

OTHER THEMES



Epistemic Injustice in the Education of People with Mental Disabilities

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ABSTRACT – Epistemic Injustice in the Education of People with Mental Disabilities. This article offers a perspective on inclusive education based on Fricker's conception of epistemic injustice. What is the relationship between inclusive education and epistemic injustice in the case of students with mental deficiencies? By adapting Fricker's thesis to this extreme case, epistemic injustice can be explored via the social model of disability (SMD). Accordingly, we propose that epistemic injustice harms the entire educational community and society.

Keywords: Mental Disability. Epistemic Injustice. Inclusive Education. Social Model of Disability.

RESUMEN – Injusticias Epistémicas en la Educación de Personas con Discapacidad Mental. Se ofrece en este artículo una perspectiva de la educación inclusiva a partir de la concepción de las injusticias epistémicas de Fricker. Se pregunta cuál es la relación entre la educación inclusiva y la injusticia epistémica en el caso de estudiantes con deficiencias mentales. Es necesario adaptar las tesis de Fricker a este caso límite, por lo que se debe pensar la injusticias epistémicas a partir del modelo social de la discapacidad. Se propone que la injusticia epistémica perjudica a toda la comunidad educativa y a la sociedad.

Palabras-clave: Discapacidad Mental. Injusticia Epistémica. Educación Inclusiva. Modelo Social de la Discapacidad.

Introduction

Education is one of the main tools used to promote equality and social mobility. However, it can also be a mechanism for the reproduction of dominant social inequalities. In this sense, given the growing need to promote the social participation of certain persons and social groups who have been constantly excluded from society and education, it is an urgent task to attract attention to diversity and to eliminate barriers to the learning and participation of children and adolescents in school contexts (Escallón; Porter; Richler, 2013).

This way of conceiving education is known as inclusion, which seeks “[...] the universalization of access to education for all children, young people and adults, and the promotion of equity” (Unesco, 2009, p. 6) and is thus proposed to address the “[...] challenges that diversities of all kinds produce in schools: gender, ethnic-racial order, social class, [or] situation, [without excluding] physical or cognitive disability [or] cultural origin” (García, 2007, p. 49). Thus, inclusive education is committed to a positive vision of diversity and respect for human rights.

Children and adolescents with disabilities are the most widely excluded social group in education (Escallón; Porter; Richler, 2013). Hence, it is necessary to problematize the attention to disability in school and, particularly, to mental disabilities to transform the educational contexts that perpetuate exclusion. We understand disability as something that cannot occur in an environment as a result of a deficiency (Nussbaum, 2012), and by the latter, we refer to “the loss of normal bodily function” (Nussbaum, 2012, p. 109). We also note that disability is a “resulting competitive disadvantage” (Nussbaum, 2012, p. 109). We use the notion of mental disability to encompass cognitive and emotional deficiencies, since, following Martha Nussbaum, emotions are not separate from cognition (Nussbaum, 2012).

However, one way to problematize the care for mental disabilities in school is through the dispute over access to education, i.e., to conceive the latter in terms of social (in)justice (Nussbaum, 2012). However, this is not the only way to define inclusive education as a problem of justice. It is necessary to conceive the education of people with mental disabilities as a problem of epistemic (in) justice (Tremain, 2017), a perspective little studied in the reflections on the inclusion of people with disabilities in school contexts.

The person who opened this debate in contemporary philosophy is Miranda Fricker. For this philosopher, epistemic injustice occurs when an agent is caused harm in his or her specific condition as a subject of knowledge (Fricker, 2017, p. 17), that is, in his or her capacity to know, which is nothing other than being able to “[...] express a personal opinion, transmit a value judgment, test a new idea or hypothesis” (Fricker, 2017, p. 107). The very ability to learn and know, as well as to manifest this process via participation in a knowledge community, is also at stake when we refer to the possibility of being subjects of knowl-

edge. For Fricker, there are two ways in which epistemic injustice can be manifested: 1) testimonial injustice, where an agent suffers from a credibility deficit on the part of the listener, caused by a negative identity prejudice associated with the social group to which he or she belongs; and 2) hermeneutic injustice, where a part of the social experience itself is hidden from collective understanding by a structural identity prejudice in collective hermeneutic resources (Fricker, 2017).

Fricker does not address the problem of disability. However, her conception of epistemic injustice contributes to a consideration of the attention to mental disability in education: The school conceives its students as subjects of knowledge and, in that sense, determines whether they are or are not subjects of knowledge, as well as in what way they are. This article seeks to problematize the attention to mental disability in education by mobilizing the perspective of epistemic injustice. It suggests that the possibilities of being subjects of knowledge are undermined among people with mental disabilities when they are excluded from quality education. To that extent, epistemic injustice is linked to social injustice, since they are two sides of the same coin (Medina, 2013; Kotzee, 2017). Thus, denying children and adolescents with disabilities access to quality education results in both types of epistemic injustice.

To support our argument, we examine Fricker's notion of epistemic injustice and adjust it to the education of children and adolescents with mental disabilities. While we argue that educational exclusion is a type of hermeneutic and testimonial injustice, it is necessary to enrich these two conceptions via the social model of disability (SMD), which affirms that this exclusion is the result of the interaction of the individual with his or her environment. This model allows us to understand the impact of context on the production of epistemic injustice. We point out that the consequences of epistemic injustice are not only suffered by people with disabilities who are excluded from education but also by other students and members of their educational community because the latter are denied the possibility of participating in the social knowledge that is produced by sharing and confronting the social experience of people with mental disabilities. Thus, we are committed to a defense of inclusive education as a mechanism for the reduction of epistemic and, of course, social injustice.

Epistemic Injustice in the Education of Persons with Mental Disabilities

Testimonial injustice

For Fricker, testimonial injustice is the “prejudicial identity credibility deficit” (Fricker, 2017, p. 58). As its definition indicates, this consists of not believing in what a speaking subject says due to an identity prejudice that the listener has about the speaker. This prejudice, which depends on a social coordination of imagination and discourse,

is based on shared conceptions of social identity. These are collectively and widely accepted associations, which allow us to categorize speakers (Fricker, 2017). One of the clearest examples of this is gender, which, following Fricker, is a territory of identity power, as are race and a good number of other social identities.

The central point regarding these prejudices is that they are negative because they entail “[...] a widely accepted disdainful association of a social group with one or more attributes that, by virtue of some affective investment on the part of the subject, offers some type of resistance to counter-tests” (Fricker, 2017, p. 69-70). Hence, they can distort the perception that the listener has of the speaker, whereby the listener does not receive the knowledge that the speaker transmits. However, they are false prejudices, unreliable empirical generalizations. Moreover, they are systematic and persistent because “[...] they persecute the subject in different dimensions of social activity: economic, educational, professional, sexual, legal, political, religious, etc.” (Fricker, 2017, p. 57). One of the most serious problems of testimonial injustice, according to Fricker, is that it damages an essential capacity for human dignity, i.e., being the subject of knowledge. The subject does not achieve the full human condition as long as he or she is not considered a carrier of knowledge; he or she loses his or her epistemic confidence and, with it, the possibility for development.

Given that negative identity prejudices operate among social groups and the subjects belonging to these groups, we can consider people with mental disabilities as members of a social group. According to Iris Marion Young (2002), the latter are understood as a group of individuals, i.e., people who are differentiated from others by their cultural forms and practices, their particular needs or abilities, or the structures of power and privilege they occupy. More than an aggregate of attributes, groups are characterized by maintaining similar social relationships within a social structure, which allows them to compare, act and interact with others and positions them differently in the social space, conditioning their experiences, opportunities, and knowledge.

For Young (2002), the social relations that constitute gender, class, race and ability should be understood as structural, that is, as processes that determine the social position that people occupy in the social space. This forges their life options, status under the law, educational possibilities, occupation, access to resources, political power and prestige. This social position is relatively permanent, and thus “[...] the social movements motivated by such group-based experiences are largely attempts to politicize and protest structural inequalities that they perceive unfairly privilege some social segments and oppress others” (Young, 2002, p. 92).

Despite the differences that each disability entails, these people belong to a social group; they share an unequal position in the social space precisely because they do not comply with the socially constructed standards of normality, which determine, in our case, unequal ac-

cess to education. According to Young (2002, p. 98), “[...] as it makes sense to say that people with disabilities are a social group, despite their vast bodily differences, this is [by] virtue of [the] social structures that normalize certain functions in the tools, built environment, and expectations of many people”.

The type of structural negative identity prejudice that conditions the lives of people with disabilities entails pointing out that they are not capable and, therefore, that in educational contexts they cannot learn or know. In short, they are ineducable. This prejudice is systematic and persistent, as it persecutes individuals with disabilities in other contexts, such as sexuality or working life; for example, it produces structural inequalities and excludes these people from the knowledge community. For Fricker (2017, p. 105), therefore, “[...] a culture that separates some from that aspect of the human condition through the experience of repeated exclusion from the dissemination of knowledge suffers from a serious defect, both from the epistemic point of view, as ethical”.

Here, we thus elaborate the schematic way in which Fricker conceives testimonial injustice and adjust it to the scenario that concerns us. Specifically, we are in the presence of testimonial injustice if:

Condition 1 (C1): Agent (A) has some type of mental disability.

C2: A shows his or her ability to participate in learning processes.

C3: The educational institution (EI) denies access to education to A because it considers C2 insufficient.

C4: C3 is the product of a negative identity prejudice regarding the capabilities of people who share the same condition, or similar conditions, as A.

Effect 1 (E1): A loses or diminishes his or her capacity to conceive of himself or herself as a subject of knowledge.

These four conditions are a method of modeling testimonial injustice in our case, although this needs some additional explanation. C2 captures, with slightly more flexibility, the notion of testimony used by Fricker. In this context, what is at stake is not the truth or falsity of any affirmation of the agent but his or her very capacity to learn and know and to manifest this knowledge when participating in a community. Thus, it is not a question of A expressing a state of affairs but of evidence that this state of affairs corresponds to what he or she expresses and who, despite the evidence presented and the truth of what is expressed, believes him. It is, rather, a scenario in which A, who has a mental disability, is able to show that he or she can participate in a learning process and, although he or she has demonstrated this to some degree, it is considered that this is not the case, despite the evidence. This is expressed in C3. Finally, C4 tries to capture the reason why the judgment of the educational institution is unfair, since it is not the result of what A has been able to show but is the product of an identity prejudice, associated with the group to which A belongs.

If these conditions are met, we can affirm that A is the victim of testimonial injustice because despite showing the ability to participate

in a learning process, this possibility has been denied him or her by his or her context. Additionally, if these conditions are met, we have consequence E1, namely, for A, it is now more difficult to conceive of himself or herself as a subject capable of knowing and learning. Now, to demonstrate that A has been the victim of testimonial injustice, it is necessary that C2 is true, i.e., that A is effectively able to show that he or she is able to participate in learning processes and to manifest them. As we note above, it is the environment that determines whether deficiencies become a disability and handicap (Nussbaum, 2012). Thus, whether A shows that he or she can effectively be a subject of knowledge depends, to a large extent, on his or her social environment and, in our case, on whether the teaching/learning tools and processes provided by E1 enable that capacity. In the second section of this text, we describe the implications that this has for Fricker's conception of testimonial injustice.

Hermeneutical injustice

Fricker (2017, p. 252) defines hermeneutic injustice as “[...] the injustice that some significant part of one's social experience is hidden from collective understanding due to a structural identity prejudice in collective hermeneutic resources”, which prevents certain experiences from becoming meaningful and invisible. This produces an interpretative marginalization that makes the collective hermeneutic resource structurally prejudicial by promoting biased understandings of the social experiences of certain individuals and groups. As in testimonial injustice, this marginalization is persistent and systematic, producing inequality in hermeneutic participation. Exclusion is thus perpetuated.

To understand this type of injustice, we use the following example: a woman who is responsible for most of the household tasks who has a husband who, despite helping a little, can dedicate himself more to this work. It seems evident that there is a gender injustice here because it is not clear what can justify this unequal division of domestic work. What is particular about this hermeneutic injustice is that perhaps this wife is not even capable of realizing that there is injustice. Nor is the husband capable of realizing it. The idea of Fricker is that if in the social imaginary the role of wife is systematically associated with the function of performing household tasks and that of the husband with the function of providing economic well-being as well as professional success, this unequal distribution of housework does not even appear to us as unfair.

The agents in this example do not have the interpretive tools needed to verify and know that this state of affairs is unfair. Likewise, they do not have the capacity to express this injustice; within its vocabulary and within the social vocabulary, there is nothing that can express and interpret this situation as injustice. The problem is that this situation constitutes a disadvantage only for the wife. This example allows us to emphasize that hermeneutic injustice is above all structural, that is, the problem is not that the husband is voluntarily acting unfairly. He reproduces the unjust but accepted structures within the common

imaginary of the people who belong to his social group, and therefore, his wife cannot make sense of her experience. It is not, then, the result of the just or unjust actions of the agents, although it certainly does not seek to exclude some type of responsibility.

However, hermeneutic injustice is not as concerned with the inequality of power within the social space, e.g., gender inequality, as in our example. The focus of this dimension of epistemic injustice is on groups that suffer some type of oppression and are excluded from the space and social imaginary. Thus, this oppression can be hidden by the lack of hermeneutical tools, both for society and for the victims of oppression. Accordingly, we can adjust the conception of hermeneutic injustice to fit the situation of exclusion in regard to the education of children and adolescents with mental disabilities. Specifically, we are in the presence of a hermeneutic injustice if:

C1: A has some type of mental disability.

C2: A is unjustly excluded from an educational setting, that is, he or she is the victim of unjustified discrimination.

C3: A does not have the hermeneutical tools, i.e., the ability to understand that he or she is a victim of unjustified discrimination or to give meaning to his or her experiences as a subject who knows and learns.

C4: The EI that excludes him or her lacks the ability to understand that the exclusion of A is an act of discrimination.

C5: C3 and C4 occur because A belongs to a group that carries a negative identity prejudice and is excluded from the hermeneutical tools needed to give meaning to his or her exclusion from the educational system as unjust and discriminatory.

EI: A loses or has a diminished ability to conceive of himself or herself as a subject of knowledge.

As we have noted, this example ignores the question of whether A was the victim of a discriminatory action. The central question for Fricker is whether A, as well as the EI, have the ability to interpret this situation correctly, as unjustified discrimination. Additionally, our concern is to try to understand to what degree agents who have a disability and who are victims of hermeneutic injustice, in addition to being discriminated against, are able to see themselves as subjects of knowledge injured.

However, this example, if it adequately reflects the ideas of Fricker, has some undesirable implications. It is necessary to ask ourselves what generates C5, that is, what excludes A from the hermeneutical tools required for there to be understanding and what produces C4, i.e., why the EI that excluded him or her is not able to understand that the exclusion of A is an act of discrimination. Thus, in this particular case, we can encounter a situation of voluntary hermeneutic ignorance, a problem that we address in the next section.

Epistemic Injustice under the Social Model of Disability (SMD)

Testimonial injustice

Thus far, we have adjusted Fricker's characterization of epistemic injustice to the case of children and adolescents with mental disabilities in an educational context. Here, we address the greatest difficulty presented by our purpose. Fricker, in his thesis, is not concerned with examining the truth of what is expressed by the victim of testimonial injustice. The central example of this type of epistemic injustice that the philosopher refers to is the case of Tom Robinson in the novel *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Tom is an African-American accused of having assaulted a young White woman. Despite his innocence, his presentation of all the evidence and the truth of his testimony, he is not believed because he is an African American. For Fricker's thesis, the most relevant factor is ignorance of whether Tom is innocent and speaks truthfully when giving his testimony. Moreover, we must assume that it is indeed true and that his testimony is sincere, as in fact it is. As we are well aware, the author's concern is what causes Tom to not be believed and what kind of injustice this is.

In our case, the situation is not as simple, not because we should doubt the ability of an agent with a mental disability to enter into a teaching/learning relationship, but because our difficulty is more fundamental. Tom has been treated unfairly regarding his capacity to know and more particularly as a *giver* of knowledge. Tom is trying to prove his innocence, and despite the evidence, his testimony is totally dismissed. The jury assumes that Tom is lying. The unjust credibility deficit of which he is a victim undermines his social capacity to transmit knowledge, that is, to produce true propositions about the world, since he is deemed a liar.

What our agent with mental disabilities is trying to express is not that he or she has a belief about how the world is and that the world is this way. What he or she tries to show is that he or she is simply capable of forming such beliefs and that he or she is capable of learning to form them. Clearly, we are in a radically different situation from that presented by Fricker, one that is also a borderline case. Given that what is at stake in our context is not only the truth or falsity of a statement or the sincerity of the speaker but also the very ability of the agent to establish a specific interlocution relationship, that is, teaching/learning, it is necessary to reflect on the possibilities of action for the agents in question. For this, it is crucial to explore the social model of disability, as it questions how abilities and disabilities have been conceived.

For the activists and researchers with disabilities who founded the Union of the Physically Impaired Segregation (UPIAS) in the 1970s, this social movement was accompanied by a change in perspective on disability. Opposing the medical-individual model of disability, they proposed the social model of disability (Hunt, 1966; Oliver, 1981; Barnes, 1996; Oliver; Barnes, 1998). In the former model, there is a direct, causal

relationship between an *impairment* and the inability to perform any activity. Thus, the inability of a person to use his or her legs to walk prevents him or her from moving through the streets of a city. This is a causal association between deficiency and disability, which the authors of the SMD try to break because this model “[...] involves nothing more or less fundamental than a switch away from focusing on the physical limitations of particular individuals to the way the physical and social environment[s] impose limitations upon certain categories of people” (Oliver, 1981, p. 28).

The SMD thus draws a distinction between the physical limitations of an agent, the paralysis of the legs in our example, and the ability or disability to perform certain activities, such as traversing the urban space. The particularity of disability is that it does not arise as a necessary consequence of the former but through the interaction of a limitation with a social space, as also indicated by Nussbaum (2012). An agent with paralyzed legs can traverse the urban space if certain conditions are met, e.g., if it were designed in such a way that other ways of moving through the space than walking are possible.

In the more traditional version of the SMD, there is a certain radicality in the causal separation between deficiency and disability. At its base is a strong ontological statement about what a physical limitation is and what a disability is, provoking a deep debate among the various disciplines that deal with the population with various disabilities (Beaudry, 2016; Terzi, 2014; Gallagher; Connor; Ferri, 2014; Anastasiou; Kauffman, 2013; Shakespeare; Watson, 2001). Given that this important discussion is outside our focus, we take a practical position (in the sense of practical reason) similar to that suggested by Beaudry (2016) or Terzi (2014).

Thus, we have adopted a more modest version of the SMD. Beyond the ontological relationship between impairment and disability, there are a number of descriptions of actions that are only true if certain social conditions are met—those that have to do with disability but not impairment. Therefore, affirming that as a result of an injury an individual cannot walk can be true is not equivalent to the affirmation that said individual cannot move along the platforms of the city. The conditions of the second are different, since there are other ways of moving across the platforms as long as they are adequate for these other ways of inhabiting the space.

The idea is, following the traditional SMD (Oliver, 2009), to avoid the denial of physical limitations while recognizing that the practical consequences, that is, the possibilities of action in a social environment, depend on more criteria than physical limitations or mental deficiencies. Hence, the SMD in education is understood as the interaction of students with context, people, policy, institution, school, teacher, culture, and social and economic circumstance, as these interactions pose barriers to student learning and participation (Escallón; Porter; Richler, 2013). The SMD emphasizes such interaction as well as the relationship

between the individual and his or her context, as the latter produces borders or eliminates them, either for access to education or for the production of knowledge. This allows us to suspend our judgment on the exact nature of the relationship between deficiency and disability and, at the same time, preserve the practical, ethical and social consequences of the model.

Harnessing this succinct version of the SMD, we return to our problem and to the model that we formulated in the first section of the article. We have observed two crucial points, namely, the agent's demonstration of his or her ability to learn, C2, and the refusal by the EI to admit it, C3. Thus far, we have assumed that this rejection stems from a negative identity prejudice. However, now we have the possibility of discerning that the relationship between these three conditions is somewhat more complex. C2 can be considered insufficient not only because of a prejudice of identity. It is possible that the agent who has some type of mental disability is not able to learn, not because his or her deficiency limits this action, but because the EI does not give him or her the social environment where he or she can perform this activity; thus, there is a much lower possibility of testing his or her ability to learn.

We are, then, in a different circumstance from that described in our first model, since C2 may not be fulfilled; however, we can still be in the presence of epistemic injustice. One of Fricker's fundamental intuitions is that in the case of epistemic injustice, what is at stake is not whether the victim's claim is true or false but whether his or her interlocutors believe him or her, regardless of whether there is evidence to support the claim. This intuition reaches its limit in our case because it is possible that children and adolescents who have mental disabilities are denied not only credibility but also the very possibility of being credible.

Hence, we can have two models of epistemic injustice for determining if an agent is the victim of epistemic injustice in regard to obtaining access to education. On the one hand, the second is similar to the first one, which we have already built:

First model adapted to the SMD:

Csmd1: A suffers from some type of mental deficiency

Csmd2: EI offers the appropriate tools so that agents with mental disabilities such as those of A can learn.

Csmd3: A shows his or her ability to participate in learning processes.

Csmd4: EI denies access to education to A because it considers that C2 is not enough.

Csmd5: Csmd4 is the product of a negative identity prejudice regarding the capabilities of people who share the same condition or similar conditions as A.

E1: A loses or diminishes his or her capacity to conceive of himself or herself as a subject of knowledge.

Here, we have implied that Csm2 describes the configuration where the EI provides the possibility that the agent can perform a particular action, proving that he or she can learn. When this condition is not met, we have another type of case that could be modeled as follows:

Second model adapted to the SMD:

Csm1: A suffers from some type of mental deficiency.

Csm2: EI does not offer adequate tools for agents with mental disabilities such as those of A to learn.

Csm3: A, because of Csm2, is unable to show that he or she can participate in learning processes.

Csm4: EI denies access to education to A because it unfairly considers that he or she cannot learn.

Csm5: Csm4 is the product of Csm2, that is, the result of an action or inaction of the EI.

EI: A loses or diminishes his or her capacity to conceive of himself or herself as a subject of knowledge.

We now have two ways that testimonial injustice can occur when denying access to education to a child or adolescent with some mental deficiency. Unlike the modeling in the first section, in these, we use the term mental impairment to emphasize the fact that disability occurs in the interaction between the individual and his or her environment, as pointed out by the SMD. In both cases, we must emphasize that the injustice committed is radically different because, on the one hand, it is the basic ability to enter the community of knowledge that is at stake and, on the other hand, identity prejudice is reinforced by the material exclusion and social rejection that impede entering this community through the creation or maintenance of a social environment that transforms deficiency into disability and handicap.

Now that we have reappropriated Fricker's conception of testimonial injustice through the SMD, following Medina (Medina, 2013), we can argue that testimonial injustice is relational, that is, credibility and the very possibility of being credible are not independent of the social position occupied by the subjects, nor are they evaluated in isolation and regardless of their social affiliations. In contrast, this is always a comparative and contrasting process (Medina, 2013). In our case, it is a comparison and contrast of not only those "normal" students who are attributed an excess of credibility in their learning process compared to the credibility deficit attributed to those with disabilities but also of the relationship between the students with disabilities and their context, since this is what largely determines what can be considered the ability to learn and know as well as what creates the conditions for participation in a community. Thus, we emphasize that students with mental disabilities can show their abilities to participate in learning processes, that is, whether they can provide evidence of it depends on their relationship with the environment and on whether it is possible.

This allows us to affirm that we are not only in the presence of epistemic injustice but also guilty ignorance, even in the best cases. An educational institution that limits the possibility of a student learning, condemning him or her to an inadequate learning environment, seems to lack a special duty that is based on its specific role in society.¹ Providing itself with the luxury of ignoring the specific needs of its students, current or potential, is not something that an EI can afford when accepting the role of educating. One of its fundamental duties is to commit to the adaptation of education to fit human diversity.

Hermeneutical injustice

The implications of the SMD for the case of hermeneutic injustice allow us to point out something similar with respect to what is affirmed in testimonial injustice: Only in a comparative and contrasting analysis of hermeneutic power (Medina, 2013) is it possible to understand hermeneutic marginalization and how it generates inequality in collective hermeneutic participation. In other words, it is not only necessary to review the relationship between hermeneutically privileged and marginalized persons but also essential to know how the latter find themselves in that position as a result of their interaction with a context.

In light of these considerations, the initial model we created for hermeneutic injustice does not seem to need modification. It is, however, necessary to specify some of the conditions that we describe. In the model, and more generally, when we relate to people with mental disabilities, we must understand that the hermeneutical tools that we mobilize for the understanding of injustice or exclusion are precisely part of that environment that makes deficiency become disability. It is precisely because students with disabilities develop in environments with a limited and prejudiced collective hermeneutical resource that their deficiency not only becomes a disability to perform certain tasks but also a disability to give meaning to their experience, to see themselves and be seen as victims of injustice or as people capable of entering into a teaching-learning relationship.

This reflection does not entail modifying the model formulated above but rather understanding that C3 and C5 are statements about hermeneutic tools insofar as they are part of the environment that is determinant in disability.

For Fricker, social groups that occupy privileged social positions enjoy an unfair advantage in relation to the structuring of collective social interpretations and, therefore, of social facts (Fricker, 2016). Thus, certain groups that occupy marginal social positions fail to participate in the structuring of collective interpretations of events, eliding their own social experience precisely because of the understanding, dissemination and production of knowledge, with the consequence of being excluded from the shared social imagination. This results in the inability of hermeneutically marginalized subjects to give meaning to their

social experiences; therefore, they do not have access to equal participation in the production of social meaning, nor can the context give meaning to the social experiences of these groups. Hence, for marginalized persons, this constitutes a disadvantage that is not understood as a social injustice.

For our case, the exclusion of the education of students with mental disabilities is due to structural identity prejudice in the collective hermeneutic resources, which affirms the inability of these people to learn, to know and to participate in education for all. This prejudice is sustained by how privileged groups shape social interpretations by dividing subjects between the capable and incapable, normal and abnormal, and educable and uneducated, thus reinforcing and justifying exclusion. In addition, for our case, this shapes educational institutions and justifies their arbitrary admission of certain students but not others.

On the one hand, people with mental disabilities cannot always make sense of their experiences as subjects who know and learn, according to their abilities, nor can they recognize that their exclusion from education is unfair precisely because they do not have the hermeneutic resources to interpret their own situation, which undermines their possibilities of being subjects of knowledge; therefore, their dignity as human beings is questioned. On the other hand, educational institutions do not have the hermeneutic tools to understand the rational contributions of people with disabilities nor to enhance these contributions; they also lack the tools to interpret their exclusion and selective admission to be unfair, i.e., they can only perceive that for the social group of people with disabilities, there is, as we have suggested, a disadvantage.

However, today, amid the advances in research and pedagogical practice regarding disability and inclusion and debates over universal and equal access to education, it does not seem appropriate, without more evidence, to argue that institutions do not have the hermeneutical resources to understand that their arbitrary admission is unfair; therefore, this can be a case of voluntary hermeneutic ignorance. This possibility is the object of debate within the literature dedicated to epistemic injustice. Specifically, philosophers Gail Pohlhaus Jr. (2012) and Kristie Dotson (2012) have argued that in addition to testimonial injustice and hermeneutic injustice, there is a third type that is situated, in a sense, between the former two: contributory injustice (Pohlhaus, 2012), i.e., voluntary hermeneutic injustice. Although these philosophers do not defend their premises similarly, their positions share a number of significant similarities. Both share, along with Medina (2013), the idea that in a society there is not a single set of hermeneutic resources but several and that one is usually dominant and coexists with the others. Typically, the hermeneutical resources of marginal or vulnerable groups are used to protect themselves from the oppression of dominant groups.

Thus, when we are in the presence of hermeneutic injustice, the dominant group may not penalize itself by using hermeneutical re-

sources other than its own, which causes among other forms of epistemic injustice, both testimonial and hermeneutic injustice (Pohlhaus., 2012; Dotson, 2012). Therefore, this position implies that the structural characteristic of Fricker's hermeneutic injustice has to be nuanced, since it is true that there are other sets of hermeneutic resources that agents can mobilize, particularly those of vulnerable groups. By not doing so, whether voluntarily or through negligence, we can then be in the presence of cases of guilty hermeneutic ignorance, whether voluntary or negligent². Fricker (2016) supports some points of the aforementioned authors but emphasizes the structural and thus not always agentic dimension of hermeneutic injustice.

If we return to our concern, which focuses on the particular case of an EI and its relationship with students who have a mental disability, we can discern pathways that lead from the aforementioned debate. As we said above, the social position that an EI occupies necessarily implies special duties. To clarify this, it is helpful to consider the type of epistemic duties that a medical specialist has, for example. Someone who occupies this position cannot afford to ignore the side effects of a certain relatively recent treatment, and if his or her ignorance compromises the health of a patient, his or her lack of knowledge seems unacceptable to us because we can assume that he or she has the ability to acquire the relevant knowledge (he or she is a specialist) and that he or she has voluntarily accepted the duty to prescribe the best treatment available for his or her patient (when entering a doctor-patient relationship). Hence, ignorance does not excuse him or her from his or her responsibility for the effects that he or she did not foresee.

Likewise, an EI acquires certain types of special duties that are the responsibility of its members, or at least some of them. In particular, an EI is committed to the duty of doing everything possible to educate students, which necessarily implies the duty to adapt pedagogical practices to fit students. For this, it is necessary to account for the types of needs of the students to identify how to adapt contents, practices, spaces etc. Notably, negative identity prejudices are so powerful that they vitiate and resist evidence. In this context, resistance has been demonstrated in studied and proven cases of successful inclusive education (Escallón; Porter; Richler, 2013)³.

However, in some sense, it seems understandable that educational institutions do not have the hermeneutical resources to understand the rational contributions of people with disabilities, but it is precisely because they elide the social experiences of these people from the production of collective knowledge, which are fundamental for structuring social interpretations and transforming contexts—in this case, educational contexts. Although it is not a simple matter to determine with precision, there is a degree of responsibility of an EI for its inability to mobilize adequate hermeneutical resources to adapt to certain types of students who do not correspond to the generic student, an expression inspired by the concept of the generic knower by Pohlhaus (2012, p. 720).

Accordingly, in collective hermeneutical resources and the structuring of social interpretations, the production of social knowledge is at stake. According to Young (2012), social differences related to gender, class, culture and ability should be considered in the promotion of justice, not as selfish interests of groups but as inclusive political resources. In this philosopher's judgment, the communication of experience and knowledge, derived from different social positions, corrects the biases of dominant and biased perspectives and increases social knowledge. Hence, a similar social position generates a social perspective (Young, 2002). This does not mean that people who occupy a disadvantaged social position are epistemologically privileged but that their situated knowledge, a product of their position in the social structure, gives voice to the needs, interests and perspectives of those with a disadvantage, which can facilitate making fairer decisions and, thus, transforming social structures.

In the case of people with physical disabilities, for example, when they have "[...] the opportunity to express their perceptions of biases in the socially constructed environment or expectations of functions needed to perform tasks, then everyone learns how to see the social environment differently" (Young, 2002, p. 117). In this way, the communication of their needs, perspectives, interests and, in our case, learning capacities affects the available social knowledge and fosters the structuring of more inclusive spaces, thereby questioning the collective hermeneutical resources that privilege certain groups and communities' social interpretations. This social knowledge produces epistemic diversity (Kotzee, 2017); that is, it contributes to the inclusion of many perspectives, needs, and interests in an educational community. The latter, as situated (Medina, 2013), are those that allow correcting the biases of collective hermeneutic resources and giving meaning to the social experiences that have been hidden from the collective.

The SMD allows us to recognize that the exclusion of people with mental disabilities from the structuring of collective hermeneutical tools and their inability to give meaning to their experiences as subjects of knowledge is the result of their interaction with an environment where hermeneutic resources are vitiated by privileged perspectives that shape facts and social interpretations; in this case, they give shape to educational institutions and what constitutes the ability to learn, know and participate.

Inclusive education is epistemic justice

Given our relational view of epistemic injustice and our use of the SMD to understand the importance of the environment, we can affirm that the unjust epistemic consequences in the case of hermeneutic injustice impact not only the people excluded due to their mental disabilities but also the other students and members of their community. Although the disadvantage occurs in relation to the subordinate social group, the other members of the educational community are also

somewhat affected in relation to the social knowledge that ceases to be produced when sharing and confronting the experience of people with mental disabilities does not occur.

To use an expression of Fricker, a “collective hermeneutic impoverishment” is generated that has a differential impact on people while reducing the possibility of understanding, producing and disseminating knowledge. For this philosopher, “[...] hermeneutical gaps are like black holes in the ozone layer: it is the people who live under them who burn” (Fricker, 2017, p. 259). However, this does not happen uniformly, which shows that the main disadvantage is effectively among the subordinate social groups. Although other members of the community are affected – they share the same ozone layer – these are hidden experiences, i.e., social determinants with respect to understanding the human and, in our case, the transformation of education.

However, in hermeneutics as well as testimonial injustice, there is “[...] a common epistemic significance: the prejudiced exclusion of participation in the dissemination of knowledge” (Fricker, 2017, p. 260). This impacts all members of an educational community and prevents the biases of dominant and biased perspectives from being corrected. As Fricker points out, hermeneutic injustice can often be composed of testimonial injustice; hence, we can affirm something similar in relation to this, i.e., although it mainly affects those who suffer a deficit of credibility or prejudicial identity, this deficit affects the community by preventing the participation of people with disabilities in the dissemination of knowledge and thus by reducing the production of social knowledge that enables the transformation of contexts.

A commitment to inclusive education that addresses diversity as a way to produce and enrich social knowledge constitutes the mechanism for the reduction of epistemic – and of course, social – injustice, as it allows the access of people with disabilities to education. It becomes necessary for schools to educate students “[...] in diversity, promote equal access to those victims of some form of exclusion and generate the conditions so that their experience in all spaces is based on their recognition and their rights” (García, 2007, p. 50).

Reducing barriers to learning and increasing the participation of children and adolescents with mental disabilities while seeking an increase in the production and dissemination of knowledge allows the community to view the latter in a different way and begin to erode the negative identity prejudices that drive their persecution. This type of education recognizes that the fundamental change is precisely located in context to ensure that it is committed to a transformation in contents, approaches, structures and teaching strategies via the conviction that the ordinary system must educate all children (Escallón; Porter; Richler, 2013).

Undoubtedly, inclusion is not a means to overcome a deficiency but a mechanism to reduce injustice with respect to access to education and the production of knowledge. Therefore, it is a means that allows

questioning what constitutes a disability and handicap. If the environment is what determines disability, i.e., concerning the ability to learn, know and participate, an inclusive environment ensures that the rational contributions of people with disabilities are visible; therefore, it is committed to enabling their ability to demonstrate their learning abilities.

This social knowledge, produced in an environment of inclusive education, allows, on the one hand, the promotion of human rights, justice, equity and moral values because it is the most effective means to combat discriminatory attitudes (Escallón.; Porter; Richler, 2013). On the other hand, it enables the recognition of vulnerability, interdependence and illness (Kittay, 2011) and generates forms of solidarity with and care toward others, facilitating the maintenance of continuity between people called capable and those deemed incapable (Nussbaum, 2012.). This produces, as a consequence, another recognition of one's own and others' limitations. Moreover, it makes it possible to know what a person is capable of being and doing. This inclusive social knowledge also allows us to give meaning to other ways of being in the world and of learning and knowing, driving us to consider mental disability "[...] an opportunity to explore the nature and limits of concepts such as justice., rights, respect, care and responsibility" (Carlson; Kittay, 2009, p. 308).

Inclusive education also enables a richer conception of the subjects of knowledge, dignity and academic excellence that recognizes deficiencies and promotes mechanisms to overcome barriers to learning and participation. Thus, inclusive education promotes and enriches social knowledge and contributes to social and epistemic justice. Nevertheless, "[...] modifying the unequal power relations that generate the conditions for hermeneutic injustice requires much more than any individual virtuous behavior; [it] requires group political action for social change" (Fricker, 2017, p. 279). Accordingly, the path of education effectively constitutes a commitment to the transformation of the realities experienced by subordinate social groups, making it possible to mitigate injustice and reduce suffering.

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Notes

- 1 The literature on the special duties that respond to specific social roles is abundant. For a clear introduction, see Pettit and Goodin (1986).
- 2 Elaborating a theory of responsibility for hermeneutic or testimonial injustice requires further research that exceeds the focus of this work. We simply want to leave this option open.
- 3 It is necessary to add that there is extensive research on inclusive education, which has provided positive results. Recently, the meta-analysis of Szumski, Smogorzewska and Karwowski (2017) has shown that there are no negative impacts of inclusive education on students without disabilities and even a

slight improvement in some competencies. A similar conclusion is drawn in the meta-analysis of Capp (2017), who shows that institutions that follow the universal design model have a moderate but positive impact on all students, with or without disabilities.

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