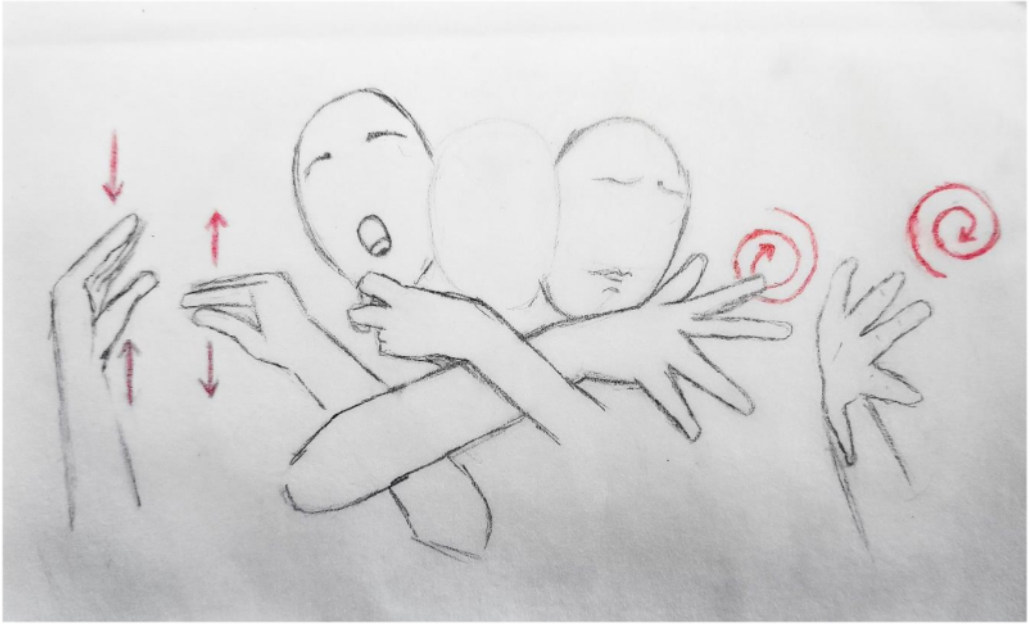
[Final] Synthesis Papers - AP.docx

by Candidate No : 260395

Submission date: 30-Aug-2023 11:58PM (UTC+0100)
Submission ID: 212083146
File name: _Final_Synthesis_Papers_-_AP.docx (14.97M)
Word count: 15416
Character count: 88345

Co-constructing notions of Inclusion with Deaf Women in Colombia through Cooperative Inquiry

MA in Power, Participation, and Social Change



Candidate Number: 260395
Supervisor: Jackeline Shaw
Word Count: 14,990

Paper submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of MA in Power, Participation, and Social Change at the Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex (2022-2023).

Abstract:

This paper synthesizes a Cooperative Inquiry conducted in collaboration with Colombian Deaf women to question mainstream and monolithic definitions of Inclusion. Through facilitated dialogues and creative methodologies, the study aimed to explore alternatives and new understandings of inclusion that recognises different experiences of gender, disability, and Deafhood. Throughout six chapters, it addresses the question of how the notion of inclusion can better recognize and embrace the experiences of these Deaf women, delving simultaneously into unexpected findings concerning methodological considerations while conducting action research (AR) with this population. Overall, this process sheds light on experiences of intersectional exclusion and inclusion, while also discussing the effectiveness of AR methods employed to foster conscientisation within this population.

Key words: *Inclusion; Intersectionality; Deafhood; Disability; Gender; Cooperative Inquiry.*

Resumen:

Este artículo sintetiza una Investigación Cooperativa llevada a cabo en colaboración con mujeres Sordas colombianas con el propósito de cuestionar definiciones convencionales y monolíticas de inclusión. A través de diálogos facilitados y metodologías creativas, este estudio tuvo como objetivo explorar concepciones nuevas y alternativas de la inclusión que reconozcan diversas experiencias de género, discapacidad y Sordedad. A lo largo de seis capítulos, aborda la pregunta de cómo la noción de inclusión puede reconocer y abrazar mejor las vivencias de estas mujeres, adentrándose al mismo tiempo en hallazgos inesperados relacionados con consideraciones metodológicas del llevar a cabo investigación-acción participativa (IAP) con esta población. Este proceso, resalta experiencias de exclusión e inclusión interseccional, a la vez que discute la efectividad de los métodos IAP empleados para fomentar la concientización dentro de esta población.

Palabras claves: *Inclusión; Interseccionalidad; Sordedad; Discapacidad; Género; Investigación Cooperativa.*

Acknowledgements

To the participants who made this research possible and embraced it as their own.

To my parents, for their unconditional and never-ending encouraging support.

And to those whose companionship I found essential to complete this journey of academic and personal growth: 'The Seven' (my exceptional classmates Yas, Ale, Hana, Cate, Jojo, and Miss Ambuso), Patta, Jo, Rosie, Jackie, and Amy. I'm grateful our paths crossed, and I got to learned from magnificent women. Gracias.

Note from the author:

As you dive into this document, you'll notice drawings that show you little glimpses of the sign language used by the participants during our gatherings. For me, sharing these drawings is a political decision. I made the deliberate choice to capture and incorporate here that embodied nature that is intrinsic to sign language. I made the effort to bring this language to a document that is traditionally oral and writing centred. By drawing them from fragments of the session's recordings, not only do I preserve their anonymity by avoiding publishing photos or videos, but I also find a format –accessible for my co-inquirers– to keep a record of our dialogues.

Through these drawings, I'm extending to you –dear reader– an invitation to give yourself a moment to pause whenever you encounter one and try to imitate it. Before you read the description of what it is communicating, I would like you to stop, try to replicate the movements you see on the page, and give your body the chance to decipher the emotions, the feelings, and the sensations that these movements evoke within you. There is a chance you might get it right.

In addition, I also want to highlight that all the images and figures in this document come with Alt Text, meaning descriptions that provide details on the movements of the signs used so those who cannot see and use an accessibility software, can follow along and can experiences this embodied narrative as well.

Finally, I want to acknowledge that the process described in this document is not linear nor have a single version. This is my version of what I experienced happened in this research. Thus, please reading it as such, knowing this is only one of the many narratives that came out of the research process.

Content:

List of abbreviations:

AR: Action Research
CI: Cooperative Inquiry
SLPs: Sign Language Peoples
LSC: Colombian Sign Language [in Spanish]
WFD: World Federation of the Deaf
FENASCOL: Colombian Deaf Federation [in Spanish]
ASORCALI: Cali's Deaf Association [in Spanish]

List of figures

Chapter 1. Introduction.

Despite their widespread recognition and profound impact on our social life, certain concepts remain elusive and lack clear definition. Time, for example, is something we intuitively understand, and yet, when asked to define it, it is common to struggle while articulating an explanation of its nature. A similar phenomenon happens with the notion of inclusion: we can find it challenging to put it into precise words, but seem to know what it is, and thus, we tend to operate under assumptions of a shared understanding.

A brief search for definitions in dictionaries like Oxford, Cambridge, and the RAE, define inclusion as the *act/effect of including*. However, this tautology falls short in fully capturing a tangible and practical meaning. Just as time, inclusion is far from being a universal concept. I believe it has a multifaced nature that encompasses various dimensions and interpretations, which proves difficult to capture in a single definition because it can differ its understanding within different communities and contexts.

I became interested in this topic when I noticed strategies of inclusion often fail to adequately consider the unique experiences of Deaf communities, specifically regarding the needs of Deaf women, leading to ineffective solutions to their problems. I addressed this issue by creating spaces where the intricate dynamics between gender and deafness could be explored through their experiential knowledge and narratives. By amplifying their perspectives, I started to identify the gaps in current approaches and started opening the door to radically rethink this concept. I believe doing this, could potentially build enduring consequences like the strengthening of Women's commissions at different levels (local or regional), by showing them their capacity of agency and knowledge building, as well as tools they can replicate in their organisations. At the same time, by capturing these experiences and contributing to the discussion around the importance of participatory inclusion in development, I hope this research prompt my colleagues to take pause and critically question their understanding of inclusion within the population their work with.

I would like to point out that my perspectives are unavoidably permeated by my personal experiences as a hard-of-hearing woman who has had to learn to navigate the duality of passing as hearing while being Deaf. My approach to this topic has been influenced by my exploration of Deaf Studies literature and my involvement with Deaf collectives. Thus, I'm entering the discussion assuming there is a sociocultural and collective dimension of deafness often overlooked. Therefore, I believe is necessary to problematise approaching Deaf-inclusive policymaking only from a disability perspective and legal framework, without room from other epistemological spaces to understand the Deaf experience.

As a researcher, I recognise that –as Bourke (2014) highlights– this background will inevitably shape my understanding of the topic. However, by embracing the reflectivity principle of

Action Research (Heikkinen et al., 2007; Scott-Villiers, 2021), I hope to engage in an ongoing process of self-analysis to recognise and address any biases and assumptions that could potentially influence the process and the findings.

Building upon this acknowledgment, I structured this document in following structure: in this first chapter, the introduction, you will find an overview of the background context and literature review of this research. Chapter 2 explains the conceptual framework I used to make sense of the data and the process. Chapter 3 details the methodological design and the ethical considerations of doing online Action Research with Deaf communities. In chapter 4, I share my reflection on the methodological challenges and opportunities, as well as the power dynamics experienced during the research. Chapter 5 compiles the findings of this cooperative inquiry, which includes both the co-inquirers and the researcher perspectives on the topic. Finally, chapter 6 presents the conclusions.

1.1. Background:

During my previous fieldwork with Deaf collectives in Colombia, I came across an example of how the concept of inclusion can take on different meanings for different groups in different settings. I had the opportunity to engage in a discussion about an accessibility law being debated in Congress. It was during these conversations that a powerful phrase resonated among the leaders: 'The fight for Deaf education is the fight for the future of Deaf Culture'. This statement captured the challenges faced by signing Deaf people when navigating inclusive education. In this particular case, it was highlighting the tension between language ownership, control, and the emergence of new forms of oralist[1] oppression that can take place when these policies fail to acknowledge the cultural and collective particularities of these Sign Language Peoples (Palma-García, 2019).

Following this, the focus of this research centres on exploring the understandings of inclusion that Deaf communities[2] in Colombia have, as they continue to face numerous challenges despite the existence of protocols and laws to ensure the inclusion of people with disabilities. These challenges are, for instance, limited –or conditional– access to education, health, and

---

[1] Oralism refers to an educational system primarily focused on the use of speech as the method of communication, teaching, and interacting with deaf individuals. Historically, this approach has discouraged the use of sign language by promoting speech and lip-reading instead. It advocates for the assimilation of deaf individuals into the hearing society.

[2] The capital 'D' refers to those who self-identity as part of a linguistic and cultural minority. For these individuals, being Deaf is not solely about a hearing ability but about sharing sign languages and collective experiences (Ladd, 2011). My decision to use it, rather than 'deaf' or 'hearing disability or impairment' (emphasising the medical condition), is a political one that resonates with my co-inquirer's positionality. This is also mentioned in British literature as "SLPs" (Sing Language Peoples), as a way to refer to groups of deaf people that define themselves by "shared membership in physical and metaphysical aspects of language, culture, epistemology, and ontology" (Batterbury et al., 2007, p. 2899). Both are ways to denote non-hearing individuals and groups who use sign language and see it as the pillar of a cultural and collective identity.

employment, as well as spaces of decision-making in issues that directly impact their bodies, languages, and communities. Among this population, Deaf women are particularly affected.

Thus, in a cooperative process with 10 Deaf women from various cities of Colombia, this research seeks to explore an alternative and more profound conception of inclusion that recognises different experiences of deafness/deafhood while moving beyond mainstream and monolithic definitions of it. By questioning the superficial trends of buzzword terminology in development, and transcend a mere checkbox of accessibility, this research recognises that inclusion, understood and signified by those meant to be included, can be a transformative catalyst for meaningful and structural change.

These tensions, that result in a call for a differential approach to inclusion, are situated within a specific legal framework and socio-political reality. In Colombia, and other Latin American countries[3], the discourses and narratives of this fight resonate with a multiculturalist approach that questions policies that promote a one-size-fits-all responses. From my perspective, this calls for a redefinition of inclusion that goes beyond mere concepts of accessibility and presence, to incorporate notions like community and linguistic patrimony or heritage.

While concerns for individual accommodation remain necessary, the collective aspect of sign language hold significant importance for Deaf people as is not just a communication system –like braille– but rather a language with a rich history of collective construction. As so, it encapsulates shared experiences and cultural heritage that connects Deaf individuals as a community. In this sense, in the absence of specific geographical territories of Deaf communities, sign language is then signified as the symbolic territories[4] of Deaf existence (Batterbury et al., 2007; Corker, 2000; Eichmann, 2009). Consequently, any policy that involves it, becomes political as it has implications beyond mere semantic concerns; as Burch & Kafer (2010, p. 17) state, "questions about language are also questions about politics".

Because of this, I believe is crucial to emphasize the significance of citizen participation in the shaping of Deaf-inclusive policies, especially if we recognize that inclusion, if not carefully

---

[3] The inclusion discourse in Latin America is deeply influenced by indigenous movements and collective rights struggles, which have led to the recognition of sign languages in countries like Colombia (1996), Ecuador (1998), Venezuela (1999), Brasil (2002), Mexico (2005), and Bolivia (2009). However, despite these advancements, progress in accessibility remains limited. In contrast, countries in the Global North, such as England or the United States, prioritize civil rights and approach deaf-inclusion through a disability framework, emphasizing individual accommodation (Palma-García, 2023).

[4] I recommend reading Palma-García (2019) to delve deeper into this argument. This author uses the metaphor of the *Gran Caribe* (Caribbean) to explain the socio-linguistic dynamics, interconnectedness, and shared experiences between Deaf communities that extend beyond national –hearing– boundaries. Similar to the seemingly isolated islands in the Caribbean, she argues these Deaf communities have –thanks to sign language– their own distinct cultural dynamics that foster particular dialogues and connections within and beyond the 'Caribbean' region.

addressed, can end up reproducing forms of assimilation. As showed by the indigenous fight for decolonisation in Latin America, even when governments prioritise bilingual and intercultural practices in education, the influence of structural power dynamics can continue to constrain language and epistemological autonomy (Dietz, 2014); an example of this, is the language planning policies that were used for the spanizhisation of these groups, imposing a single form of 'indigenous allowed'.

Recognising this context and the need for a participatory aspect of inclusion, this research was conducted in collaboration with the Women's Commission of ASORCALI (Cali's Deaf Association), and it aimed to co-construct meanings of inclusion by engaging in online cycles of dialogue and reflection with a group of 10 Deaf women from cities like Cali, Buga, Popayán, Pasto, Medellín, and Bogotá. Adopting a Cooperative Inquiry approach, this process aspired to build bottom-up knowledge about deaf-inclusion by opening communicative spaces to question mainstream definitions while examining the potential exclusionary consequences of current policies and practices for this population.

Chapter 2. Framing the inquiry.

To narrow my interest to a specific topic, I used the conceptual funnel proposed by Marchall & Rossman (2016). As *Figure 1* shows, I focused my question in a specific population and location to establish a clear learning objective, which served as a guide to construct the conceptual framework.

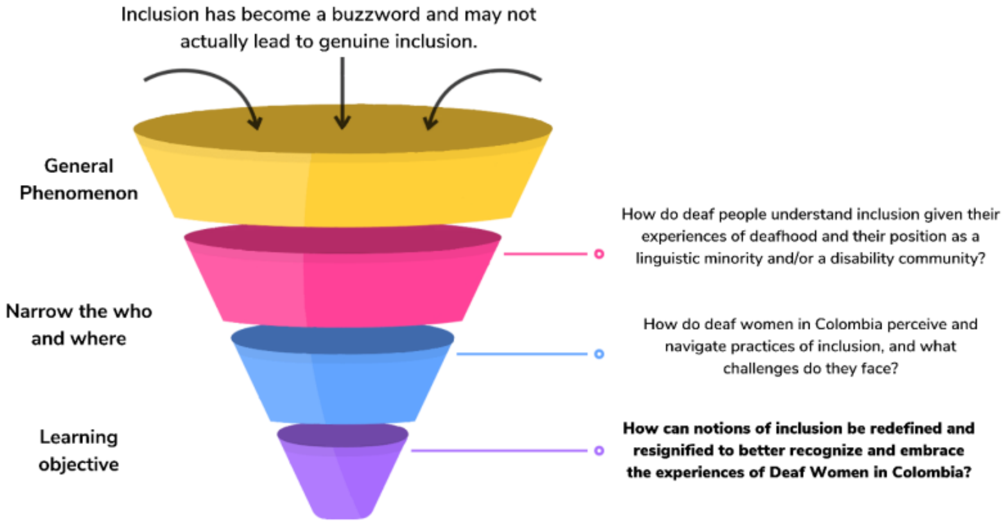


Figure 1. *Conceptual funnel*

Recognising the multifaceted nature of the research question, I determined the need to incorporate key concepts from various disciplines. Therefore, I integrated concepts from Deaf Studies, Critical Disability Studies, and Feminism, drawing upon their respective lenses. Building upon this, the following are the main concepts framing my inquiry:

Intersectionality, coined by Crenshaw, recognises the interconnectedness of social identities and systems of oppression. This unveils the complex interplay of discrimination and privilege among intersecting dimensions like gender, disability, race, and class. However, as Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall (2013) highlight, what defines an intersectional analysis is not merely the use of the concept or its association with a specific discipline, but rather the adoption of a "way of thinking about the problem [...] and its relation to power" (Cho et al., 2013, p. 795), putting the emphasis in what it does rather than what it is. Therefore, by embracing this lens, my analysis makes a conscious effort to shed light on the multifaceted forms of domination that shape the experiences of these women.

As this concept is inextricably link to **Power**, I used Batliwala's (2018) perspective to understand the multifaceted nature of power, unveiling its nuanced presence in visible, invisible, and hidden ways, and its impact on individuals' lives through different manifestations (power over, to, within, with, and under). Additionally, Gaventa's (2005, 2006) power cube analysis added more layers by highlighting the interplay of power within different spaces and levels. By integrating these lenses into my research, I was better equipped to notice the underlying causes of intersectional inequality present in the stories shared by these women. The relevance of this concept lies in providing me with a more nuanced lens to facilitate our sessions, enabling me to engage in multi-level thinking during our conversations and activities. This allowed me to ask strategic questions and delve deeper into the discussions, uncovering the underlying layers of their experiences.

In term of representation, the feminist concept of **Presencing** is relevant as it involves bringing forth marginalized voices and bodies, challenging invisibility, and fostering a space for alternative narratives and perspectives (Lewis, 2017). While presence refer to the physical attendance, presencing involves a more active and deeper transformative engagement with the space. Thus, it can be seen as a critique of the “add-and-stir” logic of mainstream inclusion that suggest that incorporating marginalised voices in a superficial or tokenistic manner is enough to address issues of power and inequity. This concept became relevant as it prompted questions of representation, not only in policymaking but also in the creation of alternative narratives of inclusion, highlighting the importance of an authentic and political incorporation of these perspectives.

Another key concept is **Deafhood**, described by Ladd (1999, 2005, 2011) as a cultural approach to deafness that prioritizes the recognition and celebration of Deaf people's unique cultural and linguistic identities, moving away from viewing deafness solely as a medical condition. This was useful to explain the experiences and perspectives of Deaf individuals regarding their collective identity, as well as highlighting the internal struggles they face in choosing whether to align themselves with 'Deaf ways' or 'Hearing ways' of existence, which underscores what I see as a complex interplay between personal identity, cultural affiliation, and societal expectations.

This concept was coined specifically to name these distinct experiences, establishing a theoretical space for the Deaf subaltern to express their perspectives and epistemologies. Nevertheless, I argue the concept of strategic essentialism proposed by Spivak (1994) is complementary in this context as it question the idea of a unified identity and recognises the complexities of representing diverse voices. This explains how and why people strategically emphasize specific aspects of their identity to navigate power systems, such as requesting individual accessibility services or demanding collective cultural rights within a multicultural constitution.

Additionally, Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2012, 2023) suggests **Disability Justice** should not focus only on the intersections of disability, gender, and representation, but also aim to actively disrupt ableist narratives. Kafer (2003), likewise, advocates for a radical reimagining of disability through the lens of crip theory, aiming to challenge ableist[5] assumptions and expand understandings of disability as a site of resistance and empowerment. By adopting this, our dialogues transcended discussions focused on experiences of exclusion and the failures of the current systems, and shifted towards an exploration of what's working, and when /where we feel truly seen.

Finally, I found crucial to acknowledge and navigate the tension between disability studies and deaf studies, as this research provides an opportunity to expand both lenses. As highlighted by Robinson (2010) from the twentieth century onwards, is possible to trace in Deaf movements practices of ableism towards others within the disabled community as a strategy of empowerment, presumably influenced by broader social political contexts. This internalized ableism has manifested through a discourse of culture that downplayed the barriers they faced compared to other disabilities, thus implying a sense of superiority and privilege by being able to choose to reject this label (Burch & Kafer, 2010). Thus, in this research I made a conscious effort to constantly ask how –in our reinterpretation of inclusion– we can avoid unintentionally perpetuating discrimination towards others within our own disabled community. This is an effort to bridge the gap between deaf studies, which primarily focuses on the cultural history of deaf people, and disability studies, which often overlooks issues of collectiveness and language politics.

Moreover, throughout this research Deaf and disabled people are understood as occupying a complicated, but not antagonist, position in terms of power and privilege. As Rashid (2010) argues, deafness –despite having the privilege of choosing to reject the label of disability– is more than solely a cultural phenomenon and it should be understand as something that encompasses both a disability and a cultural dimension that are interconnected rather than conflicting.

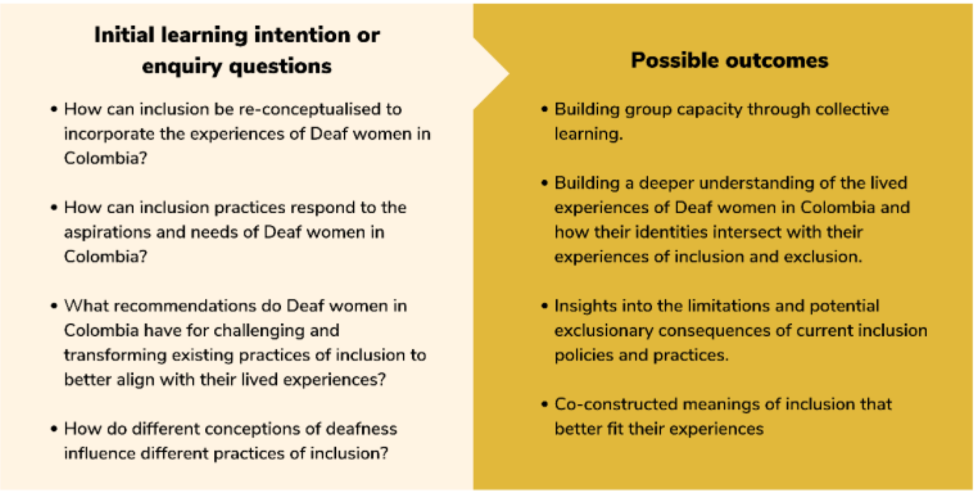
Overall, these concepts offered both a valuable conceptual ground and analytical tools to approach my learning objective. As presented in the next section, integrating this framework in the planning of this research, significantly influenced the choosing of the methods and inquiry approach.

---

[5] Bogart & Dunn (2019) explain **ableism** as a system of beliefs, practices, and prejudices that promote a specific idealized notion of the "perfect" human body, marginalising and *othering* disabled individuals. It involves stereotyping and discrimination that perpetuates social oppression based on bodily differences. Parallel to this, deaf studies proposed the concept of **audism** to explain the discrimination and prejudice faced by Deaf communities based on their language difference, emphasizing the need for linguistic and cultural acceptance too (Ladd, 2005).

Chapter 3. Methodology.

The initial inquiry questions illustrated in *Figure 2*, such as 'how can inclusion be re-conceptualised to incorporate the experiences of Deaf Women in Colombia?', were the reference point in the design of the research. Although they evolved throughout the process, they served to build a common ground and brought together the shared interests that made possible the creation of the research group.



Initial learning intention or enquiry questions

- How can inclusion be re-conceptualised to incorporate the experiences of Deaf women in Colombia?
- How can inclusion practices respond to the aspirations and needs of Deaf women in Colombia?
- What recommendations do Deaf women in Colombia have for challenging and transforming existing practices of inclusion to better align with their lived experiences?
- How do different conceptions of deafness influence different practices of inclusion?

Possible outcomes

- Building group capacity through collective learning.
- Building a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of Deaf women in Colombia and how their identities intersect with their experiences of inclusion and exclusion.
- Insights into the limitations and potential exclusionary consequences of current inclusion policies and practices.
- Co-constructed meanings of inclusion that better fit their experiences

Figure 2. *Main questions and purposes of this research*

Before delving into the conceptual influences that shaped my research design and my approach to Action Research (AR), I find important to highlight the epistemological roots on that guided my work. As Burns et al. (2021, p. 107) suggest, action research is a shift from the notion of "universality" to embrace "pluriversality", recognising that knowledge is not exclusively confined to cognitive realms, but can also emerge through action, dialogue, and feeling. In this sense, action research recognises the spectrum of human experiences and capacities as valuable assets that can enrich processes of transformative change (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). With this approach, those who directly experience the issue of interest for the research, becomes the main actors of it, building capacities to shape their own realities while identifying context-based solutions.

Additionally, I rooted my epistemological framework in Latin American perspectives, such as Orlando Fals-Borda's (1987) concept of 'Diálogo de saberes'[6] which advocates for the integration of academic knowledge with, local, traditional, and experiential one, acknowledging the inherent limitations and biases within the first one. In a similar decolonial take, Arturo Escobar (2011) introduces the concept of the 'Pluriversality of knowledge' as a

---

[6] Dialogue of knowledges.

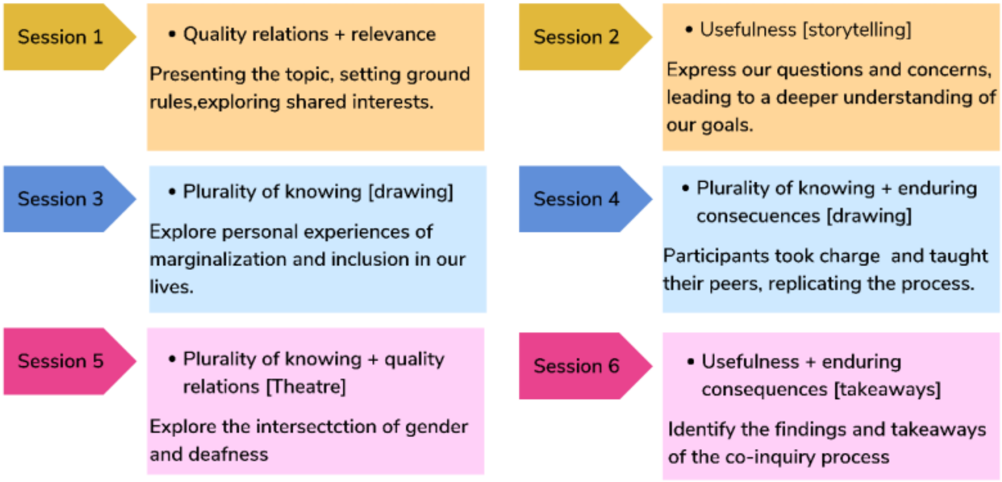
way of challenging the dominant and homogenizing understanding of development that prevails in the global North. This perspective, that encourages us to value the varied ways in which we make sense of the world, emphasising the significance of embracing different knowledge systems and ways of being –of existence–, aligns with my research purposes by prioritising the lived experiences and perspectives of the participants. By placing the dialogue of knowledge at the centre of my research design, I aim to address the gaps in academic understanding of deaf-inclusion and embrace its multifaceted nature.

Through these dialogues, communities can actively participate in transformative learning processes that Freire (1973) describes as 'conscientização', a critical awareness of the inequal social, political, and economic systems that surrounds them. By collectively reflecting and examining their experiences, people can identify effective strategies for resistance and catalyse meaningful change. Moreover, Sanderbergs's (2009) concept of liberating empowerment offers a transformative approach to action research based not only on individual and collective action, but also recognises autonomy and self-determination as powerful sources of social change.

3.1. Research process:

I adopted a Cooperative Inquiry (CI) approach for this research as it aligned with the dialectic needs of the study, which focused on engaging with diverse and conflicting perspectives, knowledge systems, and experiences within Deaf communities. As an approach, CI is grounded in collaborative explorations of a topic of common interest, to co-construct knowledge and new meanings through dialogue (Greenwood & Levin, 2007; Heron, 1996; Howard et al., 2021; Reason & Heron, 2006), allowing an active involvement of the participants in the shaping of the research process. In this sense, the learning objectives and the design of the methods used here were shaped with the participants based on their concerns and interests as the dialogue unfolded.

Taking this into account, I designed each session and its corresponding activities to encourage collective thinking and active listening among the participants. To achieved this, I set the 'quality relationship' validity criteria as a guiding goal to shift the locus of the inquiry from "I" to "us". Throughout the research cycle, As shown in *Figure 3*, the presence of other criteria highlighted by Bradbury & Reason (2001), such as plurality of knowing, relevance, usefulness, and enduring consequences, varied depending on the specific phase and the needs of the space.



Session 1

- Quality relations + relevance

Presenting the topic, setting ground rules,exploring shared interests.

Session 2

- Usefulness [storytelling]

Express our questions and concerns, leading to a deeper understanding of our goals.

Session 3

- Plurality of knowing [drawing]

Explore personal experiences of marginalization and inclusion in our lives.

Session 4

- Plurality of knowing + enduring consecuences [drawing]

Participants took charge and taught their peers, replicating the process.

Session 5

- Plurality of knowing + quality relations [Theatre]

Explore the intersectction of gender and deafness

Session 6

- Usefulness + enduring consequences [takeaways]

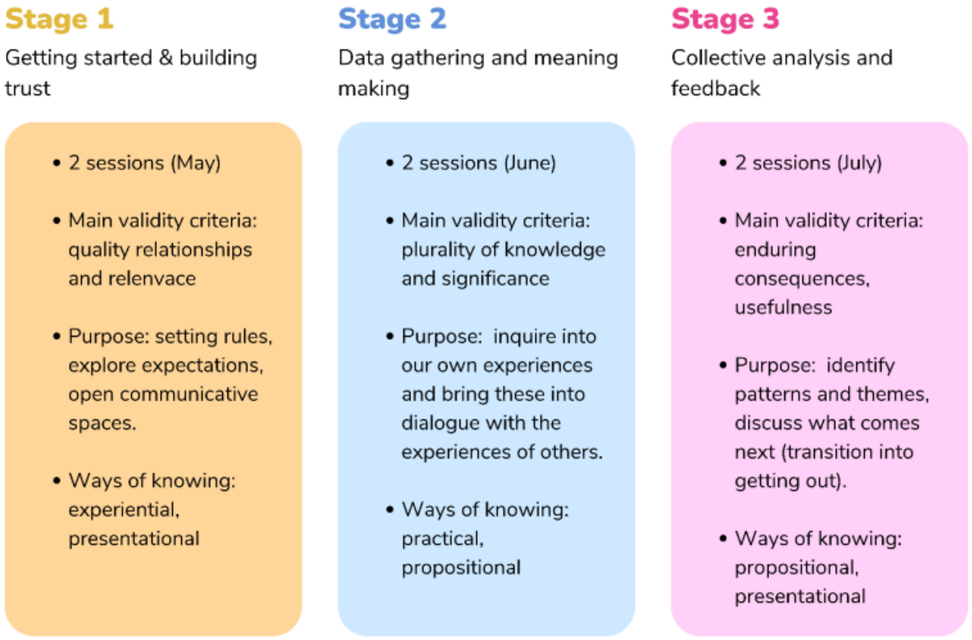
Identify the findings and takeaways of the co-inquiry process

Figure 3. *Validity criteria used each session.*

Given the challenges Deaf individuals often face, like feeling as a minority or as outsiders even within their own haring-homes and seek in Deaf Associations a sense of belonging and shared experiences, CI methods were beneficial to offer s supportive space where they could express themselves freely. For the majority of these women, this was the first time they found themselves in a space exclusively for Deaf women. From day one, they were intrigued by the possibilities this presented in terms of the questions they could ask, the lessons they could learn from each other's lives (considering their diverse ages), and the insights into how life was in different parts of the country. Some of them even manifested this being a transformative experience as it was the first time, they felt someone genuinely asked and pay attention to their opinions, being expected to contribute actively to the discussions. This shift in dynamics was encouraging, although also intimidating and sudden for most, but I will delve into that in the next chapter.

3.2. Stages of the CI:

I structured my research cycle with three distinct stages, each serving specific purposes with corresponding methods that align with the learning objectives. This planning provided a broad framework that allowed for adjustments, inputs, and changes based on the co-inquirers' contributions throughout the process. It was akin to outlining a roadmap without imposing a rigid direction or destination. Each stage –consisting of 2 sessions each– was designed around a validity criteria and type of knowledge, ensuring the methodological and topic flexibility needed for this to be a cooperative inquiry.



Stage 1

Getting started & building trust

- 2 sessions (May)
- Main validity criteria: quality relationships and relenvace
- Purpose: setting rules, explore expectations, open communicative spaces.
- Ways of knowing: experiential, presentational

Stage 2

Data gathering and meaning making

- 2 sessions (June)
- Main validity criteria: plurality of knowledge and significance
- Purpose: inquire into our own experiences and bring these into dialogue with the experiences of others.
- Ways of knowing: practical, propositional

Stage 3

Collective analysis and feedback

- 2 sessions (July)
- Main validity criteria: enduring consequences, usefulness
- Purpose: identify patterns and themes, discuss what comes next (transition into getting out).
- Ways of knowing: propositional, presentational

Figure 4. *Research cycle and stages*

To generate and gather the data, I employed a diverse range of methods –like group discussions, visual and performative activities, and reflective writing/storytelling methods– engaging with various forms of knowledge. Building on Lewin and Shaw's (2021) arguments on visual and performative methodologies for participatory research, I decided to use creative and embodied methods as the primary ones as they offered both unique opportunities for participants to express themselves in a format that is closer to the principles of communication through Sign Language, and a way to step back from their analytical self and tap into embodied emotions and imaginations. Additionally, their interactional nature help foster trust and collaborative relationships. For example, it enables the co-inquirers to position themselves in different roles of self-expression and active "listening", creating a meaningful link between the individual and group belonging, fostering a second-person inquiry, and promoting intersubjective sense-making (Lewin & Shaw, 2021). By incorporating these methods, I aimed to capture a more nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives. This helped convey non-verbal elements and different ways of cognition more effectively, both in the sessions with my co-inquirers and in this document.

With these considerations in mind, and anticipating changes in the sessions, I carefully prepared a selection of methods and tools that could be useful to me as a guide to propose activities across the different stages:

I. Practical knowledge: *what are we doing already? / How could we do X better?*

Achieved through participatory methods such as community mapping and collaborative activities like collective drawing. As Robert Chambers (2006) point, these activities provide tools for participants to reflect on and asses the current state of inclusion, identify inclusive practices they already use, and explore practical opportunities for enhancement. An example of an outcome based on this type of knowledge could've been the creation of a decalogue of deaf-inclusive practices.

II. Propositional knowledge: *how do we understand what X is?*

Facilitated by engaging in mind-mapping exercises or storytelling exercises aiming to create a unified narrative. These activities would allow us to unpack or identify the different layers there is to inclusion, examine how it's understood and implemented, and identify gaps and effective approaches. The co-inquirers could reflect on existing frameworks and develop shared understandings of what inclusion means to them. I'd like to highlight that visual methods, such as drawing, were helpful to explore the different ways in which inclusion (or exclusion) was present and impacted their lives, fostering curiosity and deeper understanding on the topic.

III. Presentational knowledge: *how do we see X in our lives?*

Nurtured through creative methods like photovoice, rivers of life, image theatre, and the sharing of drawings. These activities enable participants to express their perspectives, emotions, and everyday experiences related to inclusion through narrative building. The use of these creative methods, encourages participates to share their stories in their own terms and boundaries, bridging their experiences with others in a way that transcends traditional verbal/cognitive communication.

IV. Experiential knowledge*: ¿how have we experienced X?*

Cultivated through activities like the rivers of life, video-journaling, and collective story-building. These immersive methods provided a platform for participants to delve into introspection, capture their personal journeys, and collaboratively weave narratives that highlight and celebrate the diverse aspects of their intersectional identities and their encounters with inclusion. This also emphasize on cultivating reflexivity among the co-inquirers by encourage them to engage , a regular practice of circular reflection that relies in questioning what happened –and didn't happened– in the process (Scott-Villiers, 2021).

3.3. Ethical considerations:

Throughout this process, I encountered various challenges that required careful ethical and methodological considerations. Ensuring accessibility was a primary concern, and as such, all interactions –including the consent process, informative stage, discussions during the sessions, conversations in between meetings– were conducted in Colombian Sign Language (LSC). Because my signing is not fluent, I worked closely with an interpreter to ensure effective communication and mutual understanding. It's important to note that this arrangement was primarily for my own accommodation rather than for the participants as I was the one relying on the interpreter's support to ensure clarity and accuracy in our exchanges. And to maintain a sense of trust and familiarity among the group, I opted to work consistently with the same female interpreter, avoiding the introduction of new people into our safe space.

Recognising the potential power dynamics at play, I made the deliberate decision to select a female interpreter that had a LSC variation or accent that was not from Bogotá (the capital).It was important for me to be mindful of the existing tension between the Deaf Associations in Bogotá and different cities or regions due to their position about the role of the hearing interpreters in language planning policies, and their political strategies to claim their rights. Thus, I aimed to prevent introducing to our group external elements that could exacerbate those tensions or reproduce historical patronising attitudes of centre-periphery.

Additionally, I acknowledge that the online nature of the study restricted participation to those who had access to technology, internet, and the necessary knowledge to navigate digital platforms. Consequently, only Deaf women who are privileged[7] within the community had the opportunity to consider joining the discussions. I am mindful that the insights gained here may not fully capture the reality of Deaf women living in context of poverty, rural and disperse areas, or even cities that are not as big and recognised as the capitals of the regions. Nonetheless, I made a conscious effort to make the group diverse by extending the invitation to other associations in contact with the one in Cali (ASORCALI).

Throughout this process, I faced many methodological challenges that prompted me to take a step back and critically examine the applicability and inclusivity of conventional participatory methods to work with this population. For me, this research journey became a meta-exercise. Not only was I interested in exploring understandings and practices of deaf-inclusivity in external or public/political settings, but I also found myself having to deeply assess and reshape my research process to ensure it was deaf-inclusive. It became evident that radically redefining inclusion required me to radically question my approach to ensure that every step of the process resonated with the needs, interests, and ways of knowing of my co-inquirers.

---

[7] Privileged considering that for Cali, the census from 2010 reveals that the majority of people with disabilities, around 80% of them, are concentrated in the 3 lowest socioeconomic levels. This pattern is consistent at the national level, where approximately 79.9% of the population falls into similar lower socioeconomic levels, while only a small percentage, around 0.3%, belong to the 3 higher ones (Palma-García, 2019, p. 43).

One aspect that stood up was the challenge of designing facilitated activities with creative methods tailored to fit both the purpose of the session and the particularities of the group. When incorporating performative methods, such as Image Theatre (Santiago-Jirau & Thompson, 2019), I had to carefully consider how to maintain the core characteristic of this tool –to demechanise the body– while recognising the embodied nature of Sign Language. As the essence of this language lies in the corporeal expression and composition of ideas, I found myself having to rethink my approach to creative methods in order to foster activities that could allow us to access embodied knowledge without solely relying in signing by default.

As shown in the next chapter that delves into the practical insights of this process, my research offers valuable perspectives on what is missing from traditional action research methods to fully engage with Deaf communities. While it may not have offered definitive answers to my initial questions about re-defining inclusion and prefigure deaf-inclusive practices, it shed light into how we, as action researchers, can reshape our methods and approaches to better respond to the needs of this population and facilitate meaningful engagement in future inquiry processes. In this way, my research serves as a significant step towards paving the way for the creation of deaf-inclusive action research, enabling us to address those initial questions more effectively in the future.

Chapter 4. Navigating challenges and methodological opportunities.

4.1. Understanding our question:

During the second session, I realised that despite their enthusiasm on the topic and space, my co-inquirers were struggling to envision how to question and create their own understanding of inclusion. To them, this word was a given, an establish institutional and overwhelming concept that seemed beyond their reach. They were unsure of how to approach something that felt so out of reach and specialized that stroked as it was not their place to explore.

Sensing their anxiety, I decided to change my plan for that session and focus on those concerns. I told them I was going to start the meeting again, greeting each one of them and asking, *'how are you'*, and I wanted them to explain how they were feeling using only a type of water. They looked visibly confused, so I started sharing I was feeling like a lagoon, calm, not so energetic but rather at rest. As each woman took her turn, the atmosphere began to shift. One participant felt like a river, constantly moving and facing large rocks –obstacles– in her path. Someone from the Atlantic coast felt like the sea, joyful, strong, energetic. Someone even shared feeling like a glass of cold water on a hot day, refreshing.

Building on their answers, I draw a parallel with our topic: just as their descriptions of water varied, so did their experiences with inclusion, carrying different meanings and perspectives that were equally valid and significant. By the end of the session, we had woven a narrative that intertwined their different water-related answers with diverse takes on inclusion: from everyday refreshing experiences (relieve and support), to being calm and sure (embracing our bodies), to be tenacious and persevering (like rivers and seas). This exercise help initiate a process of grounding this vast topic on embodied experiences enabling them to engage in reflective and questioning exercises.

From this session, the outcomes changed in order to negotiate and balance their initial desire to see immediate results and their new interest in exploring shared introspection. Understanding we hadn't yet built the capacity to jump directly to redefining inclusion, I proposed a revised plan that delved deeper into personal experiences of inclusion, grounding our collective understanding of the topic on our own stories. The aim was to encourage them to appropriate the concept, allowing their perspectives to shape it. Later on, maybe in another process, we could explore how this new definition would translate into tangible actions in different scenarios.

4.2. Finding our rhythm:

While I was aware, from the start, that there would be challenges in designing the research to better engage with my Deaf co-inquirers online, I didn't anticipate the extent to which my carefully planned session and activities would present hurdles too. As a visual learner myself, I initially leaned towards incorporating digital whiteboards and sticky-notes during the first sessions to capture ideas, enabling everybody to contribute and build upon each other's thoughts. However, this online tool required sharing the screen, which hindered our visibility and, consequently, our ability to engage in conversations. Additionally, it heavily relied on written Spanish, which is not the strongest communicative method for the majority of them.

In an attempt to find alternatives, I asked one of the women who was helping me set the group, how they (in ASORCALI) usually captured and keep a record of their meetings. Her response, that I now understand came from past experiences of ableism and stereotypes of them not being smart enough, was to emphasise their capacity to learn how to use that tool if needed and not to "dumb" things down on their behalf. I planned adjustments and tried it during our first meeting but quickly realised it didn't serve the purpose I intended. Instead of improving our communication, it disrupted the flow of dialogue and disturbed the group's energy.

Just as the accessibility button on websites, that offer accommodations but ultimately complicate the user experience, my initial facilitation attempts and methods inadvertently hindered our dialogue instead of enhancing it. This was a clear example of how making adjustments for accessibility without engaging in a deeper conversation about the type of inclusion sought or without involving the participant's feedback on its usefulness can backfire, making the experience more difficult instead of providing a platform for meaningful expression and engaging in their own way of knowing.

I had to quickly pivot and find new ways to document our interactions in a more accessible format while remaining collaborative by essence, allowing the participants to see, contribute, and shape the records themselves, rather than just sending them a summary at the end of each session. For instance, I started making various recaps throughout the session and sharing notes over our WhatsApp group, encouraging them to comment on them simultaneously; if I noticed they were simply agreeing with whatever I shared, I deliberately made errors to prompt discussion, like documenting something as positive when it was shared as negative, giving them a chance to expand on a topic.

Similarly, my effort to encourage journaling and individual reflexivity exercises, a core practice in action research to foster critical self-awareness and deeper insights into the process (Anderson, 2021; Attia & Edge, 2017; Scott-Villiers, 2021), faced substantial challenges. Both journaling and reflection were foreign concepts to them and thus didn't have specific signs in their language making it challenging to convey their meaning. The closest sign was "thinking," but it didn't fully capture the depth of this retrospective way of thinking. I suggested they try "talking to themselves", exploring with different formats to keep a personal record that they could refer back to before our meetings. For example, taking photos of something that prompts a thought, jotting down ideas, talking to themselves in a mirror – something I often do to engage with my inner thoughts– and record it on video.

However, despite the alternative formats, this method didn't resonate with them; it didn't make sense nor was helpful. One participant even said, "why do I need to talk alone if I can come here and do it?". After building on that question, I realised the gap wasn't in accessibility or in individuals' resistance to trying new methods, but rather in the sociocultural mismatch between the proposed practice and their existing ways of processing experiences. I believe their *habitus* is forged within a sociocultural context that inclines them toward *collective verbal* –or in this case outer rather than inner– *processing*, similar in practices of oral tradition.

Acknowledging their background and drawing upon the works of scholars like Bourdieu (1972) with the concept of habitus, Geertz (1973) with his understanding of culture as a form of communication that shapes how we signify the world, and Elias (1978) who explains how historical sociocultural processes can profoundly influence our thought patterns –e.g. Western cultural norms rooted in individualism and rationalising processing experiences internally rather than communally–, I adapted my approach to respect and respond to their ways of knowing. By understanding that it's not simply about the formatting options but rather about embracing this sociocultural dispositions to process things collectively instead of individually (see *Figure 5*), I changed my facilitation strategy from 'reflect outside and do [co-construct knowledge] here' to 'reflect here and do [replicate] outside'. This aimed to create communicative spaces that nurture fruitful and useful interactions.

Figure 5. *"Refection as an internal vs a communal process". This drawing illustrates a co-inquirer's perspective on journaling through a 3-part story: initial internal thoughts kept for themselves, a gesture of disapproval (no), and then an open expression of thoughts and feelings.*

This shift in perspective prompted me to explore different ways of facilitating the sessions. As a result, storytelling emerged as a powerful dialogical base to pair with visual (drawing) and performative (theatre) methods. Through this journey, I learned that traditional AR methods –even the creative ones– that I learned during my masters, did not align properly with the unique characteristics and needs of this population. As a result, this became a meta-exercise of constantly innovating my methodological design by seeking their feedback and fostering a collaborative learning process. We learned together to meet the group's needs and questions. Navigating these situations was challenging, and often frustrating for me as the only one in the group partly-hearing and not fluent in sign language. I often felt alone with the task of finding solutions, brainstorming new options and facing the unknown, as my colleagues and professors were mostly unfamiliar with this population and settings. Thus, I found myself using *outer processing* to journal and ground my concerns and ideas. I would have sessions to talk to myself in front of a mirror or record my thoughts on my phone, reflecting on what had happened or commenting on the literature I was reading. Retrospectively, despite feeling the research was progressing slowly towards our initial outcomes, I learned a lot by taking those steps back to pause and question how I was building the space, as it allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the unique participatory needs of Deaf communities. This process itself underscores the need to radically rethink inclusion, which involves reevaluating how we conceive and put into practice Action Research methods.

4.3. Power dynamics and barriers to participation:

Because of my educational background, my semi-hearing status, and my proficiency in written Spanish, I was perceived as a figure of authority that resonated with traditional educational setups, like a professor giving trainings or conferences. I was being pushed to dictate the answers, results, rules, behaviours of the space, and even correct them after their interventions. In that context, my resistance to fit the traditional leadership role was creating friction and reducing their engagement with the process. Thus, breaking internalised paternalistic patterns proved to be the first step to achieve the goal of creating a space shaped by my co-inquirers' own interest.

I was aware that this was a manifestation of historical ableist practices that have often denied disabled women spaces for agency and decision-making, contributing to their perception of this co-inquiry process as intimidating and unusual. However, precisely because of this, I was determined to break away from that perceived role. Nevertheless, I found it challenging to own my power to control the process, without that resulting in an imposition of my own ideas and forced participation. They were used to being told what to do and expected the same dynamic in our group. Therefore, they were hesitant to take initiative and even felt uncomfortable when asked to share their opinions and interests. As I embraced my role as facilitator and had more clarity over it, I gradually changed my take on the methods to shift these expectations in a non-sudden or harsh way by, for example, being the first one to do the exercises to show them that their responses didn't need to be complex or perfect; calling their names to give them the floor when I noticed they hadn't participated, instead of vaguely asking, 'Anyone else?'; and allowing us to veer off into unplanned topics, encouraging them to speak their minds freely. Progressively, they started allowing her signs to take more space in our conversations, making explicit their opinion on the activities and even facilitating some session when others needed to catch up.

This change began to manifest after our first drawing session, where we delved into our personal feelings of exclusion –related to our deafness– in different moments and places. Through the dialogue prompted by this visual method, I had the opportunity to share with them the different barriers I have had to face throughout my educational journey and within the healthcare system. I was speaking as an equal, connecting my story with theirs instead of staying in the margin. Being open and vulnerable, not only allowed them to have a deeper insight into why someone like me (hearing passing) would be interested in collaborating with them, but also showed them that despite my privileges, I also have had to face barriers and felt isolated because of my deafness.

Nevertheless, this transition towards a more participatory dynamic that placed them at the centre of the process, was difficult for most of these Deaf women due to historical ableist and paternalistic dynamics. These women were not used to having power, voice, or control over decisions. Thus it became evident that assessing this CI process solely through Arnstein's (1969) ideal 'Ladder of Citizen Participation', was not going to fully acknowledge the complexity of their engagement. As Shaw (2012) argues, this conceptual model of participation fails to capture how satisfied or comfortable people are with the control they get, the nuance in power dynamics between actors (not exclusively defined by power over other), and how individual involvement and interests vary over time.

Therefore, in this context that involves working with vulnerable populations that have experienced marginalisation, I chose to move beyond the metaphor of the ladder and focus more on the learning outcomes. Building on the critique presented by Collins & Ison's (2006), I assessed and design the participatory aspect of this cooperative Inquiry process based on capacity-building and the learning outcomes we were achieving, rather than merely focusing on the degree of control they had over the process.

4.4. Embracing my role as facilitator:

Throughout the research, I struggled balancing the desire to make this process as participatory as possible and the need of exercising control. As an action researcher, my initial vision was for participants to steadily engage and take more ownership over the process. However, I noticed that by giving up my power to control the space, I was inducing feelings of anxiety and uncertainty. I tried different activities and gave them various options, hoping that the participants would naturally gravitate towards the spotlight. Yet, it became evident that was only adding pressure to our encounters. For this process to work, I had to come to terms with the power that came with my role as a facilitator, and the expectation my co-inquirers had of me helping them navigate this unfamiliar space.

This control manifested as in how the learning objective changed and how I engage with them for logistic decisions. For the first one, I revisited the recordings of the first two meetings – where we discussed why they decided to join the space and decided to stay– to organise and make sense their contributions using the first, second, and third person[8] of action research (Bradbury & Reason, 2001). By doing so, I came up with a new main learning objective that resonated with their interest and needs understanding what inclusion meant to us, how it felt, and what it looked like in our lives (see *figure 6*). This was a step back from the initial focus on redefinition, placing instead a greater emphasis on the participants' embodied experiences. However, this step back was building capacities and foundations for future processes on creating shared definition and translating it into possible deaf-inclusive practices. Before having the session to talk about this change, I edited a video[9] summarising the why and the how of it, that was then shared with them to watch before our gathering.

Figure 6. *"Building our own understanding". This drawing illustrates a co-inquirer's interpretation of the learning objective, conveying a sentiment of claiming ownership of their stories/experiences and power within or feeling capable of doing it.*

My communication strategy also changed without consulting them. I noticed they were hesitant to respond to messages on WhatsApp to decide between a range of dates for the meetings, even after multiple reminders. Thus, I decided to be more straightforward and

---

[8] Refers to three different voices or levels of involvement in an action research. In this case, the first person included expression of excitement with having a space to think about personal experiences and learn from others, particularly appreciating the diversity of deaf women from various regions and age groups coming together. The second person gather questions about actionable steps we could do together in our immediate context, such as the associations. And the third delved in their concerns related to a wider institutional context like policy recommendations and proposals.

[9] The making of these videos involved practical and ethical considerations too. Recognising my audience was fluent in sign language, I decided to invert the traditional orders and prioritize the visibility of the interpreter while placing my image smaller in a bottom corner.

informing them of the definitive date/time of the meeting and asking them to confirm their availability. That way, I got more responses either confirming their attendance or stating that they couldn't make it, giving me room to have 1:1 to find more suitable dates. Additionally, instead of requesting written replies, I started encouraging them to send short videos instead, which they had been avoiding using –because of me– despite it being their preferred form of communication. Replying or commenting on previous short videos helped me prove I could indeed understand them. This served as a middle ground where they started to express more confidently their questions in their first language, while I replied in written Spanish (my preferred form of communication).

Journaling throughout this process showed me that my insecurities, especially the ones related to my identity as a Deaf person, were affecting how I approach my role as facilitator. In a journal entry dated in the in-between of the chaotic sessions 1 and 2, I wrote in Spanish something like:

> "Who am I to call myself deaf if I can't even speak my own language? It feels like I lost something that I never really had in the first place. And I'm not talking about my hearing, I've never missed that one, not that I can remember. Yet I feel shame and sorrow for not being able to make my hands speak. My body craves it, needs it. Is like a phantom limb syndrome. I do feel disabled in that sense, in not being able to make my body do what it longs for".

I found challenging to take on a leadership role, taking firmer decisions, as I didn't feel entitled to claim a Deaf identity and be in this space. My life trajectory led me to feel like that, with stories that involve ableist pressures that lead me to hide my deafness for decades and pass as hearing, combined with audism that makes it hard to find spaces to keep practicing sign language when I'm learning, thus why I can understand it but cannot sign it. These personal struggles were ultimately affecting my engagement with the participants, making me even more uncomfortable with the power dynamics and how I was perceived, and interfering with how I was planning my sessions. However, by giving myself time to address these issues and finding ways to be vulnerable and share my experiences of deafhood with them, I gradually built the courage to embrace my role and take more control of the space, as the process required me to do so.

4.5. Second-person reflections:

The practical insights I gained throughout the process emerged from engaging in dialogue exercises with the co-inquirers. During those dialogues, they shared their feedback and takeaways, reflecting on what had worked –or not–, what surprised them, and what could be improved. These inputs on what we had done during each session, helped me reshape my research methods to better respond to the need and interest of these Deaf women. In this section, I'll share their main reflections on the process itself and on the type of methods used.

For the majority of them, this was the first time they were part of a space dedicated exclusively to Deaf women, rather than just women or just deaf people. During the first session, as we introduced ourselves, they expressed excitement at the prospect of meeting Deaf women from different cities and learning about their experiences in those regions.

After exercises like the water one –that we used to understand our question–, they highlighted how meaningful was for them to be asked "how are you?" and to have their responses genuinely valued, going beyond the usual superficial replies. They found unusual but heartwarming that they were being encouraged to share their opinions without having someone correcting them or dismissing their views afterwards.

While the concept of co-constructing a new interpretation of inclusion that resonated more with our realities, initially seemed difficult to grasp, they acknowledged that through their conversations, they were slowly learning that their experiences were not isolated incidents they were to be blame for (see *Figure 7*). They began to understand that certain personal challenges they faced were shared by others within the community and might have a deeper roots beyond individual actions or incompetence. They also recognised learning –through a peer's story– that some situations they had considered normal were, in fact, not acceptable.

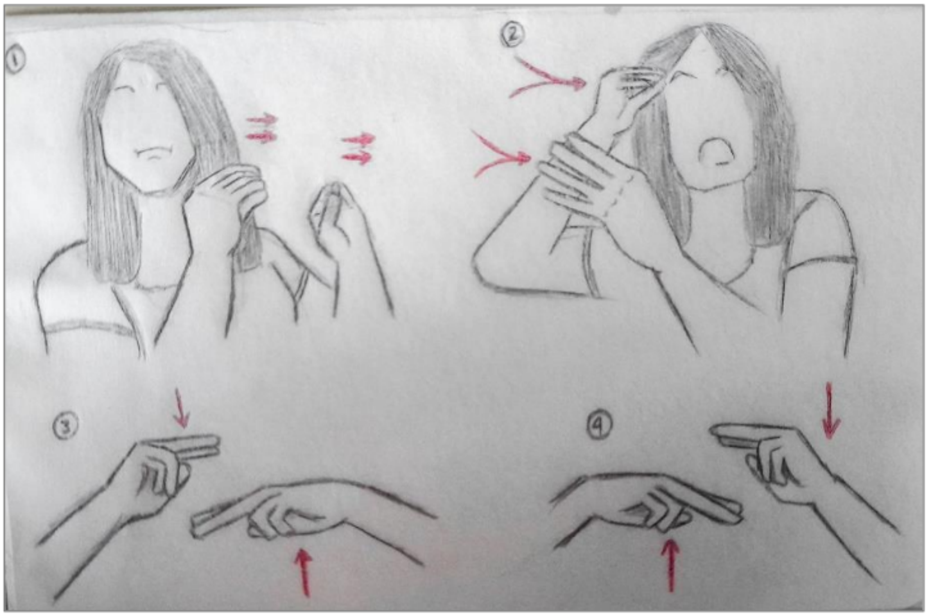


Figure 7. *"Co-constructing knowledge from lived experiences". This drawing show how a participant represents this process in 3 stages: first, sharing information or teaching others, then absorbing and embracing what was shared, and then it shoes the sign of building something with that.*

This realization fostered a sense of solidarity and reassurance that they were not alone in facing these issues (see *Figure 8*). Delving into collective dialogues rooted in Freire's and Fals-Borda's philosophy, guided by exercises design to tap into their emotions and lived experiences, encouraged them to see this process as a space for learning and becoming more aware of their surroundings. By learning how to reflect and share their experiences, they started to nurture what Batliwala (2018) calls “power within”, meaning feeling capable of actively contributing to the discussion on inclusive practices, overcoming their initial perception of the subject as overwhelmingly vast and reserved for experts due to its structural complexity.

Figure 8. *“Discovering shared stories”. This drawing portrays a 2-part story. Initially a woman is shown deep in thought. As her thoughts grow, they converge and flow together with others, symbolized by the hands coming together in a stream of shared narratives.*

As the participant’s insights and perspectives unfolded, their understanding of their needs and interest on the topic evolved too, shaping the learning objectives of our sessions. They began to highlight not only the importance of exploring what they felt inclusion was (or not), but also learning how they could start those conversations. In this sense, our session became the place for them to learn activities and creative methods they could replicate within their associations and workplaces.

One participant, for example, who was part of her city’s disability committee, shared she was feeling frustrated because of the lack of clarity whenever she asked people –but specially women– in her Deaf association and community what they wanted her to bring up in the committee to address their needs. Just like I was facing challenges finding ways to address the question of re-defining inclusion based on our perceived needs, they were facing the same difficulty identifying what they needed to ask for and articulating what they felt it wasn’t working in spaces of political participation.

As a result, the sessions pivot toward exploring creative methods, like drawing, body-sculptures, image theatre[10], and storytelling, through which they could learn different tools that could be useful for them to generate collective dialogue in other contexts. By experimenting how they felt by doing it themselves and giving them opportunities to facilitate a couple of sessions in which a group of them replicate an exercise with those who had missed it, I shifted the focus of the sessions towards encouraging them to try it out within their context to keep the conversation going beyond this process.

Finally, I would like to highlight what a participant shared during the final stage of this research. When discussing the takeaways of the different activities we did, she pointed out that thanks to the change from reflecting alone and then meeting to talk, to using the space to learn and discover together, she felt she could better understand the purpose of the space and move beyond superficial or same-old answers. As *Figure 9* captures, this process was not only about opening our minds to new ideas, but also about opening our hearts, which was a fundamental step to build knowledge.

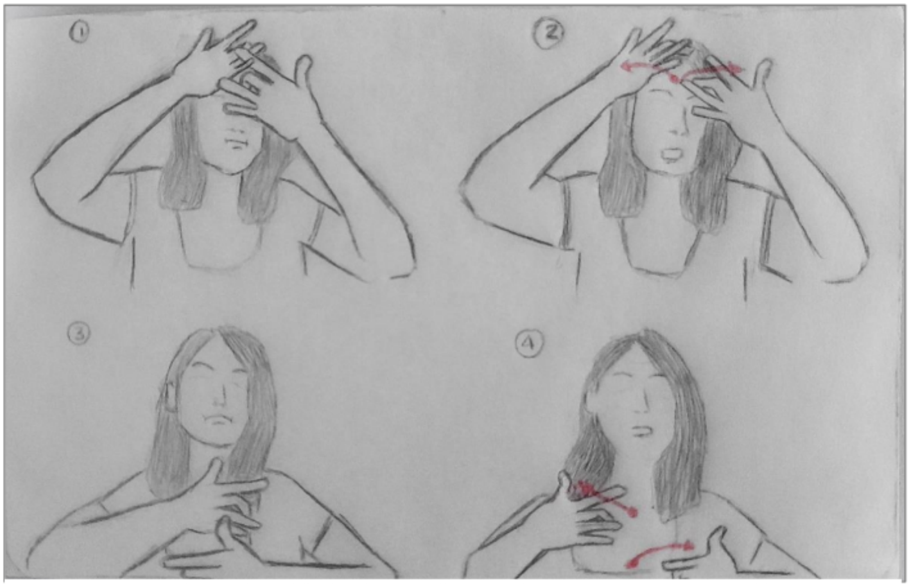


Figure 9. *"Open mind, open hearth". This drawing illustrates how a participant expressed her appreciation for creative methods. It shows her first opening her mind, and then her hearth. She explained it enabled her to break down big and difficult concepts to make sense of them through lived experienced.*

Although this participant didn't make any academic or conceptual reference while explaining her sign, her reflections made me think of what Fals-Borda & Moncayo (2009) call '*Sentipensar*' (feeling-thinking). This concept refers to a research approach that incorporates both rational reasoning with emotional intelligence, using personal experiences and insights

---

[10] During the image theatre and body sculpting exercises, I noticed a shift in participants' perception of communicating with the body while being static. The idea of their body being static wasn't logical for them, leading to a gradual transformation of the sculpting process into a form of 'corporal poetry' as the session progressed.

to create knowledge. By embracing not only intellectual arguments but also valuing emotional contributions, this type of action research aims to foster not only collective understanding but also a deeper sense of empathy among the participants, which resulting in a more meaningful research outcome. Ultimately, I do believe this research incorporated elements of *Sentipensar*, as from the reshape of our learning objectives we put in the centre the lived experiences, fears, frustrations, and aspirations of Colombian Deaf women in their pursuit of inclusion.

Chapter 5. Findings.

Since this study was grounded in Latin American epistemologies of action research, drawing from perspectives of Orlando Fals-Borda (dialogue of knowledge) and Arturo Escobar (pluriversality of knowledge and ways of existing), this chapter will begin by presenting the findings related to the relevance and enduring consequences of designing a study with this dialogical and experiential approach for this specific population. Afterwards, it will present the collective findings on the main topic of inclusion and conclude with another section dedicated to the researcher's arguments on it.

5.1. Relevance of the CI approach to AR:

> *"If I don't know what I need or what I'm missing out, I won't know what to ask for. […] Empowerment is not just helping us do things, is also teaching us to think about our daily lives and talk about it with each other".*

After a drawing session, where we explored our personal experiences of feeling included or excluded in different scenarios –like school, the health system, and within our families–, one participant signed the reflection above. As we shared our takeaways from the session and the lessons drawn from the exercises, this woman emphasised the significance and usefulness of taking the time to slow down to think about our feelings. In a reality that demands of us rapid and continuous actions to address the most visible symptoms of inequality, by creating proposals to present in public bids or having structured arguments to comment on a public hearing, the idea of stopping just to talk seemed at first as counterintuitive and a waste of time. However, the principal outcome of this AR process became to learn how to cultivate awareness and consciousness-raising by creating communicative spaces to learn from our everyday lives. *Figure 10* shows the sign she used at the end of her intervention, summing up how she felt during this process in a movement that evoked her mind expanding with each of the stories shared, leading to more questions than answers.

Thanks to the collaborative and exploratory nature of Cooperative Inquiry, that held in its core the goal of co-constructing knowledge and meaning through dialogue and shared experiences, we had a space to build the capacities needed to embark on a journey towards Freire's (1973) idea of conscientisation. Our sessions provided a space to learn how to dialogue not solely with academic jargon or rational reasoning, but with embodied knowledge and *sentipensar*. By actively framing our creative exercises in the purpose of building understandings, our conversations started to move beyond a mere empathetic exchange of stories, to create a cycle of both sharing and questioning how that was resonating with our lived experiences.

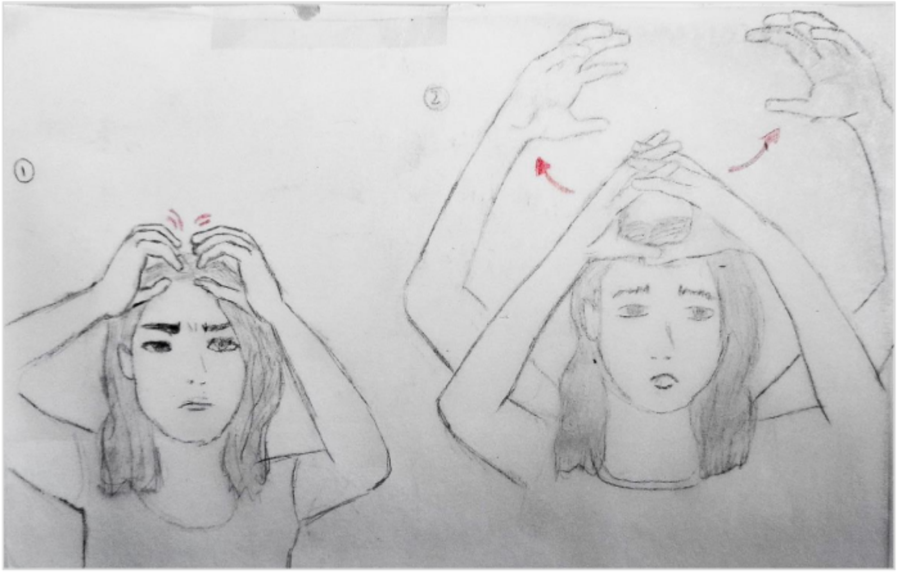


***Figure 10**. "How this process made me feel". Drawing illustrating the sign that a participant used to describe what she felt was the outcome of this study.*

Is in this questioning that I situate the action of this research, as it aligns with what Freire refers to as transformative learning. To Freire (1973), the pedagogy of the oppressed requires participants to actively build an understanding of their own needs and limitations, in order to foster genuine empowerment and transformative actions. By nurturing spaces to question our realities collectively, this research encouraged the participants to critically comprehend that their experiences were not isolated events but rather part of larger inequal sociopolitical systems that could be transformed.

Additionally, this approach was useful to address the gaps and tensions between disability studies and Deaf studies. Given the historical trend of Deaf movements' practices of ableism towards others within the disabled community as a strategy of political advocacy (Robinson, 2010), embracing this pedagogical approach was vital as such trend echoes the phenomenon highlighted by Freire (1973, p. 44): where those who are oppressed tend to become oppressors when seeking liberation without a real understanding of their own oppression.

Thus, instead of focusing on proposing new deaf-inclusive practices, I thought appropriate to take a step back and deepen in the reflective stage of the research. Encouraging collective questioning and learning, on both inclusion and exclusion, contrasting and building on the shared experiences of fellow co-inquirers with different experiences of deafhood[11], introduced a multi-dimensional lens to the conversation, allowing us to talk more freely about

---

[11] By this I mean women who are also Deaf but whose life trajectory differs – for example, in how and when they became deaf, the primary language used in their household, the type of education they received, whether or not they use hearing aids or cochlear implants, when and how they learned sign language, and so on.

the nuanced interplay of disability and deafness. In this sense, it brought up coexisting components of these intersecting identities that are often overlooked when addressing only one or the other, such as rehabilitative perspectives on their bodies and barriers related to language, which consequently made them question their initial position on, for example, hearing aids and the role of interpreters in inclusive education.

Although this approach diverted from the participant's initial desire for immediate actions and outcomes, towards the end, they highlighted a newfound appreciation for the reflective nature of the space as it provided an opportunity to explore aspects they hadn't previously fully contemplated as part of an advocacy process. *Figure 11* illustrates the moving body-sculpture these women created to represent how they made sense of this process and its usefulness in the long-term. The figure shows a continuous and growing movement that starts focalised in a small group and grows by expanding outwards, transitioning from talking within us to taking the conversation into a larger public scenario of advocacy.

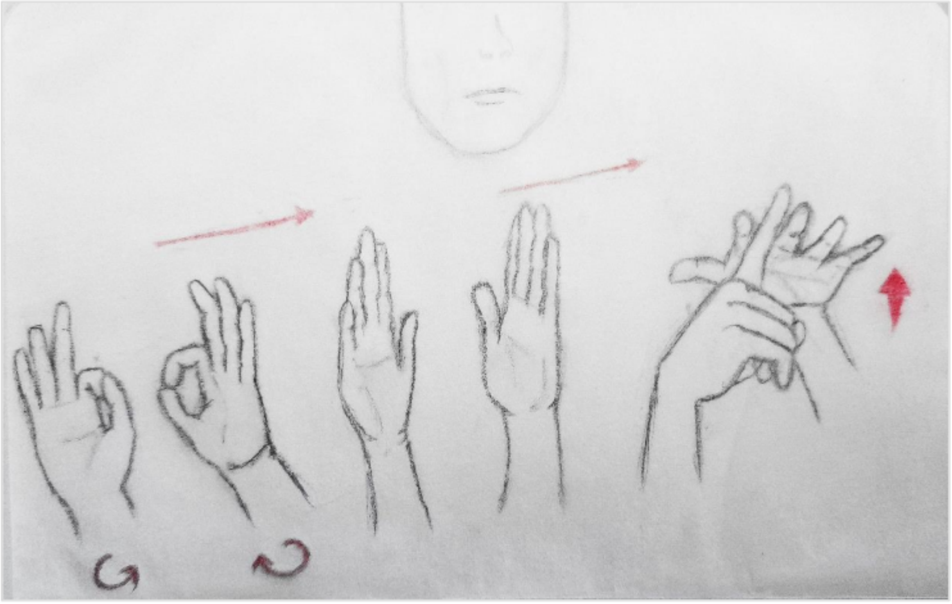


Figure 11. "Transitioning to a larger conversation". This drawing illustrates the participants' interpretation of this process. Is a transition from first and second person, to third. From left to right, the drawing shows signs related to group, then they grow towards "incidencia política" (political influence, advocacy).

From the conversation this sculpture sparked, the participants admitting don't fully knowing what they needed to ask for or how personal this fight for inclusion was really like (beyond the public sphere), acknowledging the value of tapping into our emotional memory to start understanding it and seeing how it connects with other people experiences. As one of the participants put it, encapsulating the journey of understanding their individual stories as inserted in a broader context of inequality, "what we've held [inside us] in silence for so long, we can now express; we won't keep our heads down anymore".

Thus, the CI approach and the methodology design proved not only useful but necessary to address the intersectional challenges faced by Deaf women and build capacities for future community or advocacy efforts. By showing them the power of melding personal experiences with collective dialogues processes, nurturing *power within* and *power with*[12], this research provided them with tools for them to learn –and teach– others to identify and communicate their needs. Given they are part of historically marginalized groups, developing skills of agency for them to contribute to the conversation on inclusive practices, is particularly important.

This AR process allowed us to explore creative methods that they could replicate in order to build capacities for advocacy and generating dialogue. Therefore, an outcome of this research is the participants learning that processes of change can also start small, at a grassroot and group level, by inquiring about their everyday lives rather than limiting possible actions to experts tackling broader structural challenges.

5.2. Collective findings on the topic:

The central question of this study was how notions of inclusion can be redefined to better recognise and embrace the experiences of Deaf women in Colombia. By amplifying their perspectives and experiential knowledge, the research delved into the intricate dynamics between gender and deafness. This section compiles the finding us, as a group, identified as a result of the discussions held during the creative exercises.

Throughout the stories shared of both positive deaf-inclusive practices, and experiences of exclusion (or failed inclusion), we identified six common topics:

- **Desire to belong:** longing to be part of social interactions that happen in the world around us.
- **Lack of recognition of their experiences:** across different settings, highlighting the need for broader societal awareness, especially regarding language barrier.
- **Significance of Deaf Associations or groups:** as vital spaces where participants felt understood and seen. However, their availability is limited mainly to major cities within each region.
- **Limited or conditioned accessibility:** challenges to access accommodations, leading to structural exclusion. Accessibility –specially in education stings– focused mostly on rehabilitation and speech therapy.
- **Invisibility and dependence:** being excluded from conversations that involves us, because people focus on our hearing companion. Sometimes this results in refusal of services if we are alone.

---

[12] According to Batliwala (2018) there are four different expressions of power, among them are 'power with' (building collective strength, mutual support, and collaboration), and 'power within' (agency, sense of self-worth, hope).

- **Technology's duality:** depending on the context, hearing aids and other gadget can either grant autonomy or cause dependency.

A common thread across the drawings that intended to portrait experiences of exclusion by channelling sentiments of loneliness, frustration, sadness, and anger, was the continuous sense of being left out and kept in the margins of things. Whether it was a family reunion, a chat between peers in a classroom, a festival or a movie, a political debate or even going to church, participants expressed feeling as if they were not noticed or acknowledged in the space. They noted that genuine inclusion, as they conceptualised it comparing these experiences with more positive ones, encompasses more than mere physical presence and access to a space. It extends to them genuinely being and feeling part of it, engaging with its dynamics. As one of the participants said, "It's not that I isolate or intentionally stay out; it's that I am being excluded".

Deaf Associations are the example of what resonates with their perception of effective inclusion. These organisations have played a crucial role in their lives, making them feel seen and not alone; they provide a safe place for them to share stories and ask as many questions as they want without any concerns about judgment or oversimplified answers. Contrary to what frequently happens in hearing-centric environments, here they can rely on their peers to engage in conversations about errands, sexuality, health, news, etc., without fearing they'll undermined or dismissed their questions.

Nevertheless, outside that bubble the challenges persist. One drawing told the common story of a doctor's insistence on the use of hearing aids, despite the patient's personal preferences, their medical history with it, or that the appointment was made to discuss a completely different topic. This scene sparked conversation about the nuanced nature of accessibility, questioning if inclusivity through accessibility is truly rooted in offering a comprehensive range of choices that genuinely uphold individual agency: does it truly consider the multitude of experiences of Deaf individuals and those with disabilities, or does it inadvertently push them towards choices of 'normalcy' that, if unaccepted, is frown upon.

Related to this, the stories and experiences around hearing aids showed the complex interplay of autonomy and dependence that arise from navigating assistive technology as someone with a disability. For some of them, it was a helpful tool that granted them independence by eliminating the need for a hearing companion or proficiency in written Spanish for daily tasks. For other, however, it represented dependency, as it carried expectations of normalcy that lead hearing people to believe that was the only solution needed to address communication barriers; this inadvertently placed the responsibility for inclusion onto the Deaf individual who should be wearing hearing aids to not be excluded. After our gathering, I captured the essence of this duality in a drawing (*Figure 12*) that resonated with my own experience navigating my identity. The drawing portrays a person situated between two distinct worlds that appear to tug in opposing directions, symbolizing the struggle of existing and constantly moving among these coexisting yet contrasting realities.

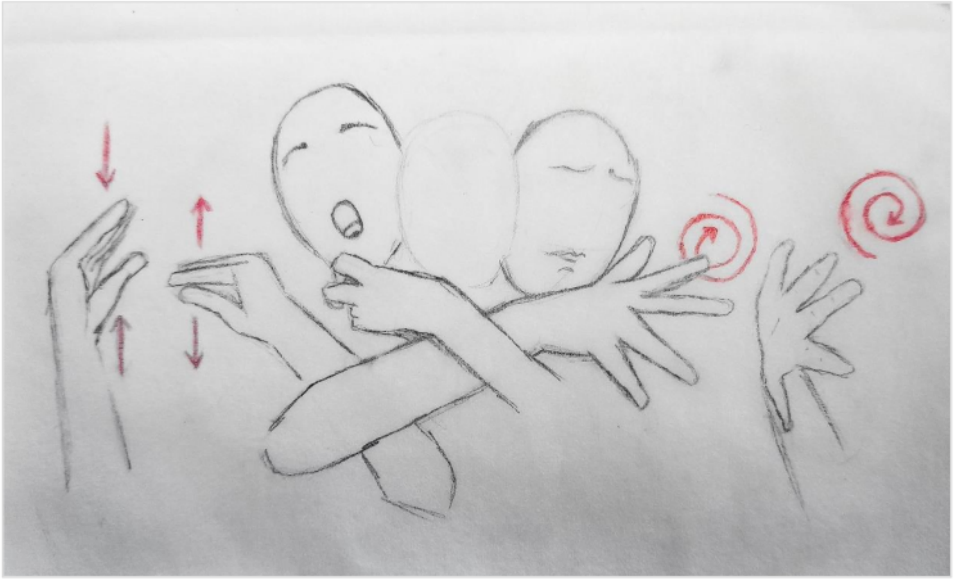


***Figure 12**. "In-between". Researcher's drawing created after the drawing session in an attempt to capture the common threads and emotions shared in the participant's life stories.*

In addition, the feeling of being invisible persisted across different settings, including educational, medical, and institutional contexts (like the police or child protection services). For example, they shared often being sidelined in issues that concerned and involved them, because people focus only on their hearing companion. This exclusionary practice usually leads to workers denying services until the deaf person returns with a companion, reinforcing a dependency that exclude them from crucial conversations. Some participants highlighted this could left them vulnerable to situations of domestic violence or abuse in general, and how this constant barrier was eroding their sense of self-worth.

Another topic underlined was 'ghettoising' or restricting disability and deaf-inclusion conversations to disabled and deaf spaces. A given example of this was a national anthropology congress where interpretation was available only for discussions related to deafness, leaving Deaf attendees unable to access other talks of their interest; or the fact that public universities in Colombia only offer a limited range of program choices, primarily constrained to special education degrees[13], restricting the opportunities for prospective Deaf students with disabilities to pursue academic paths aligned with their interests and strengths.

---

[13] For a real-life illustration of this phenomenon, see the news article Valencia (2021) wrote reporting on the protest by the Deaf community in Medellín demanding access to higher education without limitations regarding which programs could make accommodations for them.

Barriers to access education –like the shortage of interpreters and the difficulty comprehending written Spanish– continues to be a significant and systemic obstacle to feel truly included despite the existing laws of adjustments. Yet, these woman pointed out a troubling disparity within the educational landscape. Commonly, primary school for deaf kids rely heavily in rehabilitation and speech therapy, neglecting core aspects of their overall learning and development (including learning to read and write Spanish). Through their drawings, the oldest women recalled how violent this type of education can be, forcing their bodies to speak and deteriorating their self-esteem. Simultaneously, and contradictory, in most accessibility practices prevailed the assumption that providing a written rather than spoken format is enough to guarantee accessibility, such as subtitles, notes or transcripts; failing to acknowledge the distinct linguistic needs of the Deaf community. This situation accentuates an existing disconnection between how accessibility is being put into practice, the type of education offered to this community, and the lack of recognition of the linguistic component of this disability.

In analysing these six experiential components, it became clear that what these women were discussing as real inclusion or failed practices of it, was emphasizing two factors: first, the important of spaces that move beyond tokenistic gestures of inclusivity to genuine recognition and acknowledgement; and second, a necessary shift from placing the responsibility for everyday inclusion on the marginalized individuals. These findings underline how important is to take a step back to question how we are defining inclusion, as this will shape the strategies and policies used to address the complex task of designing environments that truly embrace the multifaceted realities of Deaf women in Colombia.

5.3. Researcher's findings:

While the collective findings emerged from the discussions we had during our final virtual gatherings, this section presents my individual reflections and analyses of those discussions as a researcher. The perspective here is informed by discussions we had throughout the study –not just the ones at the final stage of assessing the process–, conceptual frameworks of power and participation, and interactions with external public like attending forums on the topic. By the latter I'm referring to a webinar on 'Sign Language rights' by an alliance between the World Federation of the Deaf and the Colombian Deaf Federation, and the virtual forum on 'Political Participation of Women with Disabilities' organised by the Colombian *National Electoral Council*. It is worth noting that the participants were the ones letting me know about these spaces, which they also joined and engaged with[14].

---

[14] While the forum on political participation did offer interpretation during the moderator's interventions, it lacked interpretation during panellists' participations. In response, the women from this study, started leaving comments stating it was important to have interpretation throughout the forum to ensure the inclusion of Deaf women in discussions about political participation of women with disabilities. This call for accessibility not only underscores the intersectional nature of these discussions but also marks a significant shift, where participants felt empowered to advocate for their inclusion instead of merely disengaging from the live session.

Here I will build two additional arguments. First, that the narrative that urges women with disabilities to work –by themselves– on their self-confidence to achieve empowerment, overlooks the importance of collective processes in fostering emancipatory dialogues and forging political subjects. And second, that Deaf women's experiences are often relegated as there aren't spaces for them to be political while being intersectional; highlighting the need to create spaces where their unique challenges and strengths as both Deaf/disabled and women can be acknowledged and addressed.

Across the study, both internally and in external spaces, I came across a phrase that was constantly repeated when talking about empowerment: *we can't let ourselves be limited by the label* (either Deaf or disabled)[15]. What I found interesting, is that this call for self-confidence was also being applied in state-level discussions regarding barriers to political participation of women with disabilities. In the forum mentioned above, for example, the panellist presented a list of problematics that the population with disability face to exercise their democratic right to vote and have political representation, but when asked how they thought this could change, the majority of them gravitated toward individual perceptions of self-worth. I found problematic not only that being political was being constrained to democratic expressions of engagement with politics –like voting–, but also that the responsibility of building agency was placed in each marginalised individual.

Although I agree improving self-worth and confidence in one's capacities is part of building agency, I refuse to limit Batliwala's (2018) concept of 'power within' to an individualistic narrative. Power within isn't built in insolation; is foster through collective processes where individuals come together to share perspectives, to learn, to compare, and to explore different experiences of their common reality. By questioning everyday shared experiences by facilitating cooperative learning –in the sense envisioned by Freire (1973)– is possible to spark practices of introspection and self-awareness. Practices that can lead to the understanding of oneself as a *political subject*, as someone with agency to shape realities through political actions.

I designed this study as a collaborative inquiry, based on the belief that learning from and with others would foster first-person introspection, recognising that personal growth and empowerment are deeply intertwined with –or even rooted in– cooperative efforts. As Freire (1973) argues, such efforts to recognise and question the underlaying social, political, and economic structures that perpetuate inequality and oppression, can help individuals develop a sense of empowerment that goes beyond building their own agency to also accentuate the transformative potential embedded in collective action. In summary, I argue that to address the issue of political participation of women with disability, we must relocate the discussion from individual empowerment to a broader social and political context.

---

[15] Personally, I've been told this phrase before by well-intended people advising me to forget I'm deaf and move on. Nowadays I would recommend my younger self to embrace the label and make it my own, as it is a political act to do so.

For the second argument, I want to focus on the fact that Deaf women don't find spaces where they can position themselves as 'Deaf women' rather than just deaf or women. Their experiences of intersectional inequality are often overlooked in discussions about women's rights and feminist matters, as well as both disability- and deaf-focussed settings.

During the theatre session, some participants shared that generally their families never learn sign language, leaving them to live as a minority in their own homes. This barrier to communicate with what is their first agent of socialization, limit the opportunities they have to connect and engage with other women in their families to learn from their experiences of womanhood. As family 'fails' to provide the setting to cultivate understanding around some identity aspects like gender, but also race and disability, then other spaces like the local Deaf Associations become crucial[16]. However, these spaces are political as they take on a role of representation and advocacy by being part of de National Federation of the Deaf, Committees and disability boards, and even collaborating with local government institutions.

This political aspect, as is meant to mobilise capitals and influence policies and programs, is focused on Deafness (accessibility and services) and Deafhood (collective and language dimensions), which tends to erase and neglect inner intersections, like gender, to do so. As Spivak's concept of strategic essentialism explains, asserting a particular identity aspect can be –in context of marginalization– a tactic to navigate power structures in order to gain visibility, representation, and political power. While valuable, in the pursuit to leverage resources, they inadvertently reproduce power imbalances and perpetuate a dynamic in which when it comes to addressing the challenges of Deaf women, both feminist circles and Deaf/disabled communities attribute the topic to the other's domain.

Some examples of this, as shared by participants of this study, are that: women are notably absent from decision-making and representative roles within disabilities committees; there aren't deaf women present in spaces of dedicated to women's rights advocacy; and within Deaf organisations their male counterparts often claim that disability is not gendered as it causes the same physical/sensorial limitation regardless of gender. Overall, there is an absence of spaces for Deaf women to discuss their identities which prevents them from fully understanding and addressing the intersectional inequalities they experience, which perpetuates their marginalization but also inhibits their agency as political actors. This cooperative inquiry was a small sample of the potential of using this collective learning approach in spaces like the Women's Commission of the associations.

5.4. Re-defining inclusion:

Building on the findings presented so far, I will now articulate my answer to the question of how notions of inclusion can be redefined and resignify to better recognise and embrace the

---

[16] To deepen this argument of local Deaf association as primary agents of socialization for Deaf people, I recommend reading Palma-Garcia (2019), as her ethnography present examples of how this role takes place in different everyday life but also political interactions.

experiences of deaf women in Colombia. Because of time constrictions I couldn't share and validate with my co-inquirers the outcome I'll present in this last section. Hence, instead of considering it as a definite answer to the research question that brought our group together, I encourage you to view it as a thought-provoking proposition to initiate the discussion.

To do so, I drew inspiration from Batliwala's (2018) conceptualisation of power that is build an understanding of both power structures and relations to propose clear descriptions of what it is, how does it look like, and how is it expressed. In this sense, based on the collective learnings of this study, I understand that inclusion is a conscious intention to embrace and actively support diversity while aiming for equality (see *Figure 13)*. This conveys an idea of inclusion that involves deliberate efforts to welcome diversity and provide tangible resources and assistance to foster an inclusive environment. Note that by using the term 'intention' rather than 'will', I emphasise a more steadfast and accountable approach that leads to tangible and sustained efforts in promoting diversity of abilities –including vary ways of experiencing those abilities– and creating deaf-inclusive environments.

* Based on Baliwala's (2018) definition of visible, invisible, and hidden power

Figure 13. *Re-thinking inclusion*

The experiential insights gained through the collective dialogue with these group of Deaf Women, lead me to recognize that there are three distinct faces of inclusion, each with its own characteristics and implications. Acknowledging them is particularly relevant as it points out the need for a nuanced and holistic approach to inclusive development, understanding that policymaking often focuses on the first layer, and grassroots organizations tend to engage with the second, leaving the third one overlooked:

- **Visible inclusion:**

  Focusing on addressing, in formal and public decision-making spaces, systemic barriers. This includes creating laws and regulations to ensure people with disabilities can effectively exercise their rights, demand equitable conditions, and access essential services and accommodations for their diverse needs. This could look like approving Acts so individuals can request academic accommodations tailored to their specific needs, or enacting laws that mandate the provision of sign language interpreters for public events and the creation of disability committees within local governments.

- **Invisible inclusion:**

Acknowledging sociocultural and historical dispositions that hinders the effectiveness of visible practices of inclusion, which result in a more intimate –rather than systemic– feeling of marginalization: e.g., internalisation and normalisation of ableist attitudes and biases. As this dispositions might lead to marginalised communities not being aware of their rights or even their state of oppression, strategies to work towards invisible inclusion tend to be awareness raising, and the opening of participatory spaces (like this study).

- **Hidden inclusion:**

Addressing underlying structures and dynamics that perpetuate inequality and exclusion to maintain power imbalances and gatekeeping the issues addressed in the public arena. This type of inclusion recognises the need to delve into the participation barrier within organisations and spaces of inclusion advocacy to underscore deeper layers of marginalisation. Ultimately, it aims not only to embrace the complexities of intersectionality, but to actively create spaces where these unique and overlooked experiences can be acknowledged to shape decision-making conversations.

To explain how this definition of inclusion is expressed or translated into tangible examples, I'm proposing five components that were present –or identified as missing pieces– in these women's stories of positive experienced of inclusion. In this sense, real inclusion is feeling and being able:

- **To be / to exist:**

Borrowing Escobar's (2011) notion of 'different ways of existence', I consider inclusion as being unapologetically ourselves, without feeling the need to conform or suppress our identities and needs. Is being able to challenge able-centric, individualistic and homogenic notions of normalcy, embracing alternative frameworks to read a human experience such as disability/deafness. Is valuing the diverse cultural, linguistic and bodily realities.

- **To decide:**

Recognition of the autonomy of people with disabilities, meaning their right to make choices related to –for example– their bodies (medical interventions), sexuality and family planning, and communication preferences. This is particularly significant given the history of forced sterilization and restricted legal rights.

- **To participate / to collaborate:**

Inspired by the disability movement's principle of 'Nothing About Us Without Us' (Charlton, 1998), real inclusion should be express as a full engagement in –and enjoyment of– social, political, and cultural spheres. This would look like extending their roles from recipients of accommodation services to active co-creators of inclusive environments in their communities.

- **To influence:**

Following the same principle, a transformative inclusion involves grassroots organisations being able to influence the decision, design and implementation of policies, decisions, and programmes that directly affect them. This level of inclusion goes beyond individual empowerment and extends to collective agency, allowing marginalized groups to shape the structures that govern their lives. Is about building political power to lead systemic change in issues that concern them.

- **To shape:**

In syntony with invisible power, this component of inclusion is about being able to reshape narratives, challenge established norms, and redefine the boundaries of what constitutes normalcy (and even inclusion). By this I want to evoke that is not just about leading change, but also prefigure how that change, towards a future where diversity is not just accepted but celebrated, could look and feel like.

Chapter 6. Conclusions.

> *"I want to replace the normativeness of medicine with the curiosity of ethnography".*
> (Lane, 1992, Page 19 in Reagan, 1995, p. 245)

In essence, this study reflects my growth and learnings throughout my master's program, both as an action researcher and as a facilitator. In retrospect, I recognise that facing the methodological challenges led me to find a nuanced balance in my facilitation technique, between holding control of a situation and being open to let go of it or even take a step back; the key being learning to read and respond to the specific needs of the space, even if that implies changing the initial plan and entering uncharted waters. By accepting that –as our professor Patta told us– *everything is good enough*, I realised that rather than fixating on the pursue of conclusive answers, it is alright to embrace the path as it unfolds because the most enriching and meaningful outcomes emerge from the journey itself.

Precisely by being open to question my methods and rebuilding them with my co-inquirers as part of the CI process, this study captured a tapestry of Deaf women's experiences that shed light to the discussions of inclusion and intersectionality. In adopting a CI approach to action research, that was grounded in Latin American epistemologies and prioritised collective learning and *sentipensar*, this study not only built the participant's capacities to replicate this transformative learning journey, but also cast a spotlight on the need for pragmatic shifts in our approach to inclusion. This shift encompasses a dual transformation: firstly, within academic circles, which involves reevaluating how we conceive and put into practice Action Research's methods; and secondly, within policymaking, regarding how we conceptualise inclusion while designing and implementing strategies around it, which implies addressing the gap between current policies and the genuine experiences of those whom these policies are intended to include.

Overall, the essence of this new perspective lies in moving away from perceiving people with disabilities as passive beneficiaries of assistance, to instead recognising their potential and agency to shape their reality and contribute to building a future where their diverse experiences are recognised, valued and celebrated. It implies that inclusion moves beyond the boundaries of accessibility and mere presence, to encompass components of linguistic heritage, community, and *presencing* to avoid reproducing forms of assimilation and power imbalances.

In summary, the experiences of these Deaf women underscore two points. First, that while a constitutional recognition of cultural difference (as a linguistic minority) is undoubtedly important, alone it is not enough as a practice of inclusion. Likewise, policies around accessibility and integration, while necessary, are not sufficient as effective practices for Deaf inclusion either. Therefore, in order to build more holistic understandings and practices of inclusion that resonate with Deaf communities' experiences, we need more studies that resort to participatory methods to bridge the gap between Deaf studies and disability studies, connecting approaches that celebrate collectiveness and linguistic differences with the transformative principles of disability justice.

The second point is that these experiences of the intersection of gender, disability and deafhood are often overlooked in political scenarios. Deaf women often find themselves constrained to participate by positioning themselves just as a Deaf person, as a woman, or as someone with disability, leaving aside the particularities that emerge from the convergence of these identities. Because of the lack of spaces for Deaf women to be political while intersectional, the pertinence of the methods explored through this study are useful to consider their potential for future applications.

An example would be for local or regional Deaf Associations to actually establish, promote, and sustain Women's commissions within their organisations. These commissions could be designed as spaces where the intricate dynamics between gender and deafness could be explored through their experiential knowledge and counternarratives. Having a space of collective learning could be a catalyst of empowerment, encouraging them to embrace more active roles in shaping their lives, their communities, and the advocating strategies to claim their rights.

Finally, with this study I want to encourage my colleagues not only to engage with these ongoing discussions about inclusive practices, but also to incorporate them into their work as researchers in the field of Development. Integrating them, across different topics within development, might help them see inclusivity and development as complementary paths of social change. Rather than conceiving them as disarticulated processes that only join efforts in isolated and specific scenarios, we should embrace the symbiotic relationship between inclusivity and development to nurture their potential for structural transformation.

References:

Anderson, R. (2021). Embodied writing and reflections on embodiment. *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, *33*(2).

Arnstein, S. R. (1969). A Ladder Of Citizen Participation. *Journal of the American Institute of Planners*, *35*(4), 216–224. https://doi.org/10.1080/01944366908977225

Attia, M., & Edge, J. (2017). Be(com)ing a reflexive researcher: A developmental approach to research methodology. *Open Review of Educational Research*, *4*(1), 33–45. https://doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2017.1300068

Batliwala, S. (2018). *All about Power: Understanding social power and power structures*.

Batterbury, S. C. E., Ladd, P., & Gulliver, M. (2007). Sign Language Peoples as Indigenous Minorities: Implications for Research and Policy. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*, *39*(12), 2899–2915. https://doi.org/10.1068/a388

Bogart, K. R., & Dunn, D. S. (2019). Ableism: Special issue introduction. *Journal of Social Issues*, *75*(3), 650–664. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12354

Bourdieu, P. (1972). *Outline of a theory of practice* (R. Nice, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.

Bourke, B. (2014). Positionality: Reflecting on the Research Process. *The Qualitative Report*. https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2014.1026

Bradbury, H., & Reason, P. (2001). Conclusion. Broadening the bandwidth of validity: Issues and choice-points for improving the quality of action research. In *Handbook of Action Research*. SAGE Publications.

Burch, S., & Kafer, A. (2010). Introduction: Interventions, Investments, and Intersections. In *Deaf and disability studies: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Gallaudet University Press.

Burns, D., Howard, J., & Ospina, S. M. (Eds.). (2021). *The SAGE Handbook of Participatory research and inquiry* (Vol. 2). SAGE Publications.

Chambers, R. (2006). Participatory Mapping and Geographic Information Systems: Whose Map? Who is Empowered and Who Disempowered? Who Gains and Who Loses? *The Electronic Journal of Information Systems in Developing Countries*, *25*(1), 1–11. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1681-4835.2006.tb00163.x

Cho, S., Crenshaw, K. W., & McCall, L. (2013). Toward a Field of Intersectionality Studies: Theory, Applications, and Praxis. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, *38*(4), 785–810. https://doi.org/10.1086/669608

Collins, K., & Ison, R. (2006). *Dare we Jump off Arnstein's Ladder? Social Learning as a New Policy Paradigm*. Proceedings of PATH (Participatory Approaches in Science & Technology), Edimburgh. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/42793728_Dare_we_Jump_off_Arnstein%27s_Ladder_Social_Learning_as_a_New_Policy_Paradigm

Corker, M. (2000). Disability Politics, Language Planning and Inclusive Social Policy. *Disability & Society*, *15*(3), 445–462. https://doi.org/10.1080/713661963

Dietz, G. (2014). Educación intercultural en México. *CPU-e, Revista de Investigación Educativa*, *18*, 172–181. https://doi.org/10.25009/cpue.v0i18.761

Eichmann, H. (2009). Planning sign languages: Promoting hearing hegemony? Conceptualizing sign language standardization. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, *10*(3), 293–307. https://doi.org/10.1080/14664200903116287

Elias, N. (1978). *The Civilizing Process: The history of manners* (Urizen Books).

Escobar, A. (2011). *Encountering development: The making and unmaking of the Third World* (Vol. 1). Princeton University Press.

Fals-Borda, O. (1987). The Application of Participatory Action-Research in Latin America. *International Sociology*, *2*(4), 329–347. https://doi.org/10.1177/026858098700200401

Fals-Borda, O., & Moncayo, V. (2009). *Una sociología sentipensante para América Latina*. Siglo del hombre.

Freire, P. (1973). *Pedagogía del oprimido. Educación como práctica de la libertad*.

Garland-Thomson, R. (2012). The Case for Conserving Disability. *Journal of Bioethical Inquiry*, *9*(3), 339–355. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11673-012-9380-0

Garland-Thomson, R. (2023). *Integrating Disability, Transforming Feminist Theory*.

Gaventa, J. (2005). *Reflections on the Uses of the 'Power Cube' Approach for Analyzing the Spaces, Places and Dynamics of Civil Society Participation and Engagement*. 46.

Gaventa, J. (2006). Finding the Spaces for Change: A Power Analysis. *IDS Bulletin*, *37*(6), 23–33. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1759-5436.2006.tb00320.x

Geertz, G. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures* (Vol. 5019). Basic Books.

Greenwood, D., & Levin, M. (2007). An Epistemological foundation for action Research. In *SAGE Research Methods*. SAGE Publications, Inc. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781412984614

Heikkinen, H., Huttunen, R., & Syrjälä, L. (2007). Action research as narrative: Five principles for validation. *Educational Action Research*, *1*(15), 5–19.

Heron, J. (1996). *Co-operative inquiry: Research into the human condition*. SAGE Publications.

Howard, J., Ospina, S. M., & Yorks, L. (2021). Cooperative Inquiry as dialogic process. In *The SAGE Handbook of Participatory research and inquiry* (Vol. 2). SAGE Publications.

Kafer, A. (2003). Compulsory Bodies: Reflections on Heterosexuality and Able-bodiedness. *Journal of Women's History*, *15*(3), 77–89. https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2003.0071

Ladd, P. (1999). *In search of deafhood: Towards an understanding of British deaf culture* [Doctorado].

Ladd, P. (2005). Deafhood: A concept stressing possibilities, not deficits. *Scandinavian Journal of Public Health*, *33*(66_suppl), 12–17. https://doi.org/10.1080/14034950510033318

Ladd, P. (2011). *Comprendiendo la Cultura Sorda: En busca de la Sordedad*. Consejo Nacional de la Cultura y las Artes.

Lewin, T., & Shaw, J. (2021). Section Introduction: Collective Becoming: Visual and Performative Methodologies for Participatory Research. In D. Burns, J. Howard, & S. Ospina, *The SAGE Handbook of Participatory Research and Inquiry* (pp. 711–722). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529769432.n50

Lewis, G. (2017). Questions of Presence. *Feminist Review*, *117*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41305-017-0088-1

Marchall, C., & Rossman, G. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (Sixth edition). London SAGE Publications.

Palma-García, A. C. (2019). *La Reivindicación del Silencio: Una etnografía sobre experiencias y políticas de la Sordedad en Cali.* [BSc degree, Icesi]. https://repository.icesi.edu.co/biblioteca_digital/handle/10906/86866

Palma-García, A. C. (2023). To Radically Rethink Inclusion: The Fight of Deaf Collectives in Colombia [Alumni Network]. *Perspectives, Provocations & Initiatives*. https://alumni.ids.ac.uk/news/blogs-perspectives-provocations-initiatives/692/692-To-Radically-Rethink-Inclusion-The-Fight-of-Deaf-Collectives-in-Colombia

Rashid, K. (2010). Intersecting Reflections. In S. Burch & A. Kafer (Eds.), *Deaf and disability studies: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Gallaudet University Press.

Reagan, T. (1995). A sociocultural understanding of deafness: American sign language and the culture of deaf people. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *19*(2), 239–251. https://doi.org/10.1016/0147-1767(95)00007-X

Reason, P., & Heron, J. (2006). *A lay-person's guide to cooperative inquiry*.

Robinson, T. (2010). 'We are of a different class': Ableist rhetoric in Deaf America. In S. Burch & A. Kafer (Eds.), *Deaf and disability studies: Interdisciplinary perspectives*. Gallaudet University Press.

Sanderberg, C. (2009). Liberal vs Liberating empowerment: Conceptualising women's empowerment from Latin American Feminist perspective. *Pathways to Women's Empowerment Working*, *7*.

Santiago-Jirau, A., & Thompson, S. L. (2019). Image Theatre: The oldest branch of TO in the post-print present. In K. Howe, J. Boal, & J. Soeiro (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to Theatre of the Oppressed Routledge* (pp. 156–161). Routledge.

Scott-Villiers, P. (2021). Reflexivity and Reflection in Action Research: 'To Locate, Again, a Through Line to the Future'. In D. Burns, J. Howard, & S. Ospina, *The SAGE Handbook of Participatory Research and Inquiry* (pp. 220–233). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781529769432.n17

Shaw, J. (2012). *Contextualising empowerment practice: Negotiating the path to becoming using participatory video processes* [PhD, LSE]. http://etheses.lse.ac.uk/400/1/Shaw_Contextualising%20empowerment%20practice.pdf

Shaw, J. (2020). Navigating the Necessary Risks and Emergent Ethics of Using Visual Methods with Marginalised People. In S. Dodd (Ed.), *Advances in Research Ethics and Integrity* (pp. 105–130). Emerald Publishing Limited. https://doi.org/10.1108/S2398-601820200000005011

Spivak, G. C. (1988). Can the subaltern speak? Marxism and the interpretation of culture. *Urbana: University of Illinois Press*, 271–313.

Spivak, G. C. (1994). Can the Subaltern Speak? In P. Williams & L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial Discourse and post-colonial theory: A reader*. Columbia University Press.

Valencia, L. (2021). *La rebelión de la comunidad sorda en la Universidad de Antioquia*. El Tiempo. https://www.eltiempo.com/colombia/medellin/medellin-comunidad-sorda-protesta-en-la-universidad-de-antioquia-571938