

Curricular Policies and Teaching Prominence

Let us have an educational uprising

The article examines the idea of the teacher as a builder of the curriculum. It poses the need for the teaching profession to consolidate their autonomy in order to become representatives of their communities and policy decision-makers. For the author, a sustainable change in education will be possible with the democratic construction of the curricular reform.

Política curricular y protagonismo docente. Hagamos una rebelión pedagógica

El artículo trata de desarrollar el concepto del docente como constructor del currículo. Plantea la necesidad de que el magisterio consolide su autonomía con el fin de convertirse en interlocutor de sus comunidades y los decisores de política. Para el autor, un cambio sostenible en la educación será posible a partir de la construcción democrática de la reforma curricular.

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What are the foundations of the curriculum? This is the question Shirley Grundy made in her native Australia during the 1980s, tired of the constant repetition of the same topics of discussion focusing on how to make educational intentions operational and achieve a uniform educational performance within the school population. The issue of what defines a curricular policy, what type of object the curriculum is, what its nature is—in short, what are the foundations for the existence of the—or rather a—curriculum were absent, unsolved questions. There was some implicit, monotonous voice which took these questions for granted—the whats, the whys, and the what fors were obvious, and the debate should be limited to the criteria, methods, and techniques of curricular effectiveness.

BETWEEN HYDROGEN AND FOOTBALL

In her research, she points out that “the question ‘What is curriculum?’ is, thus, more like the question ‘What is football?’ than ‘What is hydrogen?’ [...] Hydrogen is the same whether it is found in London or Sydney, but football isn’t” (Grundy, 1998), because it is not about a universal object or conception, a “thing” of independent existence to human reality, a “laws” of nature. For Grundy, “the curriculum is not a concept but rather a social construct.” Therefore, we should not address the curriculum as if it were an abstraction, an *eidos*, because “no curriculum exists a priori—and accordingly— [...] in order to do more than random speculations around the curriculum of any institution, we need to know not the nature of the curriculum *per se*, but rather the context of the institution.” (Grundy, 1998)

For Grundy, we should not be looking for the curriculum in the bookcases of the teacher, but rather in the interactions of the different individuals of school life. It is only there where the reality of the curriculum takes place. Therefore, it is a mistake to work on this focused on a logic of applying the rules, because it is not about discussing the contents of a normative text, but to build an understanding of the “*educatividad /teaching style*” of school life, where the rules are a part of a more complex reality. Otherwise, all the cultural and experiential richness of the individuals are overlooked, and the view of the teachers is deteriorated. One first matter is therefore to break with the inertia of approaching curricular issues in an instrumental capacity, and then to ask about the cultural project (which is identity, political, epistemic) that trains our students daily, because that is what they really experience in school.

Tarea magazine suggested that we develop the concept of the teacher as a builder of the curriculum. This is the first matter we are interested in posing: that in order to develop a teaching profession building the curriculum we would need teachers that break the relationship of dependency with the curricular regulations. We need to step out of the discussion around the curriculum sitting in the operational field and then move onto building a school culture that undertakes it the same way a community organizes the educational experience, on the basis of their own and nearby cultural materials, and through collective, participative and thoughtful processes.

A SUSPICIOUS UNANIMITY

Along with the instrumental treatment of the curriculum, the politically correct discourse of the utmost importance of teaching regarding the educational change is present. It is a discourse we repeatedly hear from various authorities, experts, and politicians. A unanimity unheard of, where everybody wants to be Heard and nobody wants to be left behind or, when possible, to be among the first voices of such a disjointed choir. We need to note, though, that among the participants of this Olympic rhetoric the least present voice is that of the very teacher profession. It is clear that such a discursive hyperactivity is not gratuitous. When someone says that teachers are important, they mean to say that they are important for something which generally teachers have not been consulted. And then certain phrases appear, which as a result of so many repetitions nobody bothers to question them anymore, since they already have a univocal, universal, and definitive aura.

This way, teachers are important, for instance, to achieve learnings (how and when were these achievements determined—which even have their own day—, and why, for whom, regarding what cultural project were they defined, when, how, among whom were they agreed), to improve the quality of education (another concept always needing questioning), to innovate education (what if we only want to perform well what we think we need to do?, why do we call innovation classrooms those computer rooms?, would all the rest become “non-innovative” classrooms?, why is it necessary to decide who is an innovative teacher, and why always in their terms?); some, more traditional, say teachers are important for the instruction of the future generations (and what about the present ones?, and what ever happened with life-long education?).

The discourses, concepts, regulations—needless to



say— have a very important load of intentionality; they have been constructed to “operationalize” an understanding of society and of the world. It so happens that they are presented as concepts pre-existing the individual —almost as if they had been revealed— that will fulfill a function of normalization and interpretation of the practices of the teachers, and are imposed to the subjects through administrative, productive and legitimized mechanisms of a rationality or a form of considering the education (which is not the only valid one), and which assign a role, but above all a place for the teacher within the configuration of the reality of the educational system. This is an operational role. Through this mechanism of social control, the teaching profession is placed as a subordinate subject, incapable of thinking about the pedagogy they perform and to think about themselves as citizens and professionals of education.

As Rodríguez points out:

“[...] it is believed that there is a simple relationship of cause and effect between the teacher and the student, between what is taught and what is learned, losing sight of the bio-psycho-social complexity of learning, the rich cultural variable, the huge poverty and misery of the people, the massive unemployment, and equally believing that the teacher, in a subordination scheme, should operate automatically in the direction he/she is instructed” (Rodríguez Fuensalida, 2000).

Where and where do the very teachers provide the reasons of the importance of their role? And, more precisely, where, when, and how do these reasons of the teachers become binding, or at least relevant

for the decisions on educational policies?

THE SILENT SPRINGS

In a recent paper, Hargraves y Fink maintain that teachers can learn from the ecologist movements in the world, among other reasons, because they act in pursuit of a cultural and political change in the population and in their capacity to be organized and to become actors of the environmental policies. But also because their focus is on the continuity of life, with its genetic diversity, its joy, and its strength. However, the economic logic focusing on growth submits the planet to measures of optimization and the increase of productivity, at the expense of the natural life. Thus, they state, “we spray the elm trees and in the coming springs we cannot hear the song of the robin” (Hargreaves, 2007). In other words, in the attempt to achieve certain results we end up destroying the very forces of the forest that foster the continuity of life. And they warn us about the grave danger entailed in the establishment of this logic of economy and the technique of educational policies:

“The arrival of such silent springs to the world of education [...] is also a potential danger, as the standardized and voracious educational reform leaves behind a plague of exhausted educators and a learning lacking happiness” (Hargreaves, 2007).

We experience this in our schools. Teachers and principals overloaded by the need to fulfill a set of established procedures so the administrators may exhibit outcomes

and achieve political legitimacy. These procedures are external to the daily beat of life within the classrooms, within the schools; they have nothing to do with the dynamics that occur in some schools, and rather destroy their initiatives, their identities, their bonds with the realm of life. It seems that the slogan is “the best school and the best teacher are those who obey”, those who comply with the rituals, who display the results. Naturally, what this generates is a race to fulfill. An example of this is what our current vice president told us about the schools in Moquegua, with teachers committed to achieve the best results in the Student Census Evaluation-ECE (which today has prize bonuses) and prepare students to take the exam. The same occurs with the PISA test, where the administration understood the efforts and resources needed to prepare the students who would take part in it.

The standards have become sacred objects. More than a debate, it looks like a cult. And around it, a sort of “normative hypertrophy”, as Dussel called it (Dussel, 2006), is generated, an excess of initiatives from the core of the system which invades school life and tries to control it. It is the presumption of a technical vision of education that believes it can achieve the control of the whole system based on an industrial strategy, and —we have to say— an industrial strategy of the Taylorian administrative paradigm; that is, we are not even updated. The problem is that this generates a movement around complying with the requirements of standardized tests in the schools, but not a movement around generating sustainable learnings, those which are going to become really significant in the lives of individuals. To think that being educated means to know how to pass examinations or that by complying with the standards I am an educational success is to impoverish the sense of education and of the meaning of an educated person.

These are subjects that entire communities of teachers who want to innovate discuss. But the logic of a technocratic educational reform is inconsistently authoritarian and centralized; it could manage without pedagogy as a field of knowledge and replace it with the belief that teaching problems are of a technical nature and intervene the teaching practice with procedures which, beyond the discourse, are of mandatory compliance.

It is worth recalling educator Constantino Carvallo, who in his *Diario educar* [Daily Teaching] uses a quote by Montaigne: “Regarding those who, according to custom, are in charge of instructing different spirits by means of

intelligence and character, and give everyone the same lesson and subject matter, it should not come as a surprise that only two or three of those actually get the proper benefit of teaching.” In this line, nowadays, with greater strength, this contingent nature of attention to the diversity of education is present in the educational thought. So, to think about teachers as builders of the curriculum implies this discordance with the logic of the technocratic educational reform.

A CURRICULAR REFORM IN DEMOCRACY

A critical, reflective teaching involves the confirmation of the teaching autonomy, and consequently, a questioning of this cult of obedience that the technocratic reform is imposing. The curriculum is a cultural policy, and should be developed within a democracy. And the procedure for this is the cultural negotiation, which demands that those negotiating are not in a situation of subordination.

This is not something we may easily understand. Our country has a long conservative tradition; our reflexes still resemble colonial prejudices; we still believe that the center holds the most capable individuals and the periphery has a deficit of human resources. What is happening is a situation of authoritarian culture, where the center determines the parameters of efficiency, effectiveness, relevance, quality, and further concepts with which they measure the periphery. But this twenty-first century is impregnated by the presence of the others, by the differences, by interculturality, which is a complex notion, which recognizes the rights of each and every one, which implies a recognition of emotions, of equal value of others, of trust, which promotes a policy of empowerment and openness, and epistemology of wisdom sharing.

Well, then, this is what we can find in multiple experiences of teachers throughout our country. Our teaching profession has a reserve of pedagogical richness that, despite the shortages our system has imposed to the public school, has learned to keep and develop. We have to trust these teachers. The educational policy has to strengthen this richness, and this is the strategy we need to develop the pedagogical creativity in those teachers with greater difficulties.

The democratic construction of curricular policies is not simply a matter of consultations. They even tend to occur as a mechanism that works in the opposite direction. When referring to the role and characteristics of

the consultations regarding the curriculum in the 1990s, Ferrer points out:

“[...] these consultation mechanisms were rather formal and relatively fenced, and did not provide any information on the established procedures to guarantee the due consideration of the proposals or observations received, neither did they register or inform which external contributions were used in the normative or in the programs, nor the reasons why some of them were ignored or rejected” (Ferrer, 2004).

In this case, any resemblance with the current reality is not a coincidence. The democratic nature lies within the very conception of curricular policies as a social construct, as a process of interaction between the actors of the school. Not as a technical and normative development—centrally-generated—around which a number of people gather to debate.

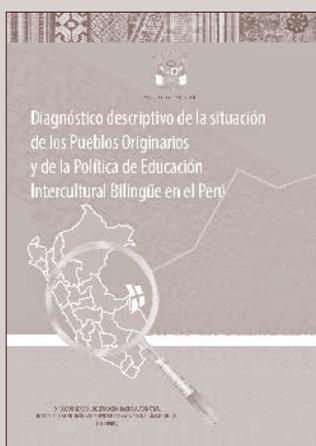
This task of democratic construction of curricular policies happens all the time: in the practice of curricular decision-making and development in the schools, sometimes in talks with the communities; in processes of cultural negotiation, not without conflicts, even then with issues of cultural subordination between the school culture (monocultural) and the community cultures. As a consequence, the idea of the teacher as a builder of the curriculum involves this political dimension and the sharing of wisdoms between the different agents of education.

What can we do as teachers building a curriculum in the face of the arriving silent springs to education? Let's have an educational uprising! This is the moment when teachers, in order to be so, need to confirm their professional autonomy, recognize the value of their

pedagogical knowledge and unite around it. Here is where our profession acquires prestige. Here is where the teaching profession is empowered and teachers become speakers between their communities and the policy-makers, showing that the way to a sustainable change in education is that of the democratic construction of the curricular reform, of the acknowledgement of teachers as builders of a curriculum that emerges from the life of the schools and from the realm of life, penetrating the daily education in the schools. **1**

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Descriptive Diagnosis of the Situation of Native Peoples and the Intercultural Bilingual Education Policy in Peru

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