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Voices in dialogue: Exploring truth and post-truth in school education

Voces en diálogo: Explorando la verdad y la posverdad en la educación escolar

*“The first casualty of war is truth.”
A phrase mistakenly attributed to Aeschylus
(5th century BCE).*

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Abstract

This reflective article analyzes a pedagogical experience aimed at addressing truth and

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post-truth in the school context, with post-truth understood as the circulation of discourses that prioritize emotion, group belonging, or virality over the verification of information. **Objective.** To reflect on the potential of critical literacy for the construction of criteria regarding truth and post-truth in the classroom. **Methodology.** This study was conducted from a qualitative perspective, employing a narrative research design. This approach allowed for an in-depth understanding of the meanings constructed by participants in relation to the pedagogical experience “*Superheroes of Truth*”, conceived as an educational proposal mediated by dialogue and the collective, critical construction

of truth. **Results.** The “*Superheroes of Truth*” pedagogical experience shows that students’ understanding of truth and post-truth was configured as a collective process, mediated by dialogue and the exchange of experiences. Through dialogical spaces, participants recognized that both concepts do not exist as fixed or finalized content, but rather as social constructions that emerge from the convergence of multiple perspectives and viewpoints. **Conclusions.** Addressing truth and post-truth in the school context requires a sustained pedagogical culture of dialogue and verification, in which critical literacy is consolidated as a daily practice for reading the world and strengthening school coexistence.

Keywords

Critical Literacy, Truth, Post-Truth, Argumentation, dialogic Teaching

Introduction

Truth and post-truth have become central categories for understanding contemporary transformations in the production, circulation, and validation of knowledge (Vásconez, 2026). This understanding of truth as a social construction anchored in evidence, critical reasoning, and consensus within educational and scientific communities aligns with social epistemology, which emphasizes communal rationality in the acceptance of empirically successful theories and the shared evaluation of arguments and evidence (Solomon, 2001). In contrast, post-truth is not merely reducible to lies or isolated misinformation; rather, it constitutes a structural social phenomenon that shapes how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and legitimized, privileging emotions, personal beliefs, and the symbolic authority of certain voices over verifiable facts (McCaw et al., 2023). These dynamics emerge when emotions and beliefs carry greater social weight than verifiable facts,

directly influencing the circulation of information and the legitimacy of knowledge sources.

From this perspective, problematizing truth and post-truth in the school context necessitates a reconsideration of the role of language and dialogue in the development of critical thinking. Critical and media literacy become essential for students to confront phenomena such as misinformation and emotionally charged narratives characteristic of post-truth, fostering reflective capacities that go beyond mere content reproduction. In this regard, integrating educational practices centered on critical language analysis and dialogic argumentation emerges as a key component for strengthening critical thinking in the classroom (Rodríguez, 2021).

Research indicates that in environments permeated by misinformation, statements tend to gain legitimacy through rapid circulation, peer influence, symbolic authority, or their capacity to elicit intense emotional responses, rather than through the robustness of their arguments or sources (Nygren et al., 2023). This dynamic undermines deliberative practices in the classroom, as questioning a particular claim may be interpreted as a personal attack, and modifying one’s stance as a loss of status, thereby affecting both learning outcomes and school coexistence

In this regard, discussing truth and post-truth in education involves recognizing that the issue does not lie solely in the presence of erroneous information, but in the fragility of the criteria with which students and teachers evaluate what deserves to be believed, shared, and publicly defended. It is important to note that in the school context, there is a challenge in sustaining spaces of dialogue where argumentation, attentive listening, and critical review of one’s own ideas are legitimate and protected practices. In this sense, the development of critical thinking cannot

be separated from a pedagogy of dialogue that allows for dissent without exclusion and the construction of knowledge without resorting to symbolic imposition (Mercer & Littleton, 2023).

Moreover, studies on critical literacy argue that this form of active reading emphasizes the relationship between language, power, and social representation, encouraging readers to identify and challenge the ideological structures that texts reproduce or maintain (Creely, 2025). Reading, therefore, is not understood as an isolated act but as a social practice situated within specific cultural, political, and educational contexts.

Educational research emphasizes that reading comprehension and critical literacy extend beyond mere decoding. They incorporate the reader's prior knowledge, experiences, beliefs, values, and social positioning as fundamental components of the interpretive process (Mínguez, 2024). Reading involves negotiating and dialoguing between what the text conveys and what the reader already knows and experiences, enabling interpretations that go beyond the literal to address ideological and social dimensions. This challenge is intensified in the digital ecosystem, characterized by an overabundance of information, circulation of decontextualized content, and the prevalence of polarized discourses. International organizations have highlighted that media and information literacy, along with the promotion of information integrity, must be treated as structural components of educational systems rather than as isolated or complementary interventions (UNESCO, 2023). Furthermore, studies indicate that short-term interventions or those focused solely on fact-checking have limited effects if they are not embedded within a school culture that values argumentation, ethical reflection, and discursive responsibility (Nygren et al., 2023).

From this perspective, *Superheroes of Truth* emerges as a pedagogical experience designed

to shift the traditional classroom question of "Who is right?" toward a more formative and reflective inquiry: "How do we know what we know, and how can we verify it without causing harm?" Through symbolic mediations and dialogic practices, the educational proposal aimed to cultivate habits of critical literacy, such as distinguishing facts from opinions, tracing sources, contrasting multiple versions, and reflecting on the social impact of language. In this sense, the study seeks to reflect on the potential of critical literacy for constructing criteria regarding truth and post-truth within the classroom

Truth and Post-Truth as Social Constructions: Theoretical Contributions for the School Context

From this theoretical framework, the pedagogical experience *Superheroes of Truth* is understood not as an isolated strategy, but as a situated response to the post-truth conditions that permeate school life. The educational proposal starts from the recognition that emotionality, virality, and perceived authority central features of truth and post-truth already operate in the classroom prior to any teaching intervention. Rather than attempting to neutralize or ignore these dynamics, they are used as a starting point to problematize how credibility is constructed and how information circulates among students, aligning with approaches that emphasize the need to work with the real discourses shaping students' everyday experiences (Mohammed et al., 2024; McCaw et al., 2023).

The use of the superheroes metaphors serves as a pedagogical device that reframes potentially conflictive emotional exchanges into opportunities for reflective learning. Through the representation of competencies such as critical questioning, source evaluation, corroboration of information, and openness to error, the proposal recontextualizes critical literacy as a set of concrete and socially situated practices for students. This orientation corresponds with

evidence showing that effective responses to misinformation in schools depend on cultivating learners who participate directly in the interpretation and validation of knowledge, rather than limiting themselves to the passive acceptance of certified information (McGrew, 2024). Consequently, the teacher is positioned not as a transmitter of truths but as a guide who accompanies students in examining communicative claims, recognizing ideological tendencies, and considering the broader social implications of the information they exchange.

At the same time, the educational experience interrogates the notion of authority in discourse. By making visible the reasons why certain narratives acquire persuasive force whether linked to emotional resonance, rapid dissemination through digital networks, or the symbolic power of those who articulate them. *Superheroes of Truth* exposes the collective processes through which credibility is socially constructed. Such reflection is crucial for dismantling the assumption that frequency of circulation or popularity guarantees epistemic reliability.

Within this perspective, the interplay between truth, post-truth, and critical literacy is articulated through the centrality of dialogue as a formative dimension of learning. The core question guiding the experience embodies an ethical stance toward critical reasoning: verification is understood not only as an intellectual procedure but also as a social and relational commitment (Alexander, 2023). In this regard, *Superheroes of Truth* is consistent with pedagogical models that link critical interpretation of reality with the capacity to coexist, to sustain disagreement without marginalization, and to revise personal beliefs while preserving communal relationships. Thus, the initiative demonstrates that education concerning truth and post-truth in school settings constitutes not merely the transmission of

information, but the cultivation of democratic and reflective subjectivities

Methodology

The *Superheroes of Truth* experience was implemented as three pedagogical sessions integrated into a broader process aimed at enhancing reading skills with sixth-grade students, involving a group of 40 students from a public school in Bogotá, Colombia. This urban school context is embedded in communicative practices influenced by digital media, where emotional narratives, multiple versions, and socially constructed meanings circulate beyond the classroom and necessarily impact learning processes. Education cannot be conceived in isolation from these realities; rather, it must create spaces for dialogue that connect everyday discourses with systematic practices of reading, argumentation, and critical reflection (Aguiar, 2024).

The sessions were guided by a critical literacy approach, assuming that the development of critical thinking requires more than technical reading skills. It demands an understanding of language as a social practice that articulates experiences, emotions, and relationships with students' worldviews. From this perspective, traditional educational discourses that prioritize vertical content transmission what Freire termed "banking education" reinforce epistemic passivity, where students consume information without relating it to their lived experiences (Freire, 2005). In contrast, pedagogy seeks to transform students into active agents of their own learning, capable of examining, questioning, and co-constructing meaning alongside their peers and teachers.

The following figure presents the organization of the three sessions of the *Superheroes of Truth* pedagogical experience, designed to foster critical reading through reflection on truth and post-truth. Using continuous and discontinuous texts, debate dynamics, and literary mediation,

the activities aim for students to understand truth and post-truth not merely as objective facts, but as relational constructions shaped by emotions, contexts, and social relationships.

Table 1. Pedagogical Proposal: *Superheroes of Truth*

Sessions	Activity	Reading and Critical Thinking Competencies (Truth / Post-Truth)
Session 1	Viewing a video of the Final Report of the Truth Commission followed by a guided discussion on telling the truth, remaining silent, or hiding it.	Participants interpret audiovisual texts by recognizing intentions, voices, and emotions. Truth is understood as a situated relational and social construction, distinguishing facts, opinions, and experiences, forming the basis for critical reading in the face of post-truth discourses.
Session 2	True-or-false game with controversial statements, followed by argumentation based on personal and family experiences.	Participants share opinions about the effects of true and false statements in real contexts. Critical thinking develops by identifying tensions between what is morally desirable and what is socially practiced, recognizing how post-truth is sustained through emotions and convenience.
Session 3	Mediated reading of the story <i>A Tree with Many Truths</i> by Beatriz Eugenia Vallejo. Collective construction of a “tree of truths” based on personal experiences.	Participants construct metaphors and multiple interpretations of the literary text. The plurality of voices allows understanding truths without relativizing facts, strengthening the ability to distinguish between diverse perspectives, which enriches dialogue and multiple interpretations of a single event

Table 1. Pedagogical Experience “*Superheroes of Truth*”: Sessions, Activities, and Critical Reading Competencies (Truth/Post-Truth). Source: Authors’ own elaboration.

The pedagogical experience was conducted in three stages that fostered spaces for dialogue and reflection on truth and post-truth. To preserve student anonymity, their contributions were recorded using codes (P1, P2, P3, etc.).

In Session 1, upon viewing the first video of the Truth Commission Report, participants shared how to interpret truth as situated and complex, beyond isolated facts. Participant P4 stated, “*Truth hurts, but if we do not face it, we cannot learn from it,*” which aligns with research emphasizing the need to strengthen critical literacy in relation to truth and post-truth, understood as a phenomenon in which emotions

and subjective beliefs can eclipse empirical evidence (Hajisoteriou, 2024). Participants distinguished between objective facts, subjective opinions, and personal experiences, facilitating the understanding of truth and post-truth as a social construction—a notion also discussed in studies on education in truth and post-truth contexts (Chinn et al., 2020). This dialogue enabled participants to articulate their critical perspectives and recognize that interpreting messages requires attention to communicative intentions and social contexts.

During Session 2, the true/false game prompted lively reflections on how controversial

statements impact personal beliefs. Participant P5 remarked, *"We believe something is true when we feel it, not because we have verified it,"* highlighting the tension between emotion and evidence. This experience aligns with research indicating that students face real challenges in resisting misinformation without well-developed critical literacy skills (Mudassir et al., 2025). Participants' interventions demonstrated that distinguishing between what "feels true" and what is supported by evidence is both a cognitive and social skill that is pedagogically constructed. In this way, they recognized that truth and post-truth circulate not only through content itself, but also through the emotions and convictions that sustain it within social groups.

Finally, in Session 3, the mediated reading of the story *A Tree with Many Truths* allowed students to express multiple perspectives as part of the sense-making process. While collectively constructing the "tree of truths," participant P6 stated, *"My truth does not take away from others, but together they help us see the bigger picture,"* reflecting an understanding of the epistemological plurality that literature can foster. Recent studies emphasize that media and critical literacy are crucial in contemporary education to confront fragmented and emotionally charged discourses (Hajisoteriou, 2024; Chinn et al., 2020). The session demonstrated how the diversity of voices in the classroom contributes to a more complex understanding of truth, strengthening students' abilities to evaluate, compare, and engage with different perspectives without falling into relativism.

Results

Participants' understanding of truth and post-truth was shaped by their personal experiences, dialogical interactions, and the pedagogical activities developed in the *Superheroes of Truth* proposal. The participants' voices indicate that truth is not understood solely as a set of objective facts, but as a practice deeply intertwined

with emotions, relationships, and social consequences. Participant P1 stated, *"Telling the truth makes you feel at peace,"* associating truth with personal trust, while P2 remarked, *"When you hide something, more problems come later,"* highlighting the conflicts that arise from concealing information. These statements reveal that truth and post-truth are experienced as situated phenomena, closely linked to daily life and interpersonal relationships.

Participants frequently expressed tensions between what they consider morally right and what they actually practice. Participants P7 and P9 indicated that lying can be a way to avoid punishment or protect affective relationships, demonstrating that their decisions are mediated by fear and the need for acceptance. Participant P4 noted, *"You know telling the truth is best, but sometimes you can't because it's scary,"* suggesting that truth and post-truth are not only about misinformation, but also about the fragility of the criteria used to evaluate what is said, believed, and shared. In this sense, students recognized that many beliefs are sustained more by emotion and perceived authority than by verification of facts.

The experience also allowed participants to acknowledge multiple perspectives on the same situation without relativizing the facts. Students reported that listening to other versions helped them better understand events and question their own certainties. Participant P3 stated, *"My truth is not the only one, but it's not a lie either,"* while P4 emphasized, *"When I listen to others, I understand better what happened."* These voices reflect a more complex understanding of truth as a collective and dialogical construction, in which the diversity of perspectives enriches the interpretation of reality.

Overall, the results show that truth and post-truth are constructed in relation to experience, dialogue, and school coexistence. Participants not only reflected on what is true and false, but also

recognized the importance of making responsible decisions in their everyday relationships. The creation of safe spaces for justification, contrast, and rectification strengthened argumentation and respect for others' voices, consolidating dialogue as a formative condition rather than merely a methodological strategy.

Finally, the *Superheroes of Truth* pedagogical experience offered a pedagogical understanding of truth and post-truth as a relational and formative challenge. The findings indicate that critical thinking about information is not acquired spontaneously, but through sustained practices of collective analysis and shared reflection. Thus, the proposal demonstrated that educating about truth and post-truth involves not only teaching students to distinguish between correct and false information, but also guiding them in the construction of ethical, emotional, and social criteria to interpret the world and engage in coexistence across differences.

Conclusions

The *Superheroes of Truth* pedagogical experience allows us to conclude that fostering truth and critical thinking requires a profound reconsideration of the role of dialogue in teaching practice. It is not enough to merely open spaces for participation; it is essential to teach students how to engage in dialogue, justify their own ideas, listen to differing arguments, and recognize the possibility of revising their positions. These practices require intentional pedagogical mediation to prevent them from becoming confrontations or reproductions of discursive hierarchies that silence certain voices.

Furthermore, the results confirm that critical literacy constitutes a relevant pathway for addressing the challenges of post-truth in the school context, as it integrates reading, context, and ethical responsibility. Critical reading does not imply distrusting everything, but rather learning to situate statements, recognize their

effects, and assume the impact that words have on collective life. In this sense, the proposal demonstrates that working with literary texts and symbolic narratives fosters a more complex understanding of truth as a social and relational construction.

Among the main achievements of the proposal is the ability to integrate reading, dialogue, play, and emotional expression to approach a complex topic without oversimplifying it or reducing it to a moralizing perspective. The superhero metaphor functioned as an effective pedagogical mediation to reframe truth and post-truth as a collective and responsible practice, promoting active participation and reflective engagement among students. In this way, the experience demonstrates that it is possible to create pedagogical scenarios where cognitive, emotional, and ethical dimensions of learning are integrated.

However, it is also necessary to acknowledge the limitations of the experience. As an intervention embedded within a broader process, its effects cannot be considered definitive or generalizable. Developing skills in information verification and critical thinking requires continuity and a school culture that reinforces these competencies across diverse spaces and moments.

Finally, as a forward-looking perspective, this article emphasizes the need to advance toward a sustained school culture of dialogue and verification, in which practices such as source cross-checking, reasoned argumentation, and correction are not isolated events but everyday habits. This entails training teachers, adjusting curricula, and acknowledging that educating in times of post-truth requires time, care, and institutional coherence. Within this framework, schools can be consolidated as spaces where truth is neither imposed nor relativized, but collectively constructed through respectful dialogue and a commitment to understanding the world without causing harm. In this way,

pedagogical experiences such as *Superheroes of Truth* demonstrate that it is possible to cultivate critical readers and ethical agents capable of responsibly navigating the complexity of the present.

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