


# Critical Communicative Methodology: Informing Real Social Transformation Through Research

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## Abstract

The critical communicative methodology (CCM) is a methodological response to the dialogic turn of societies and sciences that has already had an important impact in transforming situations of inequality and exclusion. Research conducted with the CCM implies continuous and egalitarian dialogue among researchers and the people involved in the communities and realities being studied. To this dialogue, researchers bring existing scientific knowledge, and the researched subjects contribute knowledge from their lifeworlds. In this process, new understandings emerge informing solutions to many social problems. Later, social actors lobby for the development of effective social policy based on those solutions. This article presents the CCM, its main principles, techniques, and achievements relating them to the life and person of Jesús Gómez (“Pato”), who deeply engaged in the development of this methodology, always with passion and intellectual rigor and a profound commitment to social justice.

## Keywords

critical communicative methodology, social transformation, egalitarian dialogue, political impact

This special issue is dedicated to Jesús Gómez (“Pato”), who created the critical communicative methodology before he died in 2006. This research perspective arose from scientific and ethical coherence in his life, the commitment to social justice, the strength of friendship, and the inspiration of radical love.

In 2001, Jürgen Habermas was speaking about “The intercultural discourse on human rights” at a conference at the University of Barcelona. The audience, mostly academics, also included a group from the Dialogic Literary Gatherings, a program for adults in which nonacademic people read and discuss classic literature. When Habermas finished speaking, Mariana raised her hand. She asked Habermas how women’s labor rights related to what he had said. She did not speak in the usual language and style for that kind of situation. Some professors and students looked at her with annoyance and even laughed. They saw her as lacking the status to participate in the event. But Mariana responded, “I do not speak like an intellectual, but I know what I am saying.”

Habermas intervened, applying his proposal of universal dialogue: All people have the right to offer arguments, using their own speaking style and their own language. He then responded to Mariana’s question, calling it brilliant and critical. Those who had been laughing stopped immediately. Habermas continued, pointing to the importance of thinking

about human rights in our societies. In doing so, he connected directly with the concerns of the people from that school for adults; by then, they were discussing a declaration of the rights of participants in adult education.

Habermas’ dialogic stance coincided with the kind of dialogues that Pato, a professor of research methods at the University of Barcelona, had with the working-class participants at La Verneda-Sant Martí, the school for adults mentioned above. Pato loved to engage in conversation with people like Mariana. He believed that every person has the critical capacity to analyze reality; he often commented on how much we learn from dialogues with people whose backgrounds differ from ours—and how much it benefits academia as a whole. Today, this egalitarian dialogue is the core of the critical communicative methodology (CCM) of research that Pato developed.

In this article, we present the critical communicative methodology and briefly introduce the articles that

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compose this special issue. We focus on how this research methodology has developed over the past years and show how its primary principles and effects grew out of the life of the scholar who was most involved in its development: Jesús Gómez, known among his friends as “Pato.” It is impossible to separate the principles of the CCM—and its impact on the lives of the most vulnerable—from the rigor, commitment, and passion with which Pato lived.

## Dialogism in Society and Science

During the final decades of the 20th century, we witnessed remarkable changes in our societies, including the revolution in technology and the Internet and the rise of a new global economy. Various scholars have described this change as the emergence of a new era of “post-industrialism” (Bell, 1973; Touraine, 1969), “late modernity” (Giddens, 1991), the “risk society” (Beck, 1992), and the “information age” (Castells, 1996).

In this new century, our societies are experiencing a dialogic turn (Aubert & Soler, 2006). Social actors are increasingly using and arguing for dialogue and interactions in multiple areas, from classrooms (Aubert, García, & Racionero, 2009), family relationships, and sexual and affective life (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Gómez, 2004) to international politics (Beck, 1992) and academic research.

Whereas traditional modernity was based on instrumental rationality, the definition of norms, and science, current society is based on communicative rationality (Habermas, 1987). In that rationality, which is grounded in dialogue, people use knowledge to reach understanding and emphasize the search for a wide consensus rather than imposing the will of a few on the many. Today, people expect to participate in the wider society and discuss the issues in their lives, from families and intimate relationships to their children’s schools, their workplaces, or their city. However, when social actors claim to be engaged in dialogue but those in authority are in fact imposing their will through power, we are more likely to see violence, whether symbolic or physical (Giddens, 1991).

Dialogic transformations have affected many traditional structures, in the political, economic, sociocultural, and personal domains. For example, while the industrial society of the 20th century strengthened representative democracies, today there are people claiming their right to participate in government decisions and policies, and new forms of deliberative democracy emerge (Elster, 1998; Fung & Wright, 2003). In the economic domain, factories and firms are being managed in less hierarchical and more horizontal ways, using more flexible and collaborative approaches (Mintzberg, 2009). In those new modes of organization, dialogue becomes the most important tool helping people to cooperate, reach agreements, and work together. In society as a whole, people are more open to new types of

relationships and families, and both traditional and new forms coexist in the same communities and are becoming socially accepted (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Giddens, 1991). And in romantic and sexual relationships, people increasingly try to reach agreements through dialogue (Gómez, 2004).

The dialogic turn, and the related “demonopolitization of expert knowledge” (Beck, Giddens, & Lash, 1994), has also reached the academic domain and affected research in specific ways. Traditional hierarchy between researchers and the researched is questioned, and there is recognition that scientific knowledge about the social world results from egalitarian dialogue among multiple and diverse voices. In addition, the emergence of new narratives have profoundly challenged the former ways of doing research; in response, researchers are developing analytic methods and strategies of inquiry that are more democratic and able to produce socially useful, politically responsible knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998, 2000).

Researchers are now using new strategies of inquiry such as case studies (Stake, 1995), performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003), and autoethnography (Ellis, 2004) as well as new methods for collecting and analyzing empirical materials like discourse analysis (Gee, 2005) and narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). And, as researchers have moved beyond traditional perspectives, cultural studies have played a key role in what Tuhiwai Smith (1999) calls the decolonizing of methodologies, which involves the development of research that is grounded in indigenous perspectives. Overall, researchers today can select creatively from multiple qualitative approaches.

In line with the dialogic turn of societies, the CCM states that social situations depend on meanings constructed through social interaction, and therefore reality does not exist independently from the subjects who experience it. From this perspective, “objectivity” is reached through “intersubjectivity” between researchers and the social actors involved in the reality studied. This emphasis on dialogue sets CCM apart from relativist theories and provides a different, more effective, path to reach empirical truth. As researchers can deeply understand social situations and use social science to improve the lives of others, they can propose new theories and perspectives to understand the social dynamics and ways to change them. This research of possibility, in turn, allows us all to keep believing in the possibility of social change and utopia.

## The CCM: Transforming Society Through Research

Denzin (2009) argues that research should serve a project of “empowering people with a language and a set of pedagogical practices that turn oppression into freedom, despair into hope, hatred into love, doubt into trust” (p. 29). That

revolutionary project was always key to the friendship between Pato and Ramon Flecha. They became friends during childhood and later, when they were studying at Deusto University, in Bilbao, they used to read and discuss the most important works in the social sciences with their group of friends. They always read these works in the original, rather than second hand as cited by other authors, to avoid any chance of misinterpretation. While engaged in these theoretical debates, they participated in the student movement opposing Franco's dictatorship. Over those years, the friendship between Pato and Ramon continued to deepen, marked by their commitment to fight against social inequalities and injustice. Their friendship was both inspiration and source of meaning as they searched, tirelessly, for ways to overcome oppression.

This commitment was always present in Pato's academic work, and he drew on it naturally as he developed the CCM: In addition to being a tool to explain, understand, and interpret social situations, the CCM aims to change society—driven by utopian dreams of equality and justice. Researchers meet this longer-term objective by focusing on the interpretations, reflections, and theories of the people who are directly involved in the situation being studied; they then contrast this knowledge, from the lifeworlds of the research subjects, with knowledge from the academic community. This contrast is a key element of the CCM and helps explain its transformative potential. In the dialogue between these two types of knowledge arises new knowledge that is adapted to the problems the subjects are facing and includes specific proposals to improve the situation. The development of the CCM over the past 10 years has followed this transformative principle, what has made the CCM more able to inform social change.

### **Cultural Intelligence: The Universal Ability to Contribute to Creating Knowledge**

The CCM is based on the idea that everyone can contribute to constructing knowledge. This premise is based on Habermas' (1984) postulate of *universal capacity for language and action*, his assumption that everyone has linguistic communicative competence: All human beings can communicate and interact with others, regardless of their culture, ethnic, or academic background. For the critical communicative methodology, grounded in a communicative perspective of reality, knowledge is constructed through social interaction and dialogue. Then, following Habermas' argument, all subjects in a research study can help develop knowledge.

The CCM also builds on the closely related principle of *cultural intelligence* (Racionero & Valls, 2007), which states that every individual has communicative, practical,

and academic abilities. This idea breaks with the stereotype that those groups most excluded from society do not have the necessary ability to participate in academic activities. In fact, as those using CCM have found, members of cultural minority groups, people who live in poor and marginalized neighborhoods, and those who have little formal education can make significant contributions to research, from the design to the analysis and dissemination of main findings.

In line with that principle, Pato believed that the best research results from dialogues among people with various kinds of cultural intelligence (CI), including both researchers and people who are not academics. Pato lived and worked according to that belief. In 2001, he visited Harvard University, and one of the things he most enjoyed was his animated conversations with Mario, the man who sat at the front desk at the library of the School of Education, checking students' ID cards and books. Mario was an Italian immigrant who had arrived in the United States as a child. Likewise, during his breaks, Pato went to have coffee in a nearby bar where he engaged in lively dialogue with the waiters, who were Latino immigrants. Just as in his conversations with the participants from the school for adults La Verneda-Sant Martí, who attended that Habermas' lecture, Pato loved to hear more about the life experiences of Mario and the Latino waiters. He also met with renowned scholars and had intense debates with them about key social and educational topics, always about ways to overcome inequalities. Pato treated everyone—Mario, the waiters, and the academics—exactly the same. He was egalitarian in his dialogues with them; to him, they all had cultural intelligence. He said that during that stay at Harvard, his academic work was enriched as much by his dialogues with the professors and researchers as by those with Mario and the waiters. Dialogues like these were a constant in Pato's life.

He began his work at the Centre for Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities (CREA)<sup>1</sup> at the University of Barcelona in the mid-1990s. At CREA, Pato quickly engaged in developing the CCM, participating in theoretical discussions with authors including Ulrich Beck, John Searle, Jon Elster, and Joe Kincheloe. In those dialogues, Pato always recalled the conversations with those underprivileged people he interacted with in everyday life. This capacity to relate theory and the life experiences of the most vulnerable peoples was definitional of Pato. Among the well-known intellectuals he met, his encounter with Paulo Freire in the early 1990s was particularly remarkable. Freire was impressed with Pato; they soon connected at a very deep level; both lived in ways that made their statements and their actions extremely coherent with each other. This explained that Paulo quickly considered Pato a close friend.

Freire (1998) argued that ordinary people have critical consciousness and therefore can find meaning in their own situations and change them. The CCM is in line with Freire's

theory. Pato established cultural intelligence as a principle of the CCM and argued that all people can critically interpret their own situations and think of ways to transform them. Hence, research cannot exclude those who play ordinary roles in society if it aims to understand and transform social reality; for the same reason, communicative research techniques aim to generate reflection among people who want to better understand the topic they are investigating as a first step to promote change.

Indeed, communicative research with cultural minorities, and people who have low incomes and no academic background, has proven that when their voices are included in research, they help advance the state of the art. In this special issue, Oliver, De Botton, Soler, and Merrill (Cultural Intelligence to Overcome Educational Exclusion) provide an example of how nonacademic and excluded families can provide useful knowledge about their children's education to meet their dreams of academic success. The dialogue between "expert" and "lay" knowledge on school practices makes it possible to reach shared interpretations of the way in which these practices are contributing to educational opportunities.

In the INCLUD-ED project (2006-2011), the largest study on school education within the Framework Program of Research of the EU, the use of the CCM has led to hold assemblies in which the research results have been presented to the educational community and discussed with them. Through this dialogic process, it has been possible to collect the demands and concerns of various educational actors, which have been later brought into dialogue with the findings in regard to successful educational actions (SEAs). The fact that everyone knows the project and that the results of the project will improve the educational practices of their children and, consequently, their academic results turns the involvement of the whole community in the research into a key element.

One of the techniques used to collect information in the schools that have participated in INCLUD-ED has been the questionnaire. Teachers, family members, other members of the community, representatives from organizations and associations in the neighborhood, and others related to the school participated in the design and development of the questionnaire. As a result, the questionnaires focused on relevant topics and allowed for collecting crucial information for the creation of new knowledge to improve the academic results of children. More specifically, the involvement of the community in the development of the instruments of data collection made possible the addition of the community's cultural intelligence to those, which facilitated the identification of existing needs. In addition, the involvement of the community in the design of the questionnaire made it not necessary to introduce control questions because the same people who developed the questionnaire were part of the group that answered it.

With the same approach, the article of Garcia, Ferrada, and Ruíz (Other Women in Research: Overcoming Social Inequalities and Improving Scientific Knowledge Through the Inclusion of All Voices) shows that the cultural intelligence of the "Other Women" is capable to transform feminist research and theory when the voices of women from vulnerable groups are included in the research process in an egalitarian manner. One of the examples the authors present relates to the research conducted on gender violence in Spanish universities. The fact of including nonacademic women (e.g., the administrative staff) in this research offered information and a particular perspective to the study that without the voices of these "Other Women" would have been unnoticed. The repercussion and social relevance of this study would not have been the same without the contributions of the "Other Women" to the research.

### Dialogue and Reflection: People as Transformative Social Agents

The CCM is based on a dual conception of reality, which includes the *systems* and the *lifeworld* (Habermas, 1984). Applying this idea to research, the system is the international academic community, made up of theories and previous research results; the lifeworld is made up of the interpretations and generalizations that people make based on their daily-life experiences. In critical communicative research, the lifeworld is incorporated into the research process from beginning to end through the inclusion of the voices of people who have often been silenced by researchers. When the knowledge from the system and the lifeworld is combined, new knowledge emerges.

It is important to point out that while the CCM includes the subjects' voices and gives them active roles in creating knowledge, it does not reduce the role that researchers play. The research team is responsible for making academic knowledge available to the subjects, so social actors can contrast it with their experience and use it most appropriately to address difficult situations and transform reality. In addition, as a consequence of ongoing egalitarian dialogue, researchers may need to reassess their previously held assumptions and their theory-based explanations when these contrast with the evidence from subjects' everyday lives.

However, the established knowledge that researchers provide can help the subjects reinterpret their lived experiences and work as tools for change in participants' lives and contexts. For example, the dialogue the research participants hold with researchers aims to understand the elements involved in the exclusionary situation the research subjects might experience as well as to identify the elements that are producing some change. By reflecting on elements that lead both to exclusion and to change, the subjects can more deeply understand their own situation, and change it. In this



regard, in this special issue, Flecha, Pulido, and Christou present a study on the prevention of violence in the sexual and affective relationships of adolescents (Transforming Violent Selves Through Reflection in Critical Communicative Research). Through this study, the participant teenagers reflected critically and deeply on how violent identities are constructed and found ways to rethink their earlier ideas about the roots of violence and attraction to it. As they came to understand that both the self and violence are based in social experiences, they were also able to see that they could change those. This process took place, for example, in the communicative discussion groups with adolescents, where the researcher and the adolescents converse on an egalitarian basis about feelings and situations in which attraction plays a key role for making decisions and choosing in the area of sexual and affective relationships. The discussion was oriented to achieve reflection and, as a result, the participant adolescents detected the roots of attraction to violence and thus understood the origin of violent acts. Such understanding was treated in the group as a starting point toward the achievement of relationships grounded in equity, democracy, and respect.

### **From Intention to Action: Critical Communicative Organization of Research**

Good intentions of egalitarian dialogue between researchers and social actors do not break with the methodological gap that has traditionally been present in scientific research. Not only do researchers and subjects need to be willing to engage in egalitarian dialogue to assure that their interactions remain egalitarian but also do they need alternative structures and norms and a particular approach for organizing the research process that ensures greater equality. Critical communicative research provides those structures and approach. In so doing, it moves from an ethics of intention to a Weberian ethics of responsibility (Searle & Soler, 2004), the latter being characterized by the commitment to the consequences of interaction.

In 1992, the first CREA researches did not have a communicative organization of research yet and communicative data collection techniques just started to be used. It was in the mid-1990s, through the research project "Participation and Non-Participation in Adult Education in Spain, Catalonia and Galicia" (CREA, 1994-1997) and the readings conducted in the seminar "With the Book in the Hand" (Gómez, Racionero, & Sordé, 2010) that a strong theoretical frame for the CCM was developed. Since then, such theoretical basis experiences an ongoing development, responding to social changes and theoretical advances in various sciences. By that time, and seeking to increase the capacity of critical communicative research to overcome

inequalities, communicative ways of organizing research projects were introduced. Two concrete forms of doing so were the creation of multicultural research teams and advisory committees for every research project.

The *multicultural research team* is one structure that helps researchers include members of various cultural backgrounds and from minority groups in the research process. This reflects the multicultural and diverse aspect of the society that is being investigated and is particularly important in research on cultural and ethnic minorities. In addition, multicultural research teams in critical communicative research ensure that subjects from excluded groups participate as full members of the research team during the entire research process, from the development of the research proposal to the definition of the research conclusions and the dissemination of results. This type of involvement meets the critical communicative principle of breaking with the relevant methodological gap between subjects (researchers) and objects (subjects studied) in research and allows for the development of knowledge that is closer to the reality that is experienced and thus more likely to aid social transformation.

The advisory committee further guarantees that the voices of subjects are included throughout the investigation. These committees contain representatives of the social groups or populations directly affected by the research. Among other tasks, these committees will assess the research design, validate the interpretation of the data, and discuss the results. The benefits of such participation are many. For example, in discussing the results, the advisory committee improves the study's chances of having an impact on the social situation being studied. In the European RTD project WORKALÓ (CREA, 2001-2004), which focused on why the Roma were being excluded from school, work, and other social arenas, Romani individuals were involved in the advisory committee, and this contributed to important sociopolitical impact, among other, the recognition of the Romà by both the Spanish and European Parliaments. In this special issue, the article "From Research to Policy: Roma Participation Through Communicative Organization" by Munté, Serradell, and Sordé deepens on that central aspect of the CCM, in particular, how the dialog between the researchers (experts) and the researched subjects (Roma people in this case) contribute to advance scientific knowledge and make it more powerful in terms of informing actions for the improvement of the situation of the Roma. The researchers contribute to this dialog the accumulated scientific knowledge in relation to the Roma and the overcoming of exclusion. Through the advisory committee, the Roma people provide knowledge from their life experiences and specific situations of exclusion and inclusion that may confirm the statements of the researchers or question them, thus contributing to the development of scientific knowledge.

As stated in Munté, Serradell, and Sordé's article, the creation of the advisory committee in projects such as WORKALÓ has given access to Roma people to scientific and political spheres, from which this ethnic minority had been historically excluded. In addition, the advisory committee also becomes a key element for the development of knowledge about the Roma that is more useful to inform policies that seek the overcoming of the discrimination that the Roma people suffer.

### Communicative Qualitative Techniques for Data Collection

Critical communicative research uses data collection techniques that were developed to fit with its methodological orientation and purpose of informing social change. The communicative approach includes three qualitative techniques with specific communicative traits: communicative daily-life stories, communicative focus groups, and communicative observations. These three techniques have three important elements in common: they are oriented toward change, they allow for researchers and subjects jointly interpreting situations in an egalitarian way, and in them researchers play active roles throughout the data-collection process. During the fieldwork period, the researchers constantly connect and compare what the participants say with what the international scientific community has said on a given issue. This leads to a series of reflections between the researchers and the subjects that recreate existing knowledge. In addition, the researchers are responsible for setting up the conditions for a communicative context for each observation, life story, or focus group.

A *communicative daily life story* is a dialogue between the researcher and the research subject oriented to reflect on and interpret the daily life of a social actor. Unlike other types of life stories, the communicative daily-life story aims not to construct a biography of the research participant but instead to elicit a very reflective narrative of her or his daily life that sheds light on important events, present and past, and reflections as well as future expectations. Holding a communicative orientation, before the conversation about daily life starts, the researcher needs to inform the participant about the objectives of the research and of their dialogue, emphasizing that participants are an active part of the study.

In the *communicative focus groups* of six to eight people, members of the group or community targeted in the study engage in egalitarian dialogue. The researcher is not one more participant in the conversation but someone responsible for contributing the background of the study and the knowledge from the scientific community. The researcher also ensures that everyone in the group participates and that the dialogue focuses on the topic of study. Communicative focus groups are conducted in "natural groups," that is,

composed of individuals who already know each other and meet in a context that is familiar to all the participants. For instance, a focus group could take place with a group of workers in their own workplace. The dialogue in the group allows them to interpret the issue collaboratively. Later, in a "second turn," the interpretations and conclusions will be double checked and a final consensus reached.

In the article "Communicative Daily Life Stories and Focus Groups: Proposals for Overcoming Gender Violence Among Teenagers," Aubert, Melgar, and Valls describe in more detail the richness of the qualitative communicative techniques of data collection. In particular, they focus on the egalitarian interactions between researchers and research participants in the communicative focus groups, and how that atmosphere facilitated researchers' awareness about an opposition between a language of desire and a language of ethics regarding sexual and affective relationships. The language of desire, centered in desires and likes, was used by adolescents to talk about romantic and intimate relationships. The communicative orientation of the focus groups helped to overcome this separation, which is crucial in studying issues such as violence and sexual attraction. As a consequence, relevant contributions arose about the connection between violence and attractiveness in the sexual and affective life of adolescents. These findings are crucial in the development of a theory about the preventive socialization of gender violence and actions along those lines.

The *communicative observations* differ from other observation techniques in that not only does the researcher observe, take notes, and participate in observing a situation but also does he or she share with the subjects the meaning and interpretation of their actions. For example, in the RTD project "Calli Butipen" (CREA, 2003-2004), which studied how to improve the labor situation of Romani women in Spain, researchers conducted communicative observations in the street markets. They were not there taking notes from the distance; instead, they engaged in the situation, observed interactions, and, when necessary, asked questions to the Romani women who were selling, and their relatives involved, to better understand their ongoing interactions with customers. Based on the premise that interpreting and creating knowledge are both intersubjective processes, the conclusions drawn from the communicative observations come not only from the researchers or only from the "researched" but also from a shared process of meaning making between them.

Most critical communicative studies use qualitative techniques. Nonetheless, it is possible to implement quantitative techniques of data collection and analyze quantitative data with a communicative orientation. The prime example of this is the research project INCLUD-ED, "Strategies for Education and Social Inclusion in Europe From Education" (CREA, 2006-2011), the study of the highest scientific rank and with most resources ever dedicated to research on

schooling in the Framework Program of Research of the European Union.<sup>2</sup> This entire study is being conducted using the CCM, and both quantitative and qualitative techniques are used with a critical communicative orientation, not an instrumental one. This means that the interactions between researchers and subjects during the data-collection process are always motivated by the ultimate aim of improving the subjects' situation, in this case overcoming the educational failure and social exclusion that many students from vulnerable groups in Europe face. The researched subjects are not instruments for achieving any researchers' hidden aim but are agents in constructing knowledge, just as the researchers are. For example, end users participate in designing the protocols for interviews and focus groups as well as questionnaires for a survey. Among other actions, subjects from the researched groups help to bring language and topics closer to common understanding. They also participate in the process of analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data, contributing their interpretations and recommendations for the development of transformative actions and policies.

### Analyzing Data to Create Change: Exclusionary and Transformative Dimensions in Communicative Data Analysis

Freire always argued that educational theory and research require not only that we denounce power imposition, injustice, and oppression but also that we name the possible ways to overcome those. He states, "Prophetic thought, as I see it, not only speaks of what may come, but while speaking about reality as it is and *denouncing* it, also *announces* a better world" (Freire, 2004, p. 105, italics in original). The social sciences that focus on possibility must also develop, and announce, ways to overcome inequalities. In most cases, those paths already exist, as there are people, communities, and institutions in society that are organized or function in a more egalitarian manner. There are in fact "real utopias" (Wright, 2010) all over our world that demonstrate viable paths for social change, in their immediate contexts and to larger extent. We can find, for instance, municipalities where citizens participate in allocating the city budget (Fung & Wright, 2003) or democratic schools in underprivileged areas where active community involvement helps children succeed (Apple & Beane, 2007; Gatt, Ojala, & Soler, in press). These actions deserve in-depth study to identify their common components that are making the difference and to describe ways to transfer them more broadly to other contexts and other societies.

The CCM is oriented toward building a social science of possibility. Researchers using this methodology aim to identify both the elements that reproduce inequalities and

the elements that transform them. A crucial point in accomplishing this goal is that analysis should not merely include categories, subcategories, and attributes but also differentiate between the exclusionary and transformative dimensions of the situation being studied (Gómez, Latorre, Sánchez, & Flecha, 2006, p. 100). The exclusionary dimensions are the barriers that face certain individuals and groups and that keep them from participating in certain areas or enjoying social benefits, such as the labor market or the educational system. The transformative dimensions are those that help to overcome such barriers. In critical communicative research, a transformative dimension is defined for every exclusionary one found.

This definition of both exclusionary and transformative dimensions makes it possible to identify existing alternatives that can improve social situations and overcome the social problems studied. Also, this analysis includes the voices of social actors, so that understanding what is exclusionary and what is transformative builds on people's own knowledge. This makes it possible to better understand the phenomena studied and announce more effective processes of change.

In this regard, Redondo, Santa Cruz, and Rotger in their article "Why Mondragon? Analyzing What Works in Overcoming Inequalities" analyze how through a critical communicative analysis of the Mondragon cooperatives (a corporation of competitive cooperatives which constitute the seventh industrial group in Spain) is possible to identify the key elements that have helped a noncapitalist system succeed in today's difficult economic context. The critical communicative analysis of the Mondragon case has shed light on the transformative dimensions in the financial and social areas that have led Mondragon to overcome socioeconomic inequalities.

By exploring those transformative elements, the social sciences provide a successful alternative for companies facing economic difficulties. In addition, communicative qualitative research selects transformative cases to study, with the aim to identify in them universal elements for social change. By studying the case of the Mondragon cooperatives, a successful alternative in the organization of economy, researchers can identify what has helped Mondragon reverse economic difficulties in a competitive market and which of those elements can be transferred to other contexts for the creation of noncapitalist financial models or to improve already existing cooperatives.

Selecting successful cases is also key to the INCLUD-ED project, mentioned earlier, which looks for educational actions to reverse social exclusion and marginalization. This research project selected cases of schools located in low-SES areas, with cultural diversity, which are succeeding academically compared with other schools in similar contexts. The analysis of the activities in these schools has led to the identification of common elements in all of them

that are helping more students to succeed in school and improve coexistence. By identifying why those elements/activities succeeded in particular contexts and by studying which ones could be transferred to other contexts, the INCLUD-ED research informs social policy toward educational and social change.

### **Science and Dreams to Transform Society: The Sociopolitical Impact of Critical Communicative Research**

The CCM ensures that any research recommendations result from a joint dialogue between researchers, members of vulnerable groups, educators, policy makers, employers, professionals, and other citizens. The people seeking to change their own situation who participate in the research contribute to that dialogue with their interpretations and reflections based on their daily-life experiences and common sense (Schütz & Luckmann, 1973). Researchers provide previous theories and research findings about the problem studied. From a rich and innovative dialogue between those types of knowledge, existing scientific knowledge gets recreated and new knowledge develops, which can have a transformative impact on social reality.

As an example of this, SAFO, the Women's Group at CREA, have conducted some studies for the prevention of gender violence among adolescents (CREA, 2004-2005, 2007). As a result from the dialogues with adolescents, they showed that gender violence does occur not only in couples and stable relationships but also in dates and sporadic relationships. They also demonstrate how it takes place in different spaces, from the family or domestic environment to classrooms, pubs, and discos. The results from these studies were presented and discussed in the Catalan Platform Against Gender Violence, a social platform composed of NGOs, citizens' associations, political parties, feminist movements, and academic women's groups. When the platform participated in the development of the Catalan Act on Women's Rights to Eradicate Chauvinist Violence (Catalan Parliament, 2008), the final text of the law acknowledged dating violence as a form of gender violence, taking a crucial step forward from the previous Spanish Organic Act on Measures for the Integral Protection Against Gender Violence (Ley Orgánica 1/2004), which excluded sporadic relationships from that definition. The dialogue with the Platform Against Gender Violence since the beginning of these studies led to important political and legislative impact that will change the lives of many battered girls and women suffering from violence against women.

Pato was extremely concerned about the reproduction of violence in the romantic and sexual relationships among youth and conducted research about attraction models with

a critical communicative orientation to theorize alternative radical love (Gómez, 2004). He was engaged in breaking the silence about gender violence in Spanish universities, supporting the work of Safo Women's Group, commitment for which he suffered enormous attacks from heartless feudal academic institutions, even at the end of his days. However, he would always remember conversations with Paulo Freire about radical love and ethical commitment, in which they shared that "one cannot be against something if one does not name it, and also names what one is for."

The dialogue between researchers and social actors with a critical communicative orientation always involves a commitment to study (and to name) the solutions to social problems. This may lead to actual social change: The actors can then press policy makers to implement and extend those solutions by developing action plans, policies, and legislations that include them. In November 2009, some research results from the INCLUD-ED project were presented at the European Parliament in a conference attended by researchers, school community members, administrators, and policy makers. A Romani pastor from a ghetto school in southern Europe which had been studied as a successful case in the project, spoke from a panel he was sharing with researchers and members of the European Parliament. He explained that, after implementing the successful actions identified in the INCLUD-ED research, his school changed completely: only a few years earlier, children in 5th grade could not read and write, but now they could read at age 5. He emphasized the importance this had for his community and the history of exclusion they have suffered. Due to these successes, the regional government supported the actions undertaken in the school, and today, at the request of the community and the City Council, the same dialogic procedure is being applied to transform other parts of the neighborhood. Padros, Garcia, Mello, and Molina, in this special issue, deepen in this case and explain how Romani and migrant families in that ghetto are deeply involved in recreating the school and the neighborhood through a Dialogic Inclusion Contract (DIC). The DIC is a contract between the families and the community, the teachers, the representatives of the administration, and university researchers to establish and implement through egalitarian dialogue the strategies that have proven to be effective in overcoming exclusion. The DIC is an example of how the principles of the CCM can be transferred to other fields and actions and achieve the same objective of social transformation.

Many of the results provided through critical communicative methodology research become recommendations or guidelines that can be highly useful for the coordination of effective educational practices. Accordingly, the Department of Education of another European region decided to fund and to extend INCLUD-ED's successful educational actions to its educational system, through a strategic plan to increase academic achievement and social cohesion, especially in



those schools where the students are the most excluded. In all these cases, the change did not come from above, but what made the change happen was that community members themselves adopted the solutions they found through critical communicative research.

Change in theories, policies, and social and personal lives by means of research informing policy and other social action is what ultimately drives the CCM. This is a type of change that nourishes the dream of a more just society, of a better and more humane world. It was in the union of knowledge and passion that Pato saw the potential for research to generate such transformation. He understood knowledge in a very sophisticated and courageous way that linked research to passion, to radical love, and to dreams, or to what he called keeping the “shine in the eyes.”

He used to say that history proves there is no progress without utopia and dreams: all revolutions, discoveries, and societal changes have been achieved thanks to people’s dreams. Even when the lung cancer that he initially managed to curb metastasized into his liver, he faced the situation in a profound transformative way, believing in the power of dreams:

Everyone should have a dream, the doctor’s dream is that you will be cured; you dream that you’ll get out. It is not possible for you to be cured if you don’t think that you’ll be cured, right? It is not possible for science to move forward without any dreams, right?<sup>3</sup>

In the hospital, Pato cheered up the people who visited him, and when he had his chemotherapy sessions, he managed to ensure that the other patients who were there with him ended up laughing. He called himself the “socio-oncological entertainer.”

Pato was able to transmit this transformative nature into the CCM. Since for Pato, no transformation is possible without searching for possibilities, he held that every individual—and every researcher—was responsible to dream, so they could leave this world a little bit better for the coming generations. The CCM, and the articles that follow in this special issue, are the result of Pato’s commitment to dream and to announce. Pato’s legacy will forever inspire the work of devoted researchers around the world.

All the most beautiful things in life are based on dreams which have been achieved over time. If we do not dream now, in a hundred years people will not be able to gather the fruit produced by these dreams.

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### Notes

1. Website of the Center of Research in Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities, at the University of Barcelona: <http://creaub.info/>
2. The Framework Program of Research and Technological Development is the European Union’s main instrument for funding research. Up to now, there have been seven framework programs (FP), and each is based on the EU’s strategic priorities for research, technological development, and demonstration activities for a specific time period.
3. These words are from an interview to Jesús Gómez that was conducted in 2006 by a doctoral student investigating about science, dialogue, and health.

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