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Dialogic popular education in Spain and its impact on society, educational and social theory, and European research

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Abstract

Dialogic popular education developed by La Verneda-Sant Martí School for Adults in Spain, influenced by the work of Paulo Freire, has had a range of significant social and educational impacts. Starting with an emancipatory approach to eradicate oppression, this dialogic popular education resisted and has transformed aspects of the Spanish educational sphere despite ongoing hindrances and difficulties. This article presents a path of events, a history of interventions and findings from research on how dialogic popular education has affected and changed educational practices as well as how research is approached elsewhere in Europe. In addition, it presents ways in which a radical commitment to social change can be combined with scientific standards in the pursuit of achieving a better society for all.

Keywords: dialogic education, popular education, learning communities, successful educational actions, Freire



Introduction

Dialogic popular education developed by La Verneda-Sant Martí School for Adults in Barcelona, Spain, influenced by the work of Paulo Freire, offers us insight into social and educational transformations that can come about through popular education. Transformations that occurred in this country spread to other countries. These practices have promoted new theoretical approaches and ways of analysing social impact of research in Europe.

In Spain there have been many popular education projects influenced by the contributions of Paulo Freire and other radical thinkers. But this article focuses only on the dialogic popular education that began in a school for adults in Barcelona created in 1978, as well as in its influence on subsequent social and educational transformations. Dialogic popular education is understood in this article as those that have been influenced by the theory of dialogical action developed by Paulo Freire in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970b). This dialogical approach in education is based on the inclusion of all participants in the decision-making processes and the creation of knowledge with the aim of social transformation in their communities. The first section, 'Paulo Freire in Spain', offer some historical context and describes the influence of Paulo Freire's work in popular education at the end of, and after, Franco's dictatorship in Spain.

In the following section on 'La Verneda-Sant Martí School for Adults in Barcelona' we present an educational project which was strongly influenced by Paulo Freire's theory of dialogical action. This school has been an important agent in its neighbourhood's social, cultural, and educational transformations and has received international academic recognition (Sanchez-Aroca, 1999).

In the following section 'Dialogic Learning and Schools as Learning Communities' Ramón Flecha's theorisation of dialogic learning is outlined. This learning theory is connected with Freire's theory of dialogical action (1970b) and combines this with the contributions of other authors (Austin, 1975; Bakhtin, 2010; Bruner, 1990; Chomsky, 2006; Cummins, 2000; Habermas, 1981; Mead, 1934; Rogoff et al., 2001; Searle, 1995; Vygotsky, 1934/2012; Wells, 1999) and was first developed in La Verneda-Sant Martí School. It has since been transferred to more than 10,000 pre-schools, primary and secondary schools in 14 countries in Europe and Latin America through the School as Learning Communities project (ENLARGE Consortium, 2018; Natura Institute., 2018; Rodriguez-Oramas et al., 2021; SEAs4all Consortium, 2016; Soler et al., 2019; Step4Seas Consortium, 2017; Vieites et al., 2021). The impact on the improvement of learning and social cohesion in schools as Learning Communities was the centre of a study by the *INCLUD-ED project: Strategies for Inclusion and Social Cohesion from Education in Europe*, funded by the 6th Research Framework Program of the European Union during 2006-2011. The social impact of the INCLUD-ED project led the European Commission to select it as one of the ten success stories in all knowledge areas of all EU Research Framework Programmes (European Commission, 2011).

The 'Dialogic feminism and 'the other women'' section describes the dialogic feminism of women who are also influenced by Freire's theory of dialogical action. The 'other women' are those who do not have a university degree and participate in dialogic popular education projects such as La Verneda Sant Martí School, the schools as Learning Communities and other grassroots organizations. These women have traditionally been excluded from the spaces of public debate on feminism. Lídia Puigvert (2001; Beck-Gernsheim et al., 2003; De Bottom et al., 2005) theorises dialogic feminism as when 'other women' create their own spaces for dialogue. They are the protagonists of their transformation processes, contributing to the diversification of feminism.

This is followed by the ‘Dialogic struggle against gender violence and violence in schools’ section. It presents the contributions of the other women (mothers, grandmothers, and other family women without basic qualifications) in working together with teachers and researchers to promote a dialogic model of prevention and conflict resolution to prevent violence and gender violence. The subsequent section is ‘Transferring the dialogic fight against gender violence to universities’. It presents how the commitment of researchers working from a dialogic approach in La Verneda-Sant Martí School and the Schools as Learning Communities to prevent gender violence led them to break the silence about this type of violence within the university, making it visible and promoting the implementation of measures for its attention and prevention as well as a solidarity network of support for victims of sexual harassment in the university made up of students, professors, and researchers.

The last section, ‘Dialogic Popular Education with impact on research in Europe’ explains how dialogic popular education, first in the La Verneda-Sant Martí School and then in schools as Learning Communities, contributed through the INCLUD-ED and IMPACT-EV research projects to create a new framework for the analysis of social impact in European research.

This article presents ways in which the practice of dialogic popular education in Spain has gone hand in hand with social impact research, building together over the last four decades.

Paulo Freire in Spain

Paulo Freire's work began in Spain at the end of the 1960s through Christian activists linked to the Latin American movements and Liberation Theology. They introduced his works and his literacy method clandestinely, when they were not yet published in book edition but rather in mimeographed form. From that time until Franco's death in 1975, and during the political transition until 1978, Freire was the main author of reference for the cultural literacy work carried out by the popular education movements in Spain (Flecha, 2007). Freire's materials were read and commented on by Christian grassroots groups, in pedagogical renewal movements, and in some Marxist and anarchist leftist clandestine organizations (Flecha, 2007).

Three decades earlier, with the end of the Civil War in Spain in 1939, the Dictatorship of General Franco's regime was established, which was to last 40 years. The dictatorship eliminated popular education aimed at the emancipation of the most oppressed. The great tradition of cultural education that had developed in the workers' athenaeums since the mid-19th century, the Popular Universities, and the Pedagogical Missions since the beginning of the 20th century, and the Free Women's movement during 1936-1939, among other experiences which had achieved so much social transformation and international recognition, were harshly repressed, and annihilated. Despite the repression, in which hundreds of thousands of people were murdered, exiled, and disappeared (Preston, 2012), there were people who continued to work in popular education and literacy programmes in the poorest neighbourhoods (Oliver et al., 2016).

Freire's work united non-Christians and Christians involved in organisations in the underground struggle against Franco by offering them through popular education a path to nonviolent social transformation. Nonviolence and opposition to any kind of dictatorship were part of Freire's contribution to the anti-Franco movement. Obviously, his theory of dialogical action, which he developed in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was important as well (Freire, 1970b). Freire created this theory more than a decade before Habermas' *Theory of Communicative Action* (1981). Freire's dialogical conception fitted

very well with the popular education that was already being carried out in the neighbourhoods where illiterate people were considered as creators of culture with whom the educator establishes a dialogue on an equal basis, jointly generating knowledge. Freire's work not only provided a theory that coincided with popular education in Spain, but it also provided a literacy method that, when used well, was very effective.

The double dimension of social commitment and academic recognition embodied by the figure of Paulo Freire multiplied the impact of his work in Spain and worldwide. Freire's positioning led him to elaborate this theory from years of experience in the literacy of rural peasants in cultural circles in Brazil and Chile; at the same time, he was recognised by one of the most prestigious universities in the world. In 1969 Harvard University offered Freire a position as a visiting professor. He worked at the U.S. university for 10 months (Flecha, 1989). Harvard decided to publish in English *Cultural Action for Freedom* (Freire, 1970a) and *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (Freire, 1970b), manuscripts originally published in 1967 and 1968 respectively (Ramis Salas, 2018).

With the process of democratic transition in Spain, after the death of the dictator in 1975, there was an opportunity to break with the dictatorial regime and to begin to re-establish all those organisations and movements that had promoted popular education before Franco. However, reforms within the regime meant there was no clean break with the dictatorship. Thus, there was a continuity of Francoist political positions in the nascent democracy that had an impact on all areas of society, including education (Flecha, 2011). The democratic transition did not lead to the strengthening and visibility of Paulo Freire's work in formal and 'mainstream' education in Spain. Freire's contributions to popular education and social pedagogy were not present in broader educational policies (Caride, 2021). However, dialogic popular education survived in some neighbourhoods and towns and with the professors that persisted to transmit their work in the faculties of education of some universities, continuing as pedagogies of resistance (Caride, 2021; Groves, 2011, 2016).

An example of the dialogic popular education is La Verneda Sant-Martí School, created in Barcelona in 1978 (Aubert et al., 2016; Sanchez-Aroca, 1999). The school received significant support from the centre of research CREA. La Verneda-Sant Martí School and CREA were both founded by Ramon Flecha (Giner, 2018). At the moment of its foundation in 1991 at the University of Barcelona, the Spanish acronym of CREA corresponded to the name Centre of Research on Adult Education. Subsequently, CREA became the Community of Research on Excellence for All, formed by research groups of different universities and researchers from various disciplines and countries. With this shift, CREA positions itself in a changing society, moving increasingly towards scientific and human excellence available for everyone (Soler, 2017).

Recent studies by Caride (2021), Igelmo and Quiroga (2021), and Roca et al. (2021a) are major contributions to understanding the influence of the Brazilian pedagogue's thought in Spanish universities and in the dialogic popular education projects that have been promoted at all educational stages and in social and community education in Spain.

The following sections present how elements of Freire's theory of dialogical action have been recreated in La Verneda-Sant Martí School, as in turn this school and Freire's contributions, have influenced schools as Learning Communities, dialogic feminism, and the fight against gender violence in schools and universities, as well as in educational and social research in Europe.

La Verneda-Sant Martí School for Adults in Barcelona

When the time of democratic transition in Spain came it was not free from the influence of the political reform promoted by the Francoism. Despite this some people remained committed to the challenge of transforming society by overcoming the economic, social, and educational inequalities of the most disadvantaged. Multiple popular education projects were developed in cities and towns aimed at breaking the accumulation of social and educational disadvantages of oppressed populations (Sanchez-Aroca, 1999). In this context, a school for adults was created and adopted the name of the neighbourhood where it is located, La Verneda-Sant Martí in Barcelona. Several pedagogical and intellectual references influenced the project of this school, such as the Institución Libre de Enseñanza [The Free Institution of Education], the workers' athenaeums, the Popular Universities, and the Pedagogical Missions of the Second Republic, as well as Paulo Freire (Giner, 2018).

Elisenda Giner's book, *Creative Friendships* (2018) and the article published in Harvard Educational Review (Sanchez-Aroca, 1999) are the works that most rigorously explain the origins of this school. The school for adults ended up being a request from all the neighbourhood entities, becoming a pluralistic school in which relationships were being created that had never happened before. People of very different ideologies, worldviews, religions, and ages came together with the common goal of transforming the neighbourhood through culture and education (Giner, 2018).

One of the key factors of its success is its dialogic approach (Flecha, 2000), following Freire's contributions, that includes an egalitarian, plural and democratic organisation involving the participants in all decision-making processes. Ramon Flecha and a small group of neighbours occupied an empty building that had been the location of the women's section of the Francoist movement. This building would become the community centre of the neighbourhood where the adult school would be located among other projects. One of the testimonies collected by Sánchez-Aroca (1999) is that of a woman who was part of the first group of learning participants. She explains how they were all involved in the decision-making and management processes, including meetings with policymakers to seek funding:

We, the neighbours, decided what we wanted it to be like and what to do to achieve it. Afterwards, once we managed to get the centre started, our struggle turned in part to demanding the different public administrations to take on their share of responsibility with funding. What still remains from all that is the way in which everybody gets involved and participates... What we achieved is an extensive cultural project for the community, housed in our centre. This centre brings together most of the community's cultural life, and that is why here, on its fifth floor, the School for Adults is located (Sanchez-Aroca, 1999, p. 323)

Almost 40 years after its creation, its success and growth are evidenced by more than 2,000 participants, 5 employees and more than 150 volunteers engaged in a school open seven days a week from 9:00 am to 10:00 pm (Aubert et al., 2016). Throughout its history, the school has always maintained a democratic and dialogic approach, with free educational courses, responding to the educational needs of the people of the neighbourhood and schedules decided based on their demands. Over the years, the activities offered have increased and diversified. Currently, the school offers initial training activities that includes literacy and instrumental certificates, preparation for the free exams for the Secondary Education Graduate and university admission tests for people over 25 years old, various dialogic gatherings (literary, artistic, feminist, scientific, musical, and mathematical), languages, ICT, artistic workshops, physical activities and

various training modules in philosophy, economics or literature, and family education, among others.

The dialogic management of the school has influenced and transferred to other entities in the neighbourhood. Since the beginning of the school, it promoted the creation of an organisation that coordinates the neighbourhood's entities in order to carry out the dream of improving the living conditions of all the people there. This organisation is VERN, still a very active movement that has continued to play an important role in the transformation of the area. During more than four decades of history, the school together with VERN, has promoted mobilisations that have achieved the extension of the subway line to the area, the construction of the long and tree-lined Rambla Gipuzcoa where a beltway had been planned, fought against racism against Roma people living in the local shantytown, the removal of a fascist association that had settled in the neighbourhood, the obstruction of the bulldozers that wanted to demolish the last farmhouses around the church of Sant Martí, and instead led to them being renovated for use as a playroom for children, a space for homeless people, as well as urban vegetable gardens and a large park, among other achievements (Giner, 2018).

La Verneda-Sant Martí School has not only promoted social transformations in its neighbourhood, but it has also been fostering a democratic and dialogic adult education movement, in Catalonia, Spain and internationally. The two associations of participants of this school, Agora and Heura, the second one specifically of women, were two of the organizations that were created in 1996 FACEPA in Catalonia. FACEPA is the Federation of Cultural and Educational Associations of Adults; and within the national scope, FACEPA promoted CONFAPEA, Confederation of Federations and Associations of Participants in Adult Education in Spain (Oliver et al., 2016). This movement, following the dialogic approach of Paulo Freire, is based on the premise that the people participating in the learning and education of adults without university degrees are the people who decide about their own educational processes and projects, avoiding falling into an adult education that is governed by the corporativism of some professionals.

Roca et al. (2021a) report some details about the beginning of this movement, which are described below. The adult school was also involved in preparing for CONFITEA 1997, of which Flecha was the research coordinator, where at the end 21 delegations from 13 countries (Spain, Belgium, France, Holland, Italy, Portugal, Hungary, Denmark, Romania, Czech Republic, Australia, Brazil, and India) signed the declaration of rights of the participants that had been under preparation and discussion for several years.

Freire, on his first trip to Barcelona, held a conference that was overflowing with people. Ramon Flecha, who brought Freire to Barcelona in 1988, gave his five minutes for a literacy participant to speak, to whom Paulo gave a hug at the end that was enthusiastically applauded by the audience. Freire loved the meetings promoted by La Verneda-Sant Martí School in which the people who spoke were the participants and the professionals listened. Later as Education Councillor of São Paulo, he organized the congresses of literacy learners, where the literacy participants spoke, and the teachers listened.

Dialogic Learning and Schools as Learning Communities

At the Congress of New Critical Perspectives in Education that CREA organized in Barcelona in 1994, Freire witnessed first-hand how CREA offered the project of democratic and dialogic education to anyone who wanted to recreate it in pre-schools, primary and secondary schools. Months later Schools as Learning Communities project inspired by La Verneda-Sant Martí School had already been started in four primary

schools and that it would be replicated in many parts of the world, including Brazil (Roca et al., 2021a).

Contrary to the principles promoted by the dialogical and democratic model of adult education in the national Spanish educational reform in the 1980s disregarded Freire's contributions in favour of others promoting less progressive proposals (Garcia-Carrión et al., 2021; Racionero & Padros, 2010).

La Verneda-Sant Martí School for Adults and CREA have fostered a movement that currently includes more than 10,000 schools and other educational and social settings in 14 countries in Europe and Latin America (Spain, Cyprus, Malta, Italy, United Kingdom, Czech Republic, Portugal, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru), which are implementing the successful educational actions that are part of the Schools as Learning Communities project (ENLARGE Consortium, 2018-2021; Natura Institute, 2018, 2020; SEAs4all Consortium, 2016; Step4Seas Consortium, 2017-2019; Vieites et al., 2021).

Schools as Learning Communities is a project based on a set of educational actions aimed at social and educational transformation (Soler & Rodrigues de Mello, 2020). This educational model is in line with international scientific theories that highlight two key factors for learning today: interactions and community participation (Bakhtin, 2010; Bruner, 1996; Chomsky, 2006; Cummins, 2000; Flecha, 2000; Freire, 1970b; Habermas, 1981; Mead, 1934; Rogoff et al., 2001; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978; Wells, 1999). Schools as Learning Communities involve everyone who directly or indirectly influences the learning and development of students, including teachers, families, friends, neighbours, local organizations, volunteers, etc.

The social and educational impact of Schools as Learning Communities has been studied by the European Union's 6th Framework Programme of Research project *INCLUD-ED: Strategies for Inclusion and Social Cohesion from Education in Europe* (Flecha & INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2015) and by several research projects that have been developed subsequently. The impact on the improvement of learning and social cohesion of the educational actions implemented in Schools as Learning Communities has been enhancing pro-social behaviour as well as increasing the academic achievement of all students, family education amelioration, better coexistence in the school and the community among others (Flecha & Soler, 2013). These educational actions are Interactive Groups (Valls & Kyriakides, 2013), Dialogic Gatherings (Fernandez-Villardón et al., 2021; Flecha, 2015, Soler, 2015), Family Education and participation (Rodríguez-Oramas et al., 2021), dialogic teacher training (Roca et al., 2021b), and dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution (Serradell et al., 2020; Villarejo-Carballido et al., 2019). In all these educational actions based on dialogic learning some of Paulo Freire's contributions can be identified, although they also go further. For example, in Interactive Groups, as in Freire's theory of dialogic action, knowledge is created jointly among all the learners with the guidance of an adult who dynamises the interactions; but this adult person is not only the educator but might be a family member or other people from the community. In the Dialogic Gatherings all contributions are valued according to their arguments and not according to the position of power of the person who makes them (educator versus learner). The concept of unity in diversity of Freire (1997) or the similar concept of equality of differences of Flecha (2000) is also embodied in Dialogic Gatherings when one of their principles is respect for differences. What makes all participants in the Dialogic Gatherings equal is that they have the same right to think and live differently. All opinions are accepted as long as they respect human rights.

Dialogic feminism and 'the other women'

Paulo Freire has also influenced the women's movement initiated at La Verneda - Sant Martí School: the 'other women' movement. Lidia Puigvert is the co-author with Judith Butler and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim of the book *Women and Social Transformations* (2003). The book has contributed to making visible the contributions that the 'other women' - those who have not had the opportunity to access higher education- made to making feminism more dialogical. Lidia Puigvert theorised dialogic feminism as a feminism in which all women are included in the spaces of public debate, especially those who, because they do not have academic degrees, have been left out of the feminist movement dominated by academic women (Ostrouch-Kamińska et al., 2021). From dialogic feminism, all women are organized on the basis of solidarity, always prioritising the voices and interests of those women who are in a situation of greater inequality. The 'other women' are participating in the spaces of public debate at different levels, as well as in decisions on adult education and learning projects, and in Schools as Learning Communities where their children attend. Some articles have already collected evidence of how the involvement in decision-making and participation of these 'other women' in the educational actions of the Schools as Learning Communities have improved their own lives and those of their families, but also improved their communities (Flecha, 2015). Immigrant mothers with low levels of formal education have been involved in the decision and design of health literacy activities addressed to them and their children. In some of the Schools as Learning Communities there is constant coordination between the health centre, the school, and the mothers, jointly organizing health literacy activities that have had a direct impact on improving the health of their children, for example, by increasing the level of vaccination among them (A. Flecha et al., 2013). There are Schools as Learning Communities that are conducting scientific dialogic gatherings in which women with low literacy skills are reading and discussing articles on scientific or health topics they have chosen. The narratives of these women show that they have developed critical thinking about what health information is evidence-based and what is not, just as they have stated that the scientific dialogical gatherings have helped them to make better decisions involving their health, for example, to improve theirs and their family dietary habits (Buslón et al., 2020). The social and educational research developed by CREA through the communicative methodology, also influenced by Freire's theory of dialogical action, has included the voices of the 'other women' through an egalitarian dialogue with the researchers to co-create knowledge about the educational actions that are contributing to better learning and community cohesion (Melgar et al., 2011).

From this perspective, scientific evidence has been gathered of the triple discrimination that some women suffer not only because of their gender but also because they do not have academic qualifications and belong to cultural minorities and/or have an immigrant background (Oliver et al., 2014). Evidence has been collected as well of how solidarity networks promoted by women in the communities have facilitated immigrant women's access to basic social and educational facilities, also contributing to the dismantling of racist discourses (Sordé et al., 2014).

Several studies have been developed in overcoming prejudices about non-academic Moroccan immigrants and Roma mothers who have been involved in family education in their children's schools and later as volunteers in the children's classrooms, becoming new references for all children, helping to improve their learning (De Botton et al., 2014). Other studies focused on women with low ICT skills that have achieved solidarity networks to break social isolation by participating in online dialogic literary gatherings

during the months of total lockdown due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Ruiz-Eugenio et al., 2021).

Many of the women participating in dialogic popular education were very actively involved in massive and very diverse Feminist Strikes of March 8, 2018, in Spain. Furthermore, the growing recognition of these 'other women's' contributions into the dialogic feminism and the process of diversification of this movement, that it has undergone in recent years, has contributed to the fact that more and more women of very diverse profiles and ages are taking an active part in grassroots organizations and movements and thus contributing to social transformation.

Dialogic struggle against gender violence and violence in schools

Freire's dialogical approach is also present in the contributions of the 'other women' to prevent violence in schools. Migrant mothers, grandmothers and other family women without basic qualifications are participating jointly with educators in the spaces of decision-making for the implementation of measures to prevent gender violence and violence in their children's schools (Oliver et al., 2009; Serradell et al., 2020). These contributions are framed within the dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution (Villarejo-Carballido et al., 2019) and in the promotion of measures and ways of interacting that prevents gender violence (Puigvert, 2014).

The dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution is based on dialogue as a tool for discovering the causes and origins of conflicts and to solve them within the community long before they appear. This approach focuses, therefore, on conflict prevention, through the creation of a climate of collaboration, where people participate in the creation of rules, the functioning of schools and how to resolve conflicts, creating greater understanding and meaning for all involved. To this end, the necessary spaces and conditions are provided so that all people have the same opportunities to express their voice and find joint solutions. To make this dialogue possible, it is considered that all people, regardless of their culture, educational background, etc., have the capacity to intervene, give their opinion and participate in the search for a consensual solution that helps to prevent conflicts. The responsibility and capacity to manage coexistence is not limited to an authority figure or to people who are experts in mediation, but extends to all students, teachers, families, and members of the community. This type of model allows a qualitative improvement of coexistence both in schools and in the community (Rodríguez-Oramas et al., 2020).

In the dialogic model of conflict prevention and resolution, actions are also developed that involve the whole community in promoting a socialisation that prevents gender violence. These actions are based on the line of research initiated by Jesús Gómez on the social bases of love focus on the analysis of the social interactions that shape models of sexual and affective attractiveness. Gómez (2015) suggests the existence of a majority and prevalent socialization, neither unique nor exclusive, that encourages the models that are socially considered more attractive to be those related to violent attitudes. Further research has analysed how there is a coercive dominant discourse that associates attraction with violence and influences the socialization processes of many girls during the awakening of their affective-sexual relationships, which has been shown to constitute a risk factor for suffering gender violence (Puigvert et al., 2019).

By developing ways of interacting that prevents gender violence, the whole community is involved in the promotion of interactions that generate learning that focuses on the attractiveness of those who are not violent (Valls et al., 2008). Interactions that promote new alternative masculinities are fostered from early childhood. Families,

teachers, and the community are trained in the encouragement of interactions that from the earliest years offer self-confidence, courage to take a stand against the use of violence and the creation of relationships based on friendship and solidarity (Flecha et al., 2013).

These topics are also discussed in depth not only with families but also with children, from preschool and primary education, in actions such as dialogic literary gatherings. In these gatherings, which were also created at La Verneda-Sant Martí School and have been transferred to pre-school, primary and secondary schools and other social and educational spaces in the community, literary works of universal reference, or quality adaptations for children, are read and discussed (Flecha & INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2015). In the dialogues about these works, the language of desire is promoted along with the language of ethics about those who are not violent. It is understood that the language of desire has the ability to promote greater interest and desire about a given fact, behaviour or issue, while the language of ethics describes what is considered good (Lopez de Aguilera et al., 2020).

Transferring the dialogic fight against gender violence to universities

Consistency between discourse and actions is one of the organising principles of Paulo Freire's theory of dialogical action. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, coherence entails acting in accordance with those one defends, committing oneself with those who suffer the oppression of structures and relations of power for their transformation into structures and relations that make people freer. In these words, Paulo Freire stated it.

The essential elements of witness which do not vary historically include: *consistency* between words and actions; *boldness* which urges the witnesses to confront existence as a permanent risk; radicalization (not sectarianism) leading both the witnesses and the ones receiving that witness to increasing action; *courage to love* (which, far from being accommodation to an unjust world, is rather the transformation of that world in behalf of the increasing liberation of humankind); and *faith* in the people, since it is to them that witness is made—although witness to the people, because of their dialectical relations with the dominant elites, also affects the latter (who respond to that witness in their customary way). (Freire, 1970/2018, p. 176)

Flecha and his research team were working on the Schools as Learning Communities project so that the right to the best education would be real for all adults and children. As has been explained in previous sections, these schools were developing the educational actions that were obtaining the greatest improvements in instrumental learning, values, emotions, and feelings, and includes the whole community in these transformation processes. It would not have been consistent in the development of a project such as Schools as Learning Communities if Flecha and the CREA researchers had not committed themselves to the victims of gender violence in their own university, supporting them, breaking the silence in the face of this oppression, and promoting measures for its eradication and prevention within the entire university community. Flecha (2011) analysed the impact of the feudal structure in Spanish universities, which has been more intense than in other democratic countries and has allowed a law of silence that has lasted longer in this country. He explains that in order to understand the submission of university professors to a feudal system and their silence in the face of gender violence in the university, it is necessary to place it in the historical context that allowed its consolidation during the 1980s, blocking the break with the university inheritance left by Franco's regime. The total arbitrariness in the decision of the tribunals to opt for a permanent

position meant that many of those who did not submit to the professors were excluded, whether they rejected the harassment or were in solidarity with those who rejected it.

The revolution initiated by CREA in breaking the silence against gender violence in universities has achieved very important objectives in a very short period. In just a few years, almost all Spanish universities have equality plans and officers. Many of these plans already include mechanisms to prevent gender violence. A further important step which has been achieved is that in December 2020, the Catalan Parliament unanimously approved to include in its law against gender violence for the first time in the world, the concept of isolating gender violence (IGV). The elaboration of this concept and its name has been the fruit of a long process of dialogue between researchers, policymakers, governments, parliaments, victims, survivors, social organizations, and citizens (Vidu et al., 2021). The IGV is the attacks and retaliation launched against gender violence victims' supporters so that victims remain isolated (Vidu et al., 2021, p. 178). Gender violence is a social problem that requires the involvement of the entire community to eradicate. Not looking the other way, reporting the cases that are known and positioning at the victim's side are fundamental actions to overcome it, but for this, it is necessary to establish mechanisms in our laws and institutions that overcome the IGV, protecting victim supporters (Melgar et al., 2021).

Dialogic Popular Education with impact on research in Europe

The Dialogic Popular Education described above has also influenced the way research is done in Europe. From La Verneda-Sant Martí School, the first school as Learning Community, the analysis of the social and educational impacts of schools as Learning Communities developed in the INCLUD-ED project (Flecha & INCLUD-ED Consortium, 2015) gave a new frame of analysis of the social impact to European research. Indeed, the FP6 INCLUD-ED project, was the only one selected from the social sciences within the first ten success stories of all EU Framework Programmes of research for all knowledge areas for its added value and innovation (European Commission, 2011).

The communicative approach followed in the above-mentioned research allowed both researchers and people from the communities to contribute with knowledge and new understandings informing about solutions to social problems, thus achieving social impact from the research results (Gómez et al., 2011). The 7th Framework Research Programme project IMPACT-EV (Flecha & IMPACT-EV Consortium, 2015) analyses the instrumental differences between evaluating the scientific and the social impacts of research; considering social impact as:

[...] the social improvements achieved as a result of the implementation of the results of a particular research project or study, in order to measure the social improvements achieved by scientific research and that contribute to reaching EU2020 targets or the UN Sustainable Development Goals. (Oliver et al., 2020, p. 956)

Focusing on social impact in research contributes to guaranteeing that the investment in research has a direct consequence in improving people's lives. Ramon Flecha was appointed by the European Commission to elaborate the new methodologies to evaluate the social and political impact of all research areas of scientific research which inform the European Commission for the monitoring and evaluation system of the Horizon Europe (European Commission et al., 2018). Indeed, the European Commission has highlighted the need to prioritize research outcomes and new knowledge which are linked to societal impact (Bellavista et al., 2022), introducing this societal impact as a key indicator to

evaluate the Framework Program for Research (European Commission et al., 2018). It means, for example, including strategies in research for the meaningful involvement of stakeholders and end-users before and alongside the life of the research projects and beyond, promoting public deliberation about scientific evidence with diverse audiences to enhance greater social transformation (Aiello et al., 2021). The way the Dialogic Popular Education has interacted with the research developed by CREA since its beginnings is a precedent of this achievement.

Conclusion

The Dialogic Popular Education influenced by Freire's theory of dialogical action is contributing to transforming current society. With a solid scientific base, La Verneda-Sant Martí School for Adults, is an example of dialogic popular education, and was the first of thousands of schools, with students and participants of all ages, to become Learning Communities.

The impact on the learning improvements and on social cohesion from the educational actions implemented in schools as Learning Communities has contributed to transforming the lives of people, mainly those more vulnerable, and to changing schools and communities while creating new scientific knowledge highlighting the relevance of the dialogic approach within educational and social theory. At the same time, the scientific analysis of the impacts of these schools has provided a new frame of analysis for the social impact of the European research. It represents a great transformation in the way research is done in Europe, as the distance between science and society is narrowed and a greater social impact from the research results, with the potentiality for the social transformation, is achieved.

The influence of the theory of dialogic action of Paulo Freire in Spain has crossed its borders and has not been only in popular education projects. From one of these dialogic popular education projects, La Verneda-Sant Martí School, the dialogic approach has been transferred to education of all ages and beyond education, having an impact in universities and on the way research is being promoted in Europe including processes of co-creation of knowledge between researchers in all fields and citizens.

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