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Article

Epistemologies of the South and epistemic justice: challenges for research and teacher education in Latin America[1]

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Abstract

This article analyzes the Epistemologies of the South and epistemic justice as frameworks for understanding the production, validation, and circulation of knowledge in Latin American education. It asks how these perspectives can contribute to rigorous, plural, and socially committed educational research. The study is qualitative, bibliographic, and analytical-interpretative, drawing on Boaventura de Sousa Santos and scholarship on coloniality, research paradigms, epistemic injustice, and decolonial pedagogies. The analysis connects abyssal thinking, the sociologies of absences and emergences, the ecology of knowledges, and intercultural translation with positivist, constructivist, and critical realist paradigms. The findings indicate that epistemic justice affects curriculum, assessment, teacher education, and research by expanding authorship, participation, and responsibility for the effects of knowledge. The article concludes that an ecology of knowledges neither rejects science nor supports relativism; rather, it promotes critical dialogue among forms of knowledge, guided by evidence, consequences, rights, and relevance to educational problems.

Keywords: Educational research; epistemology; Latin America; social justice; teacher education.

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Epistemologias do Sul e justiça epistêmica: desafios para a pesquisa e a formação de professores na América Latina

Resumo

Este artigo analisa as Epistemologias do Sul e a justiça epistêmica como referenciais para compreender a produção, a validação e a circulação do conhecimento na educação latino-americana. Pergunta-se como essas perspectivas podem contribuir para uma investigação educacional rigorosa, plural e socialmente comprometida. A pesquisa é qualitativa, bibliográfica e analítico-interpretativa, fundamentada em obras de Boaventura de Sousa Santos e em estudos sobre colonialidade, paradigmas de pesquisa, injustiça epistêmica e pedagogias decoloniais. A análise articula pensamento abissal, sociologias das ausências e das emergências, ecologia de saberes e tradução intercultural aos paradigmas positivista, construtivista e realista crítico. Os resultados indicam que a justiça epistêmica repercute no currículo, na avaliação, na formação docente e na pesquisa, ao ampliar autoria, participação e responsabilidade pelos efeitos do conhecimento. Conclui-se que a ecologia de saberes não rejeita a ciência nem sustenta relativismo: propõe diálogo crítico entre conhecimentos, orientado por evidências, consequências, direitos e adequação aos problemas educacionais.

Palavras-chave: América Latina; epistemologia; formação de professores; justiça social; pesquisa educacional.

Epistemologías del Sur y justicia epistémica: desafíos para la investigación y la formación docente en América Latina

Resumen

Este artículo analiza las Epistemologías del Sur y la justicia epistémica como referentes para comprender la producción, la validación y la circulación del conocimiento en la educación latinoamericana. Se pregunta cómo estas perspectivas pueden contribuir a una investigación educativa rigurosa, plural y socialmente comprometida. La investigación es cualitativa, bibliográfica y analítico-interpretativa, fundamentada en obras de Boaventura de Sousa Santos y en estudios sobre colonialidad, paradigmas de investigación, injusticia epistémica y pedagogías decoloniales. El análisis articula el pensamiento abismal, las sociologías de las ausencias y las emergencias, la ecología de saberes y la traducción intercultural con los paradigmas positivista, constructivista y realista crítico. Los resultados indican que la justicia epistémica repercute en el currículo, la evaluación, la formación docente y la investigación al ampliar la autoría, la participación y la responsabilidad por los efectos del conocimiento. Se concluye que la ecología de saberes no rechaza la ciencia ni sostiene el relativismo, sino que propone un diálogo crítico orientado por evidencias, consecuencias, derechos y pertinencia educativa.

Palabras clave: América Latina; epistemología; formación docente; investigación educativa; justicia social.

Introduction

Producing knowledge in education is never a neutral or merely technical act. Before choosing questionnaires, interviews, observations, or indicators, the researcher assumes a particular understanding of reality, human beings, and society. The researcher also decides what will be recognized as evidence, who will be allowed to speak, and for what purposes knowledge will be mobilized. As Marx and Engels (2007) caution, ideas are not formed outside the material conditions of life; therefore, investigating education requires recognizing the historical relations of class, power, and inequality that permeate both the school and science itself.

Classical paradigms offer important contributions, although none of them, in isolation, can account for the complexity of education. Positivism favors the measurement of patterns; constructivism sheds light on processes of meaning-making and learning; and critical realism seeks to explain structures and mechanisms that cannot be reduced to what is immediately observed (Guba; Lincoln, 1994; Bhaskar, 2008; Chafe, 2024). The problem arises when an approach presents itself as the only legitimate path and turns historical choices into apparent universal truths.

This concern becomes even more urgent in Latin America, where colonialism, capitalism, and patriarchy have organized not only the distribution of wealth and power, but also regimes of credibility. Quijano (2000) refers to the persistence of these hierarchies beyond colonial administrations as the coloniality of power, demonstrating that the racial classification of the population — forged since the colonization of the Americas — continues to structure labor, authority, and knowledge-production relations within global capitalism. Santos and Meneses (2010), in turn, show that social injustice is articulated with cognitive injustice: peoples and communities may be materially exploited while, simultaneously, their knowledge is silenced, appropriated, or classified as inferior.

The Epistemologies of the South emerge from this field of struggles. The South does not simply designate a geographical location, but rather the experiences and forms of resistance produced by subjects subjected to systematic oppression (Santos, 2009, 2014). By denouncing abyssal thinking and epistemicide, this perspective questions the university and the school when they transform popular, Indigenous, Black, peasant, and community-based forms of knowledge into absences. The democratization of knowledge also requires a public sphere capable of welcoming historically excluded epistemologies (Santos, 2012). In later works, Santos (2018, 2024) reaffirms that cognitive justice does not mean accepting any claim without criteria, but rather democratizing the conditions for the production, confrontation, and validation of knowledge.

In education, this discussion intersects with the pedagogy of Paulo Freire. Knowing does not mean passively receiving a ready-made explanation, but rather critically reading the world in order to participate in its transformation. Banking education reduces students to receptacles; a problem-posing education recognizes teachers and learners as historical subjects, without disregarding the teacher's pedagogical responsibility (Freire, 1987, 1996). Along the same lines, Saviani (2011) reminds us that democratizing the school requires ensuring that the popular classes have critical access to systematized knowledge. Therefore, valuing experiential knowledge does not imply denying science, but rather refusing to allow it to be used as an instrument of silencing.

This debate also extends to higher education institutions. Santos (2024) argues that the university has the potential to confront contemporary crises, although it remains selective regarding the knowledge it recognizes. Recent studies indicate that the decolonization of the university requires curricular, institutional, and relational changes, rather than merely the symbolic inclusion of new authors in already established programs (Santos, 2026). Thus, the challenge is to construct more democratic relationships among forms of knowledge while preserving rigor, argumentation, and public responsibility.

In view of this tension, the article addresses the following question: how can the Epistemologies of the South and epistemic justice contribute to the production of rigorous, plural, and socially committed educational knowledge in Latin America? The objective is to critically analyze the contributions of Boaventura de Sousa Santos and decolonial authors to research and teacher education, in dialogue with positivist, constructivist, and critical realist paradigms.

The argument developed is that measuring patterns, understanding meanings, and explaining mechanisms are necessary but insufficient operations when the relations of credibility, authorship, and power that define who can participate in the construction of knowledge are not examined. The text presents the methodological approach, discusses paradigms and coloniality, systematizes concepts from the Epistemologies of the South, and analyzes their implications for research, curriculum, assessment, and teacher education.

Methodological Approach

The study adopts a qualitative approach, of a bibliographic and analytical-interpretative nature. Bibliographic research makes it possible to gather and confront previously published theoretical contributions, without being limited to the mere reproduction of their results (Gil, 2008). The qualitative perspective was chosen because the problem under investigation involves meanings, disputes over legitimacy, historical relations, and projects of society; dimensions that require contextualized and reflexive interpretation (Minayo, 2014).

The constitution of the corpus prioritized original works by central authors and peer-reviewed articles related to the Epistemologies of the South, coloniality, epistemic justice, and research paradigms. The book *Una epistemología del Sur*, the CLACSO collection, the SciELO and DOAJ databases, and the official pages of academic journals and publishers were consulted. The searches combined, in Portuguese, Spanish, and English, the descriptors “Epistemologies of the South,” “ecology of knowledges,” “epistemic justice,” “education,” “research

paradigms," "positivism," "constructivism," "critical realism," "coloniality," and "decolonial pedagogies."

The selection considered four criteria: conceptual relevance to the problem; argumentative consistency; contribution to Latin American education; and the possibility of dialogue or tension between perspectives. Duplicate materials, exclusively informative texts, and publications without an explicit relationship to knowledge production or educational practices were excluded. As this is a theoretical essay supported by a bibliographic review, the study did not intend to conduct a systematic review or produce statistical inferences about the available literature.

The interpretation took place through four interconnected movements: comprehensive reading and systematic note-taking of the works; identification of ontological, epistemological, and methodological assumptions; comparison between paradigms and categories; and analysis of the implications for research, curriculum, assessment, and teacher education. Inspired by the Freirean understanding that the reading of the word cannot be separated from the reading of the world (Freire, 1987), the analysis sought to relate concepts to the concrete conditions of Latin American education. The authors' reflexivity was assumed as part of the method: their teaching experiences guided questions and approaches, but the interpretations were confronted with the corpus in order to prevent particular experiences from being taken as sufficient evidence.

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Research Paradigms and Their Contributions

A paradigm can be understood as a set of fundamental beliefs about reality, the possibilities of knowledge, and legitimate research procedures. Guba and Lincoln (1994) systematized this relationship through three questions: What is the nature of reality? What is the relationship between the knower and that which can be known? How can the researcher produce knowledge? Chafe (2024) points out that the term paradigm has different uses, which is why research should make its assumptions explicit rather than merely declaring a label

Positivism

Positivism assumes that there is an objective reality and that scientific knowledge advances through systematic observation, operationalization of variables, and hypothesis testing. Park, Konge, and Artino (2020) show that the hypothetico-deductive model begins with theoretical propositions, produces testable hypotheses, and uses empirical evidence to support, revise, or reject explanations. In education, this perspective supports large-scale assessments, experimental studies, monitoring of indicators, and comparisons between groups or periods.

Its contribution is indispensable when there is a need to measure inequalities, estimate effects, or monitor changes. The limitation arises when what is measurable is treated as synonymous with what is real. Indicators are constructed through human decisions: someone chooses what to measure, how to classify it, and which outcome represents success. The claim of neutrality may conceal values, contexts, and power relations. The epistemological problem does not lie in measurement itself, but in its transformation into a totalizing explanation.

Constructivism

Constructivism understands knowledge as an interpretative and relational activity. Rather than passively copying a ready-made world, subjects construct meanings based on experiences, languages, interactions, and cultural frameworks. Piaget (1970) emphasizes the reorganization of cognitive schemas, while Vygotsky (1978) demonstrates that higher psychological functions develop through social and cultural mediation. In research, qualitative methodologies capable of understanding narratives, trajectories, interactions, and contexts predominate.

Richardson (2003) cautions that constructivist pedagogy cannot be reduced to group activities or the absence of teacher guidance. It requires in-depth knowledge of the content, intentionality, mediation, and attention to effective learning. Among its limitations are the difficulty of generalization and the risk of underestimating material structures that exist independently of interpretations. The plurality of meanings does not eliminate the need to confront evidence and consequences.

Critical Realism

Critical realism, associated with Roy Bhaskar, maintains that reality exists independently of the descriptions produced about it, although knowledge is historical, fallible, and theoretically mediated. Reality is stratified: the empirical domain corresponds to what is experienced; the actual domain, to the events that occur; and the real domain, to the structures and causal powers capable of producing events. Research seeks to explain why certain outcomes emerge under particular conditions.

In education, this perspective asks not only “what works?” but also “what works, for whom, under what circumstances, and through which mechanisms?” Mirzaei Rafe et al. (2021) demonstrate its usefulness for relating curriculum, pedagogy, assessment, agency, and structures. The paradigm accepts quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods. Its main requirement is not to

transform invisible mechanisms into arbitrary claims: every explanation must compare alternative hypotheses, gather evidence, and remain open to revision.

Table 1 – Comparison between positivism, constructivism, and critical realism.

Dimension	**Positivism**	**Construtivism**	**Critical Realism**
Reality	Unique, objective, and measurable	Multiple, interpreted, and relational	Independent of the researcher, stratified, and contextual
Knowledge	Systematic observation, measurement, and hypothesis testing	Construction of meanings mediated by experience, culture, and language	Provisional explanation of structures, causal powers, and mechanisms
Subject-object relationship	Seeks distance and control to reduce interference	Transactional, dialogical, and reflexive	Recognizes mediations without reducing reality to discourse
Logic	Deduction and the hypothetico-deductive model	Induction, abduction, and hermeneutic interpretation	Retroduction: infers mechanisms from events and contexts
Predominant methods	Tests, experiments, structured questionnaires, and statistics	Interviews, observation, narratives, ethnography, and case study	Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods, articulated with causal analysis
Strength	Measures patterns, compares groups, and monitors changes	Understands experiences, processes, and meanings	Relates agency, structures, and conditions under which outcomes are produced
Limitation	May reduce complexity to what is measurable	May underestimate structures and have limited generalizability	Requires conceptual rigor; unobservable mechanisms may become speculation

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Guba and Lincoln (1994), Park, Konge, and Artino (2020), Richardson (2003), Bhaskar (2008), and Chafe (2024).

Table 1 shows that the differences between the paradigms are not restricted to the techniques employed. Each perspective is based on its own conception of reality, the subject, and validity. Positivism contributes to measuring phenomena and comparing results; constructivism makes it possible to understand the meanings constructed by participants; and critical realism

seeks to reveal the mechanisms and structures that produce what is observed. In educational research, this comparison recommends avoiding both the hegemony of numbers and the idealization of subjective experiences. Indicators, narratives, and structural explanations can engage in dialogue, provided that the researcher makes explicit the function and limits of each choice.

Coloniality of Power and Knowledge

Coloniality does not end with the political independence of former colonies. Quijano (2000) demonstrates that the constitution of the Americas and of global capitalism articulated racial classification, labor exploitation, and Eurocentrism. Europe was represented as the center of rationality and modernity, while other peoples were located at lower stages of a supposedly universal history. This matrix also organized knowledge: theories produced in specific contexts came to circulate as universal, while local forms of knowledge were treated as tradition, belief, or backwardness.

Mignolo (2000) draws attention to the geopolitics of knowledge and to border thinking. Knowing is not an act without a place: languages, institutions, bodies, territories, and histories influence which problems become visible. Walsh (2013) shifts decoloniality toward pedagogy by referring to insurgent practices of resisting, (re)existing, and (re)living. Decolonial pedagogy is not merely a set of methods; it is a practice that questions power relations and creates conditions for other subjects to produce interpretation and action.

This approach does not authorize the automatic rejection of everything produced in Europe or the Global North. Eurocentrism is criticized when a particular experience is presented as a universal measure and when other experiences are evaluated solely according to their proximity to this model. A decolonial education needs to critically engage with the canon, its scope and its silences, while simultaneously expanding authorship, problems, references, and forms of validation.

Epistemologies of the South

The South as an Epistemological Metaphor

In the book *Una epistemología del Sur*, Santos (2009) defines the South as the search for knowledge and validity criteria that attribute visibility and credibility to the cognitive practices of groups historically oppressed by colonialism and capitalism. The South is anti-imperial and not purely geographical. Its starting point is knowledge arising from experiences of resistance, collective organization, and the struggle for dignity.

This formulation broadens epistemology by shifting the focus from abstract knowledge to the practices of knowing and their effects. What matters is who formulates the problem, who controls the means of validation, which experiences are recognized, and which groups can represent the world on their own terms. Science remains relevant, but it is no longer treated as a language capable of exhausting the diversity of human experience.

Abyssal Thinking and Epistemicide

Abyssal thinking creates lines that separate the visible universe, regulated by distinctions such as true and false or legal and illegal, from another side produced as nonexistent. Santos (2007) argues that these lines, formed during colonialism, remain present in contemporary institutions — such as the university and the school — where certain forms of knowledge are recognized as scientific and others are relegated to the status of belief or tradition. Exclusion does not merely consist in stating that a form of knowledge is wrong; it consists in removing from it the status of knowledge and from its producer the status of a legitimate subject.

The concept of epistemicide refers to the systematic destruction or disqualification of ways of knowing. In education, this may occur when languages, memories, cosmologies, environmental practices, or work experiences are removed from the curriculum; when students are required to abandon their identity in order to be recognized as intelligent; or when research transforms communities into silent objects. Overcoming this logic requires more

than adding content: it requires changing relations of authorship, credibility, and decision-making.

Sociology of Absences and Sociology of Emergencies

The sociology of absences seeks to demonstrate that many realities are not naturally nonexistent; they have been produced as irrelevant by criteria of knowledge, time, classification, scale, and productivity. Santos (2002) criticizes indolent reason, which contracts the present and wastes experiences. In educational research, absence can be identified when only central institutions, standardized performance, or easily accessible subjects define what is known about education.

The sociology of emergencies expands the present by investigating possibilities that are still fragile: local practices, solidarity networks, intercultural curricula, cooperative forms of assessment, and community experiences. This does not mean declaring any novelty to be emancipatory. Emergence needs to be analyzed in terms of its conditions, tensions, limits, and potentialities. Bastos and Baroni (2019), in studying *escolas-pirilampo*, show how modes of (re) existence may remain invisible when research uses only the major institutional "spotlights."

Ecology of Knowledges and Intercultural Translation

The ecology of knowledges is based on the incompleteness of all knowledge. Learning one form of knowledge can expand capacities while simultaneously producing forms of forgetting. Dialogue should compare scope, ignorance, risks, and consequences. Therefore, the ecology of knowledges does not amount to asserting that all forms of knowledge possess the same validity in every situation. A medicinal practice, a scientific theory, a community memory, and an artistic interpretation respond to different problems and should be evaluated according to criteria appropriate to their purposes, evidence, and effects.

Intercultural translation seeks reciprocal intelligibility without reducing one experience to the language of another, preserving difference as a condition of dialogue (Santos, 2010). In education, this implies creating mediations between academic language, experiential knowledge, local cultures, technologies, and scientific knowledge. Sánchez Molano and Almeida (2023) show that science education can engage in dialogue with Latin American environmentalism and critical interculturality without abandoning experimentation, argumentation, and methodological pluralism.

Epistemic Justice and Cognitive Justice

Epistemic justice refers to the conditions through which individuals and groups can participate in the production, interpretation, and circulation of knowledge. Fricker (2007) distinguishes testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. The former occurs when prejudices cause a credibility deficit: a person is listened to less because of their identity. The latter occurs when collective interpretive resources are insufficient or unequally distributed, preventing certain groups from understanding and communicating significant aspects of their experience.

Santos's (2010) cognitive justice has a broader scope. It relates social inequality, colonialism, and hierarchies among knowledge systems. The two perspectives converge in demonstrating that knowing is also a relation of power. At school, it is not enough to formally grant voice; it is necessary to examine whether this voice influences questions, criteria, and decisions. A discussion circle may remain unjust when students are heard, but their interpretations do not modify the curriculum or assessment.

The response is not to replace competence with identity. Epistemic justice requires expanding the conditions of participation and correcting prejudices without abandoning critical assessment. Arguments, evidence, and consequences remain necessary. What changes is the awareness that credibility,

language, and access to spaces of validation have never been distributed neutrally.

Table 2 – Epistemic injustices and educational responses.

Problem	Manifestation in education	Possible response
Testimonial injustice	The word of certain students, families, or communities receives less credibility due to identity-based prejudices.	Qualified listening, transparent documentation, participation, and review of credibility criteria.
Hermeneutical injustice	Groups do not have legitimized concepts to make experiences of discrimination, exclusion, or violence intelligible.	Expand interpretive repertoires and allow subjects to name their experiences.
Epistemicide	Indigenous, Afro-descendant, peasant, popular, or territorial forms of knowledge are erased from the curriculum and research.	Historical reconstruction, plural authorship, critical interculturality, and protection of collective knowledge.
Abyssal thinking	Science appears as the only valid form of knowledge; other experiences are treated as ignorance or superstition.	Ecology of knowledges with explicit criteria, critical dialogue, and analysis of practical consequences.
Epistemic extraction	The community provides data but does not participate in the questions, interpretations, benefits, or decisions	Co-production, feedback, ongoing consent, and ethical negotiation of the uses of knowledge.

Source: Prepared by the authors based on Fricker (2007), Santos (2007, 2009, 2014), and Walsh (2013).

Table 2 shows that epistemic injustice is not abstract: it materializes when the words of certain subjects receive less credibility, when concepts for naming experiences of oppression are lacking, or when forms of knowledge are erased from curricula and research. The educational responses presented shift students and communities from the status of objects to that of subjects of knowledge. From a Freirean perspective, recognizing their voice does not mean abandoning teacher mediation, but rather creating conditions for experience to be problematized, confronted with systematized knowledge, and transformed into a critical understanding of reality.

Results and Discussion

Knowledge Construction in Different Frameworks

Classical paradigms and the Epistemologies of the South do not occupy exactly the same analytical level. Positivism, constructivism, and critical realism offer relatively systematic ontological, epistemological, and methodological responses. The Epistemologies of the South constitute a plural program of critique and reconstruction that asks how colonial modernity determined who could produce valid knowledge. Treating them as a closed fourth paradigm would reduce their open, political, and artisanal character.

There are important points of convergence. Constructivism and the Epistemologies of the South recognize the mediation of language, culture, and experience; however, Santos (2014) emphasizes that not all constructions possess the same institutional power. Critical realism and the Epistemologies of the South reject superficial empiricism and investigate structures that generate absences; however, they differ regarding the place of ontology and the role of social struggles as a source of knowledge. Positivism offers tools for measuring inequalities, but it comes into tension with the critique of neutrality and the monopoly of science.

A rigorous articulation is possible when each piece of evidence has a declared function. Indicators can show who is being excluded; narratives can explain how exclusion is experienced; critical realism can infer institutional mechanisms; and the Epistemologies of the South can question the authorship of categories and include forms of knowledge born from resistance. Pluralism does not authorize indiscriminate mixing. It requires coherence among the research question, paradigm, method, interpretation, and ethical commitment.

Table 3 – Epistemologies of the South in dialogue with classical paradigms

Axis	**Classical paradigms**	**Shift introduced by the Epistemologies of the South**
Central question	How can reality be known with validity and rigor?	Who defines valid knowledge, and which forms of knowledge have been produced as nonexistent?
Subject of knowledge	Researcher, scientific community, or subjects in interaction.	Collective subjects, movements, communities, and groups that produce knowledge through social struggles
Criterion of validity	Objectivity, interpretive credibility, or explanatory power.	Includes consequences, participation, context, usefulness in confronting oppression, and openness to dialogue
Methodology	Measurement, interpretation, or causal explanation.	Sociology of absences and emergencies, ecology of knowledges, intercultural translation, and co-production
Relationship between science and other forms of knowledge	Science tends to occupy a privileged position, even while recognizing mediation and fallibility.	Science participates in an ecology: it retains its own capacities but does not hold a monopoly over all valid experience
Purpose	To explain, understand, predict, or transform phenomena.	To produce cognitive justice and expand the capacity of historically oppressed groups to represent and transform the world

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Table 3 makes it possible to understand that the Epistemologies of the South do not constitute a closed fourth paradigm, placed alongside the others. They operate as a critique of the hierarchies that permeate all processes of knowledge and ask who produces the evidence, who interprets the results, and who benefits from their consequences. Thus, they can engage in dialogue with positivist measurement, constructivist interpretation, and the structural explanation of critical realism, but they require these operations to be subjected to criteria of cognitive justice, participation, and social responsibility.

Methodological plurality, therefore, is not simply a sum of techniques, but an ethical and political choice in the face of inequalities.

Contributions of the Epistemologies of the South

The first contribution is to make visible the political dimension of validity criteria. Santos does not claim that all scientific knowledge is colonial, but demonstrates that modern science has frequently been used to hierarchize peoples and justify interventions. Asking about the consequences of a given form of knowledge makes it possible to assess whether it expands capabilities, produces dependency, protects life, or legitimizes inequalities.

The second contribution is methodological. The sociology of absences, sociology of emergencies, ecology of knowledges, and intercultural translation constitute investigative movements: locating silences; recognizing possibilities; bringing forms of knowledge into relation; and constructing intelligibility across languages. These movements foster less extractivist and more reflexive research, especially when participants contribute to formulating problems and interpreting results.

The third contribution is pedagogical. Paulo Freire had already demonstrated that teaching is not a matter of depositing content, but of creating conditions for a critical reading of the world. The dialogue among Freire, Santos, Quijano, and Walsh strengthens an education that starts from experience without remaining within it, expands access to systematized knowledge, and recognizes students as historical subjects. Teaching authority does not disappear: it is transformed into the responsibility to mediate, problematize, teach, and learn rigorously.

Limitations and Tensions

A critical reading must recognize difficulties. The first is the risk of romanticizing subalternized forms of knowledge. Knowledge produced by an oppressed group may contain prejudices, errors, or harmful practices. No social

origin makes a claim immune to criticism. The ecology of knowledges must combine recognition, confrontation of consequences, protection of rights, and public review.

The second tension involves the category of the South. Rosa (2014) demonstrates that "theories of the South" bring together different projects competing for legitimacy. If the category is used in a binary manner, it may homogenize complex societies and erase internal colonialisms. The South should function as a historical and political orientation, not as a fixed geographical identity or an automatic seal of authenticity.

The third difficulty is operational. Concepts such as intercultural translation and the craftsmanship of practices require time, trust, resources, and institutions willing to share decision-making. Without clear procedures, participation may become symbolic. Researchers need to document how voices were incorporated, who made decisions, which disagreements remained, and who benefited from the work.

The fourth limitation concerns the dialogue with ontology. Giri (2021) argues that epistemological alternatives need to deepen ontological and participatory dimensions. Critical realism offers a useful contribution: experiences and discourses are fundamental, but material structures and causal powers also condition life. This approach prevents the critique of universalism from becoming discursive relativism.

Finally, there is the risk of superficial institutionalization. Universities may incorporate terms such as diversity, decoloniality, or ecology of knowledges without changing curricula, authorship, funding, and assessment. Epistemic justice is not measured by the vocabulary of the project, but by observable changes in relations of credibility, participation, and the distribution of the benefits of knowledge.

Implications for Education

Educational Research

Educational research guided by epistemic justice begins before data collection. The research problem should be discussed with the affected subjects, especially when the investigation addresses inequalities, territories, or collective forms of knowledge. This does not mean that all research must be participatory, but it requires justification of who defined the research question, how the categories were constructed, and which interests guide the analysis.

During the production of evidence, triangulation is recommended: quantitative data dimension patterns; interviews, observations, and narratives reveal experiences; documents and institutional analysis demonstrate rules; and the participation of subjects makes it possible to confront interpretations. Feedback should not be a final ceremony. It can function as an analytical moment in which participants challenge, qualify, or expand the results.

Ethics goes beyond the consent form. It includes the responsible use of language, the protection of sensitive knowledge, negotiation of authorship, social return, and transparency regarding limitations. Research involving Indigenous peoples, traditional communities, or social movements must respect collective forms of decision-making and recognize that not all knowledge should be published or converted into academic property.

Curriculum and Pedagogical Practice

In the curriculum, the central issue is not to add a thematic week on diversity, but to revise the architecture of knowledge. Which authors appear as founders? Which territories provide only examples? Which languages and experiences are considered capable of producing concepts? Curricular decolonization expands references and, above all, modifies the questions through which content is organized.

The ecology of knowledges can guide projects that relate science, memory, territory, art, and technology. In environmental education, for example, data on water and soil can engage in dialogue with community history, agricultural practices, territorial conflicts, and local knowledge. The teacher retains the responsibility for working with scientific concepts and assessing evidence, while also making explicit their limits, controversies, and social consequences.

Critical interculturality distinguishes dialogue from assimilation. A practice is not intercultural when it merely translates community knowledge into academic categories and discards what does not fit within them. Translation should be reciprocal and preserve relevant differences. In certain situations, there will be conflict between forms of knowledge; the objective is not to produce artificial consensus, but to create conditions for argumentation, learning, and responsible decision-making.

Assessment and Teacher Education

Assessment is a privileged field of epistemic justice because it defines what counts as learning. Tests and rubrics are useful, but they may render processes, languages, and strategies invisible. A plural assessment combines evidence: performance, production, observation, argumentation, self-assessment, and the ability to apply knowledge. Plurality does not mean the absence of criteria; it means explicit, diversified criteria that are coherent with the objectives.

In teacher education, teachers should be recognized as producers of pedagogical knowledge. Programs designed solely by external experts tend to disregard actual working conditions. Learning communities, research into one's own practice, and pedagogical documentation make it possible to relate theory, evidence, and experience without transforming experience into untouchable opinion.

Change requires institutional support. Time for planning, access to libraries and databases, infrastructure, responsible autonomy, and spaces for collective decision-making are material conditions for epistemic justice. Holding teachers

individually responsible for decolonizing the curriculum, without changing policies and structures, reproduces the logic that attributes systemic problems to isolated subjects.

Table 4 – Matrix of application to research and educational practice.

Field	Guiding Questions	Coherent Procedures
Curriculum	Which forms of knowledge appear as universal? Who is absent?	Mapping of authors and perspectives; dialogue with diverse histories, cultures, territories, and sciences
Assessment	What does the instrument measure? Which forms of learning remain invisible?	Triangulation among indicators, productions, observations, self-assessment, and formative feedback
Research	Who formulates the problem, interprets the data, and receives the benefits?	Procedural consent, co-production, reflexivity, feedback, and negotiated authorship
Teacher Education	Are teachers recipients of techniques or producers of knowledge?	Research into practice, learning communities, pedagogical documentation, and comparison of evidence
School-Community Relationship	Is the community invited only to confirm decisions that have already been made?	Territorial listening, intergenerational projects, deliberative participation, and translation across languages
Science Education and Interculturality	How can scientific rigor, the history of science, and local knowledge be articulated without relativism?	Socioscientific issues, analysis of controversies, critical experimentation, and ecology of knowledges

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the analyzed framework.

The discussion presented in Table 4 translates the epistemological debate into concrete possibilities for research and pedagogical work. The matrix indicates that rigor is not limited to technical control: it also involves contextualizing indicators, listening to subjects, analyzing historical conditions, and socially returning the knowledge produced. For teachers and researchers, this implies planning practices in which scientific content is taught in depth and, at the same time, related to students' experiences, territories, and lived

contradictions. The table does not provide a universal recipe; it functions as guidance for situated decisions, open to continuous assessment and committed to transforming the conditions that produce exclusion.

Final Considerations

The analysis carried out reaffirms that no paradigm, in isolation, is capable of encompassing the complexity of education. As teachers, we encounter situations daily that require different ways of knowing: indicators help measure inequalities; narratives reveal meanings and trajectories; and the analysis of structures makes it possible to understand why certain problems persist. Scientific coherence, therefore, does not depend on strict adherence to a single method, but on the transparent relationship among question, reality, evidence, interpretation, and social responsibility.

However, combining methods is not enough if the structure that determines which people can speak and which forms of knowledge deserve recognition remains untouched. Marxist critique helps us understand that education is embedded in a society marked by class conflicts and by the unequal distribution of the material conditions of existence (Marx; Engels, 2007). This means that school difficulties cannot be attributed solely to individual effort, as if students and communities arrived at school under equal conditions. Pedagogical work needs to recognize these determinations without turning subjects into prisoners of their social origins.

It is at this point that Paulo Freire offers a profoundly human orientation. Teaching is not transferring content or speaking on behalf of those who have been historically silenced. It is creating conditions for learners to critically understand their reality, appropriate systematized knowledge, and recognize their capacity to intervene in the world (Freire, 1987, 1996). Teaching authority remains necessary, but it ceases to be authoritarianism: it expresses responsibility, listening, rigor, commitment, and openness to dialogue.

The Epistemologies of the South broaden this perspective by demonstrating that there can be no lasting social justice without cognitive justice. Schools can teach science, arts, philosophy, and literature without disqualifying family memories, knowledge derived from work, local cultures, and community experiences. This is not a matter of romanticizing all popular knowledge or relativizing science. It is a matter of establishing a demanding dialogue in which different forms of knowledge are assessed according to their evidence, purposes, consequences, limitations, and capacity to protect life and expand rights (Santos, 2014, 2018; Amaro, 2023).

In teaching and research practice, this commitment implies making the assumptions underlying methods explicit; seeking absences in the curriculum, references, and decision-making spaces; articulating indicators, narratives, and structural analyses; involving subjects, whenever possible, in the interpretation and feedback of research; and ensuring institutional conditions for plural authorship and continuing education. These actions do not constitute a recipe, but rather an ethical-political horizon that must be recreated in each context.

Finally, an epistemologically democratic education neither reduces people to numbers nor transforms communities into silent sources of data. It measures without dehumanizing, listens without romanticizing, explains without naturalizing inequalities, and engages in dialogue without abandoning criteria. As educators, we understand that researching and teaching are ways of taking a position in relation to the world — positions that, as Freire (1996) teaches us, cannot be neutral. Our choice is for public education that socializes knowledge, confronts oppression, and recognizes students, teachers, and communities as historical subjects capable of understanding and transforming reality. This is the progressive, Freirean, and emancipatory meaning that brings the Epistemologies of the South closer to the struggle for educational justice in Latin America.

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