

Learning at Home: Pedagogical and management

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Learning at Home: pedagogical and management challenges in a diverse country

The diverse and unequal conditions in which remote education and *Aprendo en Casa* were implemented as an emergency response to the pandemic demonstrated in the short term the challenges facing education in Peru. Patricia Andrade develops four of these challenges related to management, existing inequalities, diversity, and the role of teachers.

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Challenges in a diverse country

A little over two years ago we entered a stage in the history of humanity which effects on our lives and on the entire social order have not yet been fully appreciated. We can remember, however, the whirlwind of feelings and emotions that were generated during the first weeks and months: vulnerability and uncertainty, stress as a result of confinement and changes in our routines, fear for our own safety and that of those close to us, and the numerous mournings. There was also a lot that we had to learn, unlearn and relearn, with greater or lesser success, and various displays of abilities that we demonstrated to survive and remain productive and even supportive – not always, not everyone. The crisis brought high costs but opened a window of opportunity thanks to the responses deployed to respond to the challenges (Andrade 2021).

In the educational field, the first challenge was to maintain the service in the face of school closures. This meant moving from in-person to remote, with few conditions for this, aware of the pre-existing gaps and the risk that they would end up widening, as in fact happened. Learning at Home (AeC, by its initials in Spanish) was the response to the emergency, and its value as such has been recognized. From the start it sought to be sensitive to diversity and that is why its delivery was organized in nine languages.

There was also an AeC for the population with some type of disability, and another service designed with the young and adult population needing some form of alternative basic education. Thus, the initial perception of the educational community and citizens in general was favorable: amid uncertainty and insecurity, perceiving a State that responded inspired confidence. However, soon, the limits of a single format, the (re)centralized decision making and the growing confusion between regional and institutional actors

about their respective roles revealed the complexity of managing remote education in a context diverse, unequal, and highly heterogeneous. New challenges and tensions arose in the field of management and in the pedagogical field.

FIRST CHALLENGE. MANAGEMENT: LOOKING AT THE TERRITORY AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL ARTICULATION. CONFLICTS OF DIRECTORY AND DISTRIBUTION OF COMPETENCES

On March 31, 2020, the Ministry of Education (Minedu) ordered the start of the school year through Learning at Home, a measure designed to guarantee the educational service through remote modality (Minedu 2020) based on the existing regulatory framework, which states that the Ministry of Education's function is to "define, direct, regulate and evaluate, in coordination with the regions, the national educational and pedagogical policy, and establish specific equity policies" (Congress of the Republic 2003). It was an unprecedented event, which put the rights of the country's students first. Minedu made the decision and began to design and deliver the strategy directly to each service user, through the established channels: web, television and radio. The actors of the decentralized entities received guidelines to operate, collect and send information.

Within the framework of decentralization, as is known, education is a shared competence, with specific and complementary functions between levels of government, also including local governments. As part of these powers, the Minedu formulates national policies, executes and supervises them, while the regional governments (GORE) formulate policies for the territory under their responsibility and within this framework, they articulate and adapt national policies. With AeC the Minedu made the decisions about what, how, when; not



only the policies, but the delivery itself. This is possibly one of the biggest criticisms that arose, even more so when verifying that what was initially an exceptional and temporary¹ measure lasted for two years².

For many people, what followed was a process of re-centralization and overlapping of powers, which left the GORE (regional directorates of education, DRE, and local educational management units, UGEL) little margin of decision; basically, operation. It is also true that all instances and levels of management were focused on addressing the health emergency, also hit by the pandemic. Something that characterized Minedu's actions during this stage – particularly in the first months – was the profusion of regulations, in an effort to adapt to the provisions to address the health emergency on one hand, and the various realities, on the other. This is the case, for example, of the remote work rule for sector personnel: they had to write more than one version, seeking to find the most appropriate regulation and supervision mechanisms that would not over-demand, but at the same time establish criteria to ensure that the educational service was being developed adequately.

1 Planned until May 3, planning to start in-person attendance on May 4.

2 With some exceptions in specific areas where the risk of contagion was lower.

A fact like this once again brings to the table the need to review both the distribution and effective exercise of powers and the articulation mechanisms. It can also be an opportunity to analyze the encounter between policy measures proposed from “above” due to emergency, taking into account principles of right guarantee and from “below” – activation of regional and local initiatives to compensate for difficulties, mainly of access. Considering that local governments had a proactive role, in which what was common was effort, it wasn't always well articulated or sufficient to face the great challenge of sustaining the continuity of the educational service for all students and with quality, which it is how the right is summarized.

Minedu made an effort to guarantee continuity, but with enormous limitations because it is neither possible nor desirable to resolve everything from Lima. It was up to Minedu to quickly move on to other dimensions of its direction, such as generating conditions with enabling standards, strengthening capacities, providing technical assistance, and supervising; and do everything in a differentiated way, compensating where required, applying the principle of subsidiarity. It was not a quick turnaround and certain normative-controlling tendencies were accentuated and prolonged. For their part, the GORE and local governments (LG), although they deployed important efforts to compensate for connectivity gaps, did so under



unequal conditions, and not all of them. Perhaps the best lesson learned is the need to complement and articulate efforts, have a territorial reading of the implementation of policies and expand the decision-making margins of decentralized entities. None of this is new; they are old unresolved needs.

SECOND CHALLENGE. ADDRESS INEQUALITIES

Within the framework of the tension between national measures and the reality of each territory, a mobilizing element that triggered the action of the GORE and GL was the observation of the inequality of conditions, an expression of structural and historical gaps that showed the limited effectiveness of the measures implemented during various administrations to reverse them. These inequalities were expressed in several dimensions.

First, the limitations in access to technological and communication means through which the resources and content of Learning at Home were transmitted became visible, a situation that mainly affected rural areas. It suffices to recall data such as those from the 2019 National Household Survey (Enaho), according to which one in three families nationwide had at least one computer or laptop, but only 7% of families had one in the rural area; and similar percentages were shown in terms of internet access. Along the same lines, according to studies by the Minedu Strategic

Monitoring and Evaluation Office, many families did not have smart cellphones to access AeC classes and resources; and, if they had this type of equipment, the cost to top it up was excessive for their finances, a situation also experienced by the teachers. Given this, many GORE and GL carried out actions to compensate for the gaps and facilitate access to AeC resources using various modalities. As of November 2020, 292 initiatives were registered in 26 regions³.

Efforts were concentrated on addressing this problem, but they were not sufficient in the face of other gaps and limitations that were less visible and more complex to address: from material poverty to the capabilities of educational actors. This is the case, for example, of teachers without adequate preparation to design and implement classes in remote education. Furthermore, difficulties in pedagogical management became evident; for example, in how to evaluate and provide feedback on the learning of their students (Andrade and Guerrero 2021). Additionally, the transfer of experience of learning to homes highlighted and amplified the impact on families, influencing the effective opportunities for sons and daughters to access and take advantage

³ Minedu (2020). General Directorate of Decentralized Management. Directorate of Intergovernmental Relations. National Report on Territorial Alert Actions. Presentation. Power Point presentation (Information provided by DRE/GRE and UGEL directors, updated as of November 23, 2020).

of the educational experience, to which we must add the weight of differences in cultural capital of families (Andrade and Guerrero 2021).

Managing these situations is only possible by combining short-term strategies to address the emergency and deep reforms that affect the structural aspects. Reforms, which imply political will, resources and truly intersectoral management, so that education is increasingly a service that offers space for convergence. Intersectoral management will be effective if and only if it is developed starting from the territory, which, again, means greater margins and local decision-making capacities.

THIRD CHALLENGE. CONTEXTUALIZE TO ADDRESS DIVERSITY

A constant complaint has been the lack of contextualization of the learning experiences produced by AeC, beyond the adaptation messages with which they were accompanied. There is no lack of support for this claim. With AeC, the Minedu went from formulating the curricular policy – the what, where to arrive – to defining the how, establishing and standardizing the implementation of the same learning experiences throughout the country, which is not very coherent with the situated learning approach which supports the National Curriculum.

This is explained, in part, by the fact that AeC was conceived as an emergency response; but it was sustained for a long time, without a fundamental rethinking. While there were improvements, the “same experiences for everyone” approach was basically maintained. And the fact is that, along with the messages and actions to promote the need for contextualization by teachers, the desire to “verify” the teacher’s performance was translated into monitoring formats and requests for evidence, among others, that have tended to reinforce standardization.

On the other hand, it is paradoxical that, faced with this fact, the demand of teachers, directors and specialists is that AeC provides contextualized experiences⁴, as if this were possible and desirable. It is up to Minedu, as the governing body, to establish *where* to go – that is the purpose of the curriculum – but it is up to each level of management to define *how*, based on the cha-

racteristics of each territory, educational institution and students, something that is not possible to anticipate for each student, in all schools and territorial areas of the country or even in an entire region equally. What seems to be behind this demand is the assumption that contextualizing is nominally incorporating regional (diverse) elements into experiences, which leads us to question what we mean by contextualizing and what we mean by diversity. In this regard, *diversity* is associated with the territory and its cultural, historical, and productive characteristics; and that is a level, but it is insufficient because we lose sight of the fact that diversity plays out in the classroom, where even among students with the same cultural identity, whatever it may be, there is a diversity of characters, abilities, interests, experiences and prior knowledge, habits, family traditions, learning styles and needs, as well as gender and specific parenting cultures.

Learning experiences must respond to this diversity that is the meaning of effective contextualization, which goes in the opposite direction to the claim of an AeC that provides contextualized experiences. These must necessarily be designed by teachers, while AeC or any other strategy in a remote education context would have to offer a bank of resources as examples, accompanied by guidelines and an explanation of its logic and the characteristics or conditions that guarantee significant learning. The efforts of the GORE, through the DRE and the UGEL, should be focused on accompanying their teachers in this task, and making available to them repertoires of resources and inventories of territorial challenges to facilitate it.

FOURTH CHALLENGE. THE TEACHING ROLE: FACILITATOR, MEDIATOR, IMPLEMENTER, EXECUTOR?

Along with health personnel, teachers are possibly the sector of professionals that faced the most challenges in the context of the pandemic, with remote education for which they were not prepared and with the transfer of the educational act to homes, where they had to also take charge of the learning of their daughters and sons as fathers and mothers. Not only did the scenario of their performance change: they faced the need to adapt their experiences, schedules and ways of connecting with their students. The interactions multiplied and their days became almost infinite.

For this reason, AeC represented a kind of “lifeline.” The demands they had to face were such that having

4 Information collected as part of a consultancy carried out by the author


the material already prepared allowed them to focus their greatest effort on dealing with those demands and generating mechanisms to bond with their students. The initiatives of many teachers who managed to be close are known, especially in rural areas and poverty sectors, using their own resources to upload data, multicopy and send the sessions, etc., as well as making their schedules more flexible according to the availability of their students and extending their working hours.

At the same time, the situation displaced them from their usual role: planning and developing learning. Very soon, the teachers were confronted and affected in their professional autonomy, to which was added the awareness of their own limitations in the face of the new scenarios and challenges they faced and the evidence of previous gaps.

Also added to this situation was the mechanism used at the national level to control compliance with their work performance. Not the quality of their performance in the face of the needs of the new context, but the fulfillment of the day, which had to be demonstrated with evidence. The preparation of administrative reports, for example, overloaded their tasks and displaced the time

they could allocate to contacting and providing feedback to their students, a fact that was accentuated by the continuous changes in the format of said reports, as reported in the evaluation reports. to the implementation of AeC, for Initial, Primary and Secondary, led by the Minedu Strategic Monitoring and Evaluation Office (2020).

This situation raises the need to review the processes linked to personnel management, which includes everything from capacity development to hiring and supervision mechanisms, starting from what is feasible and necessary, and taking into account the scale and diversity of situations of our reality.

In short, managing diversity involves several challenges about which the time of pandemic has offered us an opportunity to rethink: improve the distribution and articulation of competencies, making them complementary and avoiding overlaps, based on differentiated attention and the strengthening of capacities. Likewise, putting students and teachers at the center; and, essentially, encouraging and enabling the autonomy of the various levels of management to make decisions based on circumstances and needs. There is still time before the window of opportunity closes. 

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