

# Educational revolution with decentralization: four days along the river Napo

The democratic sense of decentralization is deeply associated to social and pedagogic-participatory rationale over purely technocratic and desk review decisions in its implementation. For decentralization to produce a significant improvement in the quality of education and an increase in the levels of equity in the system, this article proposed that decentralization should be implement under important processes of consultation with different educational, political and social actors, and adopt a clear position in the fight against corruption.

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“ 93 teachers had to take four days trip along the river Napo in order to start the 2014 school year in Torres Causana, one of the 13 districts of the province of Maynas, in Loreto region. The regional director, Jair Mendoza Freitas, welcomed and shook hands with each one of the teachers, who traveled

to Torres Causana, river Napo, Sargento Lores y Pantoja, with their families. The administrator and the chief of provision of the Regional Direction of Education of Loreto were also present. The teachers traveled with the coordinator of the Napo network, Orlando Capuena Amasifuén. Jair Mendoza Freitas reported that there would be two more trips to the district of Yaquerana, in the river Yavarí, and another to the Napo district” (Ministry of Education 2014).

Did that happen in other departments? Was the director present? It would have been better to have President



Ollanta Humala, the regional president and the Minister for education is that important.

The teachers - some of them are one-teacher school principals – travel with their families; the coordinator of the network (pedagogic view) accompanies them; the regional director greets the teachers and their families; the administrator and the chief of provision of the Regional Direction of Education (DRE) are also there. Decentralized management is expressed, with affection and recognition.

They go to schools in the native and Andean communities, to the villages of settlers. They are going to build a new world, friendlier, as the one described by Gastón Acurio: “[...] Peru is a multicultural, multiracial, mega bio diverse country, where we can progress without limits as long as we embrace and celebrate our differences”. Where people live “[...] with their ancestral worldview, an environment they have looked after through centuries, their right to be happy as they understand happiness”. To promote “[...] tolerance among us, mutual confidence to embrace, grow together, to build a truth that bonds us forever, to finally sing to life and to history: we are free, let us always be.” (Acurio, 2014)

So the girls in “The schools of silence” who live in “[...] Amazonian, Andean communities and the shanty town

of Ventanilla [...] can have a common dream and face similar barriers to meet that dream”. So these girls can express that they want to “become professionals”, that they assume, at such young age, “the caring of their little brothers and domestic work”; that they also provide to the “family economy”; and that they suffer discrimination of gender and violence in their houses and schools everyday”. So they can tell us they have to endure “serious impacts such as school dropout, repetition, low achievements and early motherhood as a result of this situation”. (La República, 2014)

Teachers know - the traveler Rafo León discovers - the stories of the peoples, about their biodiversity, their meals, their legends, their economy, etc.; and yet we fail in the PISA test.

To make these dreams and hopes come true, with all their richness, we need a decentralized management that focus on boys and girls education achievements.

### DECENTRALIZED MANAGEMENT

It is mainly managing and financing education by having public ethics, equity, quality and efficiency, where the local education management units (UGEL) focus on administration, while strengthening schools and education networks so UGEL assume higher management responsibilities and obtain better results.

It means that schools make the pedagogic decisions, select their staff and manage budgets, as indicated in the National Education Project (PEN) and in the Law of Education.

Financing should be oriented to close the gaps (for example, rural - urban, Andean and Amazonian - the coast); to have students get better learning achievements; to guarantee the relevance of education so that it meets the needs of local and regional development, as well as the needs of students (CNE, 2010).

The Ministry of Education (MINEDU) should manage national policies along with the regions. The National System of Evaluation, Accreditation and Certification of Quality Education (SINEACE) should evaluate the learning, whereas the National Education Council (CNE) should participate in the formulation, coordination, monitoring and evaluation of medium and long term policies according to the National Education Project (PEN). This will allow MINEDU to disengage from the programs and strengthen the decentralization of the education system management, and to transfer more attributions and capabilities to schools (EFA National Plan 2005-2015).

Not only should regional and local governments apply the Ministry's norms but also manage their own policies in their territories and invest in their children and teachers to obtain education achievements. When these criteria are applied, better results are obtained:

“ For example, in the latest evaluation, 64% of Moquegua students reached satisfactory results in Reading Comprehension while the national average was merely 33%. And in Mathematics, the distance comparing to national average is even higher: 43% versus 17%, almost three times more.

Moquegua went from 28% of students with satisfactory performance in Reading Comprehension in 2007 to 64% in 2013, making a big leap in six years; and in Mathematics, it went from 13% in 2007 to 43% last year.

What did Moquegua do? They invested 30% of their local budget to education, basically in infrastructure, furniture and equipment. They increased 10 more school days a year eliminating regional and local traditional holidays. They expanded the national teacher follow-up program with their own resources, made important

alliances with the private sector, and, basically, they managed their resources well.

But Amazonas, which does not have canon or big resources, has increased the performance of their students in Mathematics as well, becoming third in the national ranking, surpassing even Arequipa and Lima Metropolitana. It rose 11 points between 2012 and 2013 and reached 24% of satisfactory performance. How did they do it? With a five component plan: training and pedagogical updating in Mathematics and Reading Comprehension; providing educational material; monitoring and pedagogic following-up; organization and operation of education networks; support of private sector and sensitization of parents (*El Comercio*).

Goals are achieved when decentralized management tools are organized appropriately: follow-up, strengthen education networks, investment in education (teachers and students, infrastructure and equipment).

In pedagogic terms, networks respond more effectively to our reality - marked by geographic, social and cultural diversity. They are more dynamic in training and updating teachers (for example, in Chacayan, Tlacayan, Goyllarisquiza, province of Alcides Carrión, Cerro de Pasco).

Different experiences show that regions are working towards those goals, as the creation of the UGEL in River Tambo, Pichanaqui, Pangoa in Junín in 2009 demonstrates. This also happens in Puerto Bermúdez, Cerro de Pasco, as part of the Municipality's proposal. They follow decentralizing criteria for shortening distances in districts of great geographic extension and several basins, taking into account interculturality and the need promote intercultural bilingual education (IBE) schools, in short, they take good care of teachers and students. These UGEL offices work despite the Ministry of Economy, which denies the budget for the job posts.

MINEDU understood the utility of this strategy and this year, educational materials for the beginning of the school year were distributed in partnership with Río Tambo UGEL and the Ministry's promoters. However, experience shows that both instruments should be promoted: networks and creation of UGEL, as the piece of news above demonstrates: the coordinator accompanies teachers in the four days travel and arrives to the schools

with them. That is why training network coordinators means ensuring replication in the schools. UGEL offices must work in administration leaving pedagogical work mainly in the hands of networks and schools - that is what the norms say. And we add: practical experience shows that network coordinators relate with district municipalities and receive materials from them in order to do their job.

On the other side, there are no functions associated to achieving quality of learning. The results of the Census Evaluation of Students (ECE) are not discussed – such is the case of Junín (reverse in Mathematics) - neither by the Regional Government, nor the DRE Junín, nor UGEL, nor civil society, nor the media. The perspective of education achievement in students is lost (National Education Project).

It is about setting goals to make quality education a reality, especially in places where there are poor learning results, repetition, dropout and over-age rates, in rural areas, distance places. And it is about addressing Regional Education Directorate (DRE), UGEL, network coordinators, and above all, schools, as responsible for this task.

However, the Ministry of Education takes the wrong way by prioritizing and improving 218 UGEL in the whole country, and providing significant investment. It prioritizes the slowness of UGEL administration when there is the agility of the networks that coordinate with schools and focus on teaching. The greater weight of change resides in giving schools decision-making powers and investing in them (Chirinos, 2011).

And from schools, it is about returning to important actions such as the Plan Lector (Reading Campaign) and promoting libraries; to incorporate fathers, mothers and citizenship in our children reading abilities. It is an inspiring and encouraging spectacle watching children reading with their parents in the plazas, something that should not be just part of the past.

### **CORRUPTION AND DECENTRALIZATION**

However, corruption conspires against managing education for learning achievements. It is expressed in corrupt contracts, illegal qualification arrangements,

bribes for reaching positions, documents forgery, sexual blackmail, all actions that affect education resources, generate discouragement and corrode commitment with a quality education management.

The Ombudsman's office reported that during the period 2002-2003, the education sector occupied the second place in the ranking of the institutions with the most complaints; in 200 and 2004 it was the first place, and in the period 2004-2005 it was among the 10 institutions with the most complaints (CNE, 2007: 100).

The old practices have corroded and corrode institutionality; letting corruption and patrimonial management of State goods take over: deviation of payroll funds (Junín 2009). Coordination between the Strategic Program for Learning Achievements (PELA) and the National Commission for Development and Life Without Drugs (DEVIDA) are imposed by the ruling party. There has been a case of sexual blackmail with a mother in the "Mariátegui" school in Huancayo (20 March of 2014) and the principal is in prison; a UGEL director is caught receiving a 5000 soles bribe in Huancayo (2012); a regional director takes office despite having a sanction (Junín 2012). There is no prevention and surveillance exercised by society civil in this matter.

### **THE ECONOMY AND THE DECENTRALIZATION**

Investing in students is a basic component for improving learning. However, equity in budget distribution by region is nonexistent. For example, the allocation per student in Moquegua (the highest) is 2.3 times higher than in Cusco (the lowest). However, Cusco has nine times more enrollment than Moquegua, according to the National Education Project.

If we compare public spending by student in 2011 and 2012 in all the regions and in all the levels, Moquegua leads the *ranking*: Preschool, from S/.2,853 to S/.3,579; Primary S/.3,011 to S/.3,472, and Secondary S/.3,489 to S/.3,875. In Lambayeque, the region that spends the least money per student, Preschool, S/.1,112 to S/.1,029; Primary S/.1,302 to S/.1,330, and Secondary S/.1,603 to S/.2,100<sup>1</sup>. There is a correlation between investing

<sup>1</sup> However, it is worth noting that this indicator should be read considering negative growth rates in enrollment (CNE, 2013).

and learning achievement: Moquegua invests more and obtained the best results in Reading and Mathematics.

## TEACHERS AND DECENTRALIZATION

Were teachers asked what they think about DRE and UGEL offices? What do they say about giving schools managing powers (and to principals, consequently)? No. That exercise has not been made, and it is because teachers' opinions are not taking into consideration, they are seen as mere applicators or implementers of norms. That also happens when it comes to teachers' rights. Why do teachers know a lot about laws? Because their rights are frequently violated and they have to defend them. This is the case of the teachers of Pariahuanca, province of Huancayo, Junín, who have not been paid for working at the Valle del Río Apurímac, Ene y Mantaro (VRAEM). It is important to bear in mind that decentralization is not possible without the participation of teachers. So let's start asking them.

## DECENTRALIZATION, EDUCATION PROJECTS AND REGIONAL CURRICULA

The existence of regional education projects and the efforts for preparing curriculum designs show the importance of participation and dialogue, regional debate about education topics and the necessary consensus on regional education priorities. However, application has difficulties because the regional ruler considers it an obligation but then changes priorities – for example, by politicizing the sector - or because the following government prepares another document according to their priorities.

The Education sector is considered a political spoil by the ruling party and is used to distribute political positions, sometimes violating the law. That explains high rotation of regional and UGEL directors (Huancavelica case).

## CIVIL SOCIETY AND DECENTRALIZATION: PARENTS ASSOCIATION, COPARE, COPALE, CONEI

Citizen participation is a fundamental axis to ensure efficiency, transparency and democratization of the management of education; however, it is a new practice that should be constructed through the time and that can fail if positions are used politically, or

not renewed periodically (for example, in the Parents Association - APAFA), public organisms do not support and promote them, and the civil society does not address education issues. Some of this happens with the annual census evaluation of MINEDU which is not part of the discussion of these agencies, nor cases of corruption. This shows their weakness regarding decentralization (CNE, 2013).

Concerning decentralization, the CNE do follow up the Ministry's policies but not regional or teachers policies. In that sense, it is partial. It follows up what the Ministry does but little of what is needed to be done. The idea of decentralizing through schools and education networks, while having UGEL in charge of administrative matters is not there anymore. It is clear that the Ministry persists on prioritizing these offices leaving schools and networks behind. In the ethics matter, it does not make a detailed evaluation region by region or in the Ministry itself. 

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