be noted that the aforementioned researchers not only talk about cognitive styles or the way in which information is processed, but also about learning styles, which should be taken into account when teaching a foreign language such as English.

### ***Learning styles:***

It has already been explained in general terms what the cognitive style is and how it must be distinguished to understand how information is received by the student. Now, for this section, we will consider Fleming (1992) and his VARK model, which describes the learning styles: Visual, Auditory, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic. These, in contrast to cognitive style, focus more on the strategies that people use to acquire new knowledge.

An inclusive education recognizes and adapts their methodology for each learning-style, that is, for every student in the classroom. The Fleming VARK model (1992) is a great tool to understand that students process information in different ways: some need to see, others need to hear, others need to write or read, others learn by doing, and so on.

Teaching becomes much more effective and meaningful when teachers are able to detect the existence of different learning styles in the classroom and teach according to these differences. Understanding how each student processes and assimilates information makes for a more equitable and personalized educational experience. Learning styles, according to Fleming's VARK model (1992), suggests that individuals can show a preference towards one or more modality types: visual, auditory, reading/writing and kinesthetic.

Each style represents a particular way of interpreting and retaining information that can be identified by how students deal with information or react to the use of various teaching strategies. However, it becomes a real challenge when teachers do not know how to differentiate those styles in each one of the boys, girls or young people, and much more so, when confronted in large student groups.

For this reason, before addressing the specific strategies to consider in the classroom, some guidelines will be provided to help identify learning styles when teaching. With this, we not only improve English language teaching but also foster an educational system that respects students' cultural and linguistic differences. This approach promotes both inclusion and decolonial teaching by valuing diversity as a strength rather than a barrier.

### ***Observing in Everyday Activities***

To identify the learning styles, students need to be observed while performing activities which involves variety of methods during the activities. For example, when presenting new vocabulary in English, some students prefer to visualize the terms in

diagrams, photos, videos (visual), while others retain more successfully when they hear the terms in sentences or songs (auditory). By making these observations, By making these observations, the teacher can perceive the patterns and preferences of the student and thus refer to a predominant learning style.

### ***Adapting activities and feedback***

Another way to identify styles is by varying activities and receiving direct feedback from students. When teachers alternate between activities for reading, writing, dialogue, demonstration, and movement dynamics, they can see how each student responds and performs. A student who shines in making posters or diagrams will likely be a visual learner while a student who gets excited with acting or role plays in English is likely to be a kinesthetic learner.

### ***Implementing Orientation Questions and Self-Reflection in Learning***

Encouraging self-reflection in the students is also a very important piece in the learning process. When students are asked about what types of activities they find most comfortable and appealing, and which ones they feel they learn most from, they become aware of their learning preferences. At the same time, these responses help the teacher. We must keep in mind that class must be a constant and open dialogue, because the student is an active subject of the process, and must likewise be listened to. Questions such as ‘Would you rather read to learn or listen and repeat?’ or ‘Do you think you remember the content better when doing practical exercises?’ can give good clues about each student’s style.

### ***Initial diagnostic tests***

Additionally, questionnaires or diagnostic activities that explore their learning preferences may also be used. There are short questionnaires, some based on the VARK

model (and others), which help to reveal the inclination of each student, which can be a starting point to put into practice some teaching strategies adopted.

The identification and understanding of the student learning styles is a very useful tool for the teacher, since it allows adjusting the teaching strategies and ensuring that all students receive the necessary help. By embracing the students' various ways of learning, the personalized learning makes the classroom an inclusive environment where every student feels valued and supported in their unique learning journey.

#### **4.4.2 Strategies for each learning style**

##### ***Strategies for visual learners***

Visual learners find it easier to learn when they can look at various types of images, graphs, etc. that present information clearly to them. Here is a list of guidelines that will help in teaching English to a visual learner:

1. **Use of mind maps and graphs:** When teaching new vocabulary or grammatical structures, use concept maps, flow diagrams, and graphs. In a lesson on verb tenses, for example, a comparison graph showing the tenses and the use of the mother tongue can help these students' visual organization of the lesson.
2. **Constant visual support:** Provide additional documents such as videos, random images and illustrations diagrams on the board. Visualization enables students to easily contextualize the topic. A poster of irregular verbs, for instance, can serve as a handy reference for visual students.
3. **Educational videos and demonstrations that help contextualize the language:** For instance, a video about cooking vocabulary in English that shows ingredients and utensils will help them link the new with the visual, as well as videos that have

contextualized subjects, of interest to them, while they can associate with new vocabulary.

### *Strategies for auditory learning style students*

Students with an auditory style learn usually the best from listening and talking. For them, talking is key to learning. This will help you a lot:

- 1. Dialogues and dramatizations:** In class, use dialogues or dramatizations in which they use the structures and the vocabulary. It also encourages spontaneity and, in this way, allows them to hear how English sounds in real-life situations.
- 2. Active listening activities:** Integrate activities that include listening exercises with comprehension questions. Everyday situations in English (for example, conversations in shops or stations of Transmilenio or any public transport), could be recorded so that students connect the vocabulary with authentic situations.
- 3. Discussions:** In class and oral feedback sessions are vital for these students as they help them process and retain information using verbal exchange. Asking how they perceived the class or what new words they learnt will help them to reconfirm learning.

### *Strategies for Reading/Writing Style Students*

Students of this style prefer to learn through reading and writing, so they need methodologies that allow them to access content and express learning through text.

- 1. Use of readings and writing exercises:** Provide relevant readings and create writing exercises that reinforce grammatical structure and new vocabulary. By reading and writing about topics of interest, these students achieve greater retention. They can write a short essay or story on a topic close to their hearts in English, which strengthens their ability to analyze and express themselves in the foreign language.

2. **Detailed instructions and notes:** Written instructions and the use of detailed study guides help these students organize their thinking and understand each activity. A text that explains, step-by-step, how to form past, present and future sentences would be a valuable tool.
3. **Translation practice:** Including activities to translate sentences from Spanish to English and vice versa, helps these students analyze and practice the language from its written structure, (but they consider that grammar is just a part of the language learning process). It also allows them to compare and reflect on grammar and lexis in both languages.

### *Strategies for kinesthetic learners*

For kinesthetic learners, learning occurs best when they can physically interact with their environment. These learners need activities that allow them to move and experience content in tangible ways.

1. **Learning by doing:** Exercises that involve movement, such as role-playing games or ‘Simon says’ activities in English, allow these students to experience the language in a physical way, which is key to their learning process.
2. **Games and hands-on activities:** You can include manipulatives or board games that help these students remember vocabulary and grammatical structures. For example, a flash cards game with verbs in different tenses, where they can express situations according to them, can be a way to practice the language in a dynamic way.
3. **Projects and hands-on tasks:** Assign projects where students can build or design something while practicing the language. For example, they can make a poster or craft on a topic in English or a presentation in which they move around the classroom explaining different points.

## *Strategies for Students with Mixed Learning Styles*

Some students have mixed learning styles, so effective teaching must incorporate different elements, including activities previously named in a blended manner. Below are some strategies for students with multiple preferences:

- 1. Integrative activities:** Provide activities that combine several styles. For example, a research project on a cultural topic in which students read information, discuss in groups, make a visual prototype, and orally present the results allows each student to connect with the activity through his or her dominant or preferred style.
- 2. Group tasks with specific roles:** When you identify those different styles, assign collaborative work, then assign as well roles that involve different learning styles. For instance, in a group, one person may be responsible for research (reading/writing), one for presenting the project (auditory), another one for designing the visual material (visual), and one for doing a hands-on demonstration (kinesthetic). This allows each student to participate according to his or her style, and not all are evaluated in the same way.
- 3. Project-based learning (PBL):** Long-term projects allow students to experience the content from different perspectives. For example, if the topic is ‘the professions,’ students can research (reading/writing), interview someone in the field (auditory), design a presentation (visual), and conduct a hands-on workshop about the profession (kinesthetic). This type of activity is not only inclusive, but also deeply meaningful for all styles.

By applying these pedagogical guidelines in the classroom, we are offering each student adapted learning, respecting their learning style and facilitating equitable access to content, understanding that not everyone is the same, and that in the difference one must learn

to interact respectfully with every human being in the classroom. When students feel seen and understood, learning becomes a more accessible and rewarding experience for all.

#### **4.5 Curricular Strategies – Open and Flexible Curriculum**

Now, the curricular guidelines go hand in hand with the epistemological and methodological guidelines for teaching English as a foreign language, which have been discussed in the previous section. However, for this part we will propose some strategies that should be considered when talking about a more flexible and open curriculum, which takes into account everyone in the classroom and is connected with the evaluation in this process.

To clarify, this does not mean that a specific curriculum will be proposed or designed, since that is a much broader work that depends on the needs and particularities of each institution and its pedagogical model, but it will address some guidelines that should be taken into account when creating or modifying a curriculum.

This proposal is built on the idea of an open and flexible curriculum that goes beyond traditional approaches. Rather than conceiving of teaching as a rigid, single path, you should propose a pedagogical space that can adapt to students' varied learning trajectories. A flexible curriculum allows each student to make sense of what he or she learns, relating it to his or her environment and personal experiences. As it has been said before, this means that the content should not be imposed in a uniform way, but adapted to the individual and collective realities of those who make up the class.

This curricular flexibility is not intended to be a magic formula or the perfect solution, but an invitation to explore creative approaches that respond to the specific needs of its students, whom we see not as empty vessels, but as bearers of knowledge, cultures and significant experiences. Thus, the curriculum becomes a space for dialogue and shared construction, where everyone has something valuable to contribute.

#### **4.5.1 Continuous and Fair Assessment**

Assessment, traditionally seen as a method to grade students' proficiency, which usually becomes a simple numerical and standardized process, as Ocampo (2016) argues, international assessments like PISA reinforce a globalized, one-size-fits-all model of education that does not consider the local contexts, cultures, or histories of students in Latin America. According to Ocampo, such assessments not only reduce education to a series of measurable metrics but also marginalize students from diverse backgrounds, reinforcing a colonial and neoliberal view of knowledge. So, in an environment where everyone is assessed under the same standards, obviating the such as cognitive and learning styles, is transformed here into a continuous and multidimensional process that recognizes and values each student in his or her totality.

Beyond measuring just, the language, it goes towards measuring how do students relate the language to their sociocultural realities and their personal way of looking at the world. In this respect, assessment is an act of epistemic justice that recognizes the prior knowledge and lived experience of each and every student are more than just valid; they are pre-requisites for the educational exchange.

Evaluating in this way implies recognizing that each student comes to class with his or her own baggage, with ways of seeing and understanding reality that enrich the learning environment. Thus, evaluative processes should not be uniform; rather, they should be attuned to the unique ways in which each student expresses and applies his or her knowledge. Some may express themselves best through orality, others may find writing to be their way of communicating their ideas, and still others may be comfortable with visual or hands-on activities. Diversity in the evaluation process not only enriches teaching, but also strengthens the sense of belonging and mutual respect in the classroom.

To this end, take into account the following guidelines and apply the one or ones that that best suit the styles you observe in the classroom, according to each student's needs..

### ***1. Contextualized assessment***

It is essential that the assessment is not limited to measuring language proficiency in an artificial context, but that it is integrated into the cultural and social reality of the student. To this end, you can follow these guidelines:

**Project Design:** Include projects that allow students to apply their language skills in real situations. For example, a project involving the creation of an awareness campaign on a local issue, using English to write materials and presentations. This not only assesses their language ability, but also their ability to connect the language to its context.

**Learning Portfolios:** Implement the use of portfolios where students collect and reflect on their work throughout the course. In this portfolio, they can include writings, recordings of oral presentations and reflections on their learning process, allowing students to show their progress holistically.

This is different from formative or informal assessments since it emphasizes the integration of language acquisition into authentic situations. Informal and formative assessments, including quizzes, observations, or discussions, usually use brief knowledge checks to gauge students' progress during the learning process. Usually, the purpose of these examinations is to provide rapid or qualitative answers regarding the growth of the students.

Conversely, contextualized assessment seeks to gauge more than just language proficiency in isolated tasks. It highlights the ways in which students can apply their language skills in real-world situations that are suitable for their culture. For instance, learning portfolios and project-based learning give students the chance to demonstrate not just their

language proficiency but also how they can apply what they've learned to their social, cultural, and personal life.

## ***2. Diversified Assessment by Cognitive Styles***

Assessment should be adjusted to the different cognitive and learning styles of each student, mentioned above, recognizing that each student has unique ways of learning and demonstrating knowledge. To this end, the following strategies can be implemented:

**Multimodal Activities:** provide opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning in a variety of ways. It could be an oral presentation, a project, a dramatic exercise, or an essay. One student may do an oral presentation on a topic of interest, a student who is stronger in writing may type a report, etc.

**Self and Co-Assessment:** Through self-assessment, you can promote critical reflection on their own learning, e.g., Students can fill rubrics, where they assess themselves on various language competences and intercultural abilities. Moreover, co-assessment permits expert peer feedback, supplemented by peer review comments, supporting therapeutic collaborative, more atmosphere.

## ***3. Constructive Feedback***

This goes in parallel with the previous point, as feedback is an extremely crucial part of the assessment cycle and must be very specific, constructive and geared towards student improvement. To this end:

**Assignment Comments:** Your comments on assignments should be detailed and should explain not just what is wrong, but how to fix them. It is important to start that by letting the student know what his/her strengths are, so that he/she can enhance his/her process from there, and not just focus on opportunities for improvement. Hattie (2009) emphasizes

that effective feedback provides students with concrete steps for improvement, making their learning journey more transparent. For example, if a student has struggled with grammatical structure, a specific resource or practice activity can be offered, considering what is he/she better at.

**Holding Individual Feedback Meetings:** Conduct feedback meetings with students individually, where students are provided with an outline of their strengths and under-performances. Not only does this help students understand how they learn but it also builds the teacher-student relationship.

Finally, I know there are a lot of other important factors in teaching and learning that could be part of this broader approach to assessment, as well as the different barriers teachers have in the classroom, like the amount of students we have per classroom, the emotional and social factors like motivation, anxiety, and a student's sense of belonging are all key parts of the learning process. Intercultural competence and collaboration are also critical skills that could be included in assessments. However, I have chosen to focus on a narrower scope for now, because it's important to first lay down a strong foundation for a fairer and more inclusive way of assessing students.

By focusing on cognitive and learning styles, my aim is to address the current problems with standardized testing, which often overlook the unique ways each student learns. It's not about finding one 'perfect' student or ideal way of learning, but about recognizing that all students bring different strengths to the table, and those strengths should be valued in the assessment process. In other words, we need an approach that moves away from measuring everything the same way for everyone and, instead, appreciates the diverse ways students understand and engage with the world.

The key here is that assessment should be a way of understanding students as whole people. It is about recognizing and seeing their personal and cultural experiences as forms of knowledge that matter and should be celebrated. When we assess in this way, we are not just looking at how well a student can memorize a list of facts or follow a rigid set of rules. We're looking at how they use language to make sense of their reality and communicate their understanding of the world around them. This, I believe, is a more equitable and just way of assessing students, because it validates their lived experiences as essential to their learning journey.

What makes this approach more fair in terms of a equitable education, or 'inclusive' as it has been used, is that it acknowledges that each student comes to the classroom with different ways of seeing and understanding the world, and these differences should be recognized, not ignored. For example, some students may be more comfortable expressing themselves orally, while others may prefer writing or hands-on activities. These differences should be seen as strengths, not limitations. The idea is that assessment should give students multiple ways to demonstrate what they've learned in ways that make sense for them—whether that's through a presentation, a project, a written report, or a creative project.

**V. Provisional Closure, the Struggle for an Education that  
Acknowledges Others Must Continue**

**‘But what is important is that [...] are educated in the terms of eurocentrism (the objective of the colonial school), but rather that [...] they are liberated through a decolonial pedagogy that teaches them not to be slaves to their own hegemonic archetypes’ (Fanon, 1952, p. 281; own translation).**

Everything previously stated in this proposal, is linked to what has been presented throughout this document, and although it may seem a bit utopian and out of context with the many dynamics that occur in the classroom, including it little by little in our daily practice as teachers is not impossible, on the contrary, it must be a necessity if we really want to see the ‘other’ out there, in the streets, in the classrooms, in every corner of this city, this country and the world.

By returning to what was discussed in the previous chapters, and moving towards the proposal, I reaffirm my conviction that the first step to a more equitable education is to recognize that our students are not a homogeneous mass, nor should they be the Eurocentric ideal reproduction that has always been sold to us. Each of them brings with them a set of experiences, perceptions and skills that we must respect and integrate into our pedagogical

practices. If we really want to talk about recognition and equity, we cannot continue ignoring the differences that surround us.

The authors I have discussed offer us the theoretical tools to understand this diversity, but it is our task as teachers to put these theories into practice in a humane and conscious way. Only in this way we can transform our classrooms into spaces where each student, with his or her particular way of learning and understanding the world, has the opportunity to develop fully.

This study, rather than a rigid plan, is an invitation to reflect and adapt our practices, always keeping in mind that what works for one may not be the best for another. To the extent that we manage to embrace and celebrate this diversity, we will be contributing to the construction of a more just and equitable education for all.

What I propose, then, is a paradigm shift. If we really want to be inclusive, we must begin to see each student as a unique individual, with their own cognitive and learning styles, and understand those with disabilities, who have different needs, who are no less valid for not being the colonial stereotype.

Integrating all of this into our practices will not only improve academic performance, but will also promote greater equity and justice in the classroom. This will ultimately help us build a more inclusive education system that recognizes the multiple ways in which our students interact with the world.

In this way, we need an education that is not only concerned with transmitting content, but with how that content is assimilated and understood by each of our students. Ultimately, recognizing that we have been punished, being the damned of the earth, as Fannon (1961) says, but that it is also in our hands to take that Coloniality that permeates us and build something new with all of this.

My proposal to prevent exclusion in the classroom is not limited to just one aspect of the educational experience. It is a comprehensive transformation that encompasses the curriculum, resources, teacher training and institutional policies.

This approach not only responds to the current needs of marginalized students, ‘the others,’ but also offers a long-term vision of truly inclusive or, in this case, equitable education. Classroom exclusion is not a problem that can be solved in isolation; it requires a systemic restructuring that involves all stakeholders: teachers, students, families, communities and educational policy makers.

In short, the transformation I propose is an invitation to rethink education from its foundations, recognizing that all students have the right not only to access education, but to see themselves reflected and valued within it. The path to inclusive education is not easy, but it is necessary if we want to build a more just and equitable society. As Mignolo (2011) says: “Decolonization is not only a political project; it is also an epistemic project. It involves decentering hegemonic ways of knowing and opening up space for pluriversality, that is, for multiple ways of knowing, feeling, and being in the world” (Mignolo, 2011, own translation).

On the other hand, having also explored the dimensions of epistemic justice, redistributive justice and recognition justice in the Colombian educational context, it is clear that we cannot continue to perpetuate a system that excludes the voices, cultures and knowledge of non-Western communities. My proposal, which advocates for the recognition of plural epistemologies, the equitable redistribution of resources, and a diverse teaching representation, seeks precisely to dismantle the structures of exclusion that are still present in the classrooms.

Ultimately, achieving true inclusion is not about simple adjustments to an existing system, but about rethinking the entire education system. Following authors such as Fraser (2009), De Sousa Santos(2018), Mignolo (2011) and Hooks (1994), I have put forward a

transformative approach that seeks not only to recognize but also to empower those who have been systematically marginalized in education. As a teacher, I firmly believe that this transformation is possible, but it requires a constant commitment from all the actors involved.

It is interesting to think that when I started drafting this study, my focus was always on inclusion, like many, only considering those in situations of disability or exceptional abilities (who are also included in this project). However, gradually this project opened my mind to realize that inclusion, or as I prefer to call it, an equitable education that sees the other, is about everyone, each one of us, and each of our students—so different and so deserving of being recognized in that way.

Finally, this work does not end here; the fight for justice in education is ongoing, and each generation of educators and students has the responsibility to continue moving toward a more just and equitable educational model in our country, and in the world.

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