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The curriculum in the spotlight

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

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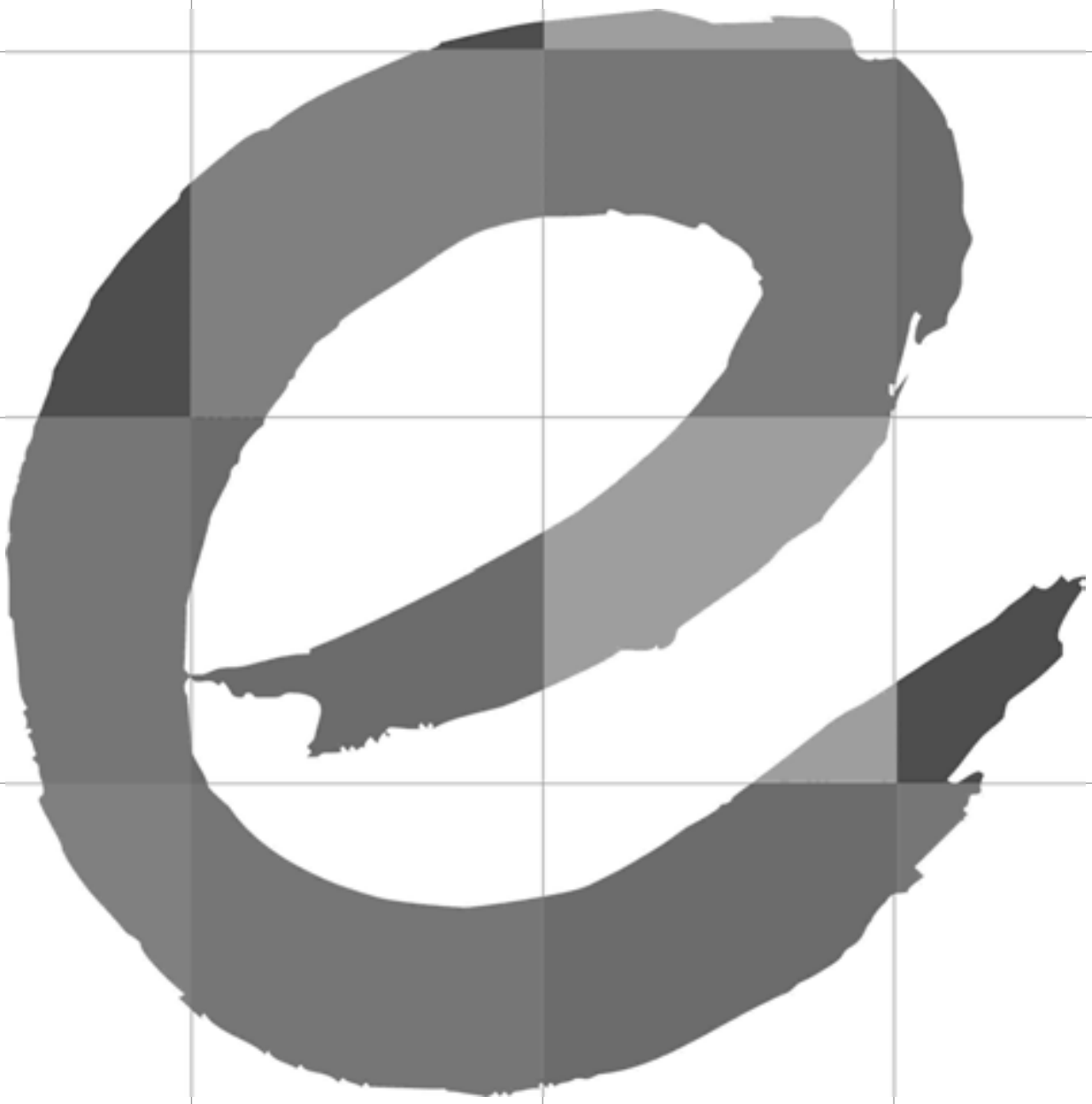

The curriculum *in the spotlight*

United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization

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PREFACE

During recent decades, education reforms in the region have given high priority to the curriculum, making it the focus of changes, but also of controversy and debate. So important has the subject become that at times, education reform is seen as synonymous with curricular reform.

The points of discussion around the curriculum cover a broad gamut, beginning with the recognition that in many countries, curricular reforms have been on paper only. A frequent comment is that in some places proposed curricular changes do not reach the classroom or do so with changes that are far from the intentions and structures with which they have been created at the central level of education systems.

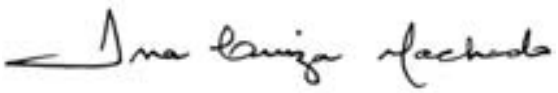
Discussions about the curriculum are in their essence on-going, although they pass through particular moments of intensity and change. Our region is in the midst of a special situation involving assessments and re-thinking of its reforms. Undoubtedly, this offers an opportunity to re-examine old problems in order to incorporate innovative focuses and to set new challenges for the future.

Discussions about the curriculum are, and will continue to be on-going because they treat key themes that affect all education actors. Decisions about what to teach, why to teach it, and how to do so involve technical, political, and cultural dimensions that involve society as a whole. In the end, the answers to these questions refer to the kind of society that we wish to construct. It is for this reason that this debate is as dynamic as life and social change. Changes in the world context, the vertiginous production of knowledge, cutting-edge technology, and new functions delegated to schools undoubtedly create pressure for and enliven new challenges in curricular policy.

With these points in view, and considering the guidelines of the Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean -PRELAC- with its emphasis on the meanings of education, UNESCO's Regional Bureau of Education organized in May, 2006 in Santiago a meeting with Vice-Ministers of Education and those responsible for the curriculum within ministries of education in order to place "the curriculum in the spotlight". Together with a comprehensive view of controversy and challenges, the meeting discussed three subjects in depth: the curriculum and its relation to learning and assessment standards; the curriculum and the situation and roles of teachers; and the curriculum and diversity in all of its dimensions – personal, gender, culture, etc.

Here we offer the reader several presentations and efforts resulting from that meeting, and add to them contributions of well-known specialists in the area who look at it from new perspectives: competencies, citizen training, policy sustainability, inclusion of international commitments, etc.

We hope that this publication stimulates open and constructive discussion that will foster the development of quality education.



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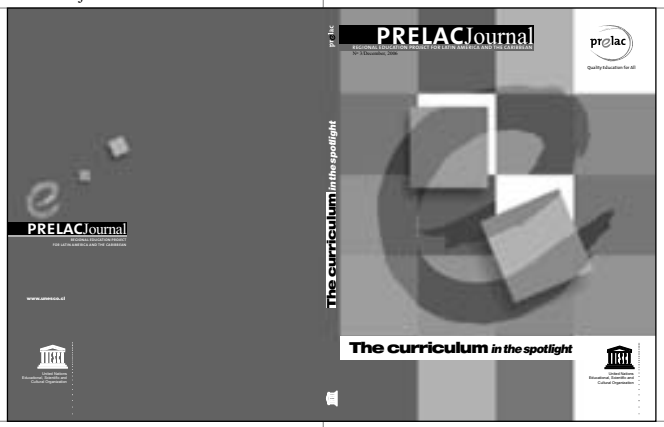

The curriculum *in the spotlight*

The prevalence of the curriculum debate

BASIC LEARNING, COMPETENCIES, AND STANDARDS

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Curricular reforms and changes continue among the themes that provoke most interest among educators. Academics, education professionals, and policy-makers who work in national and international organizations continue to dedicate much time and effort to analyzing the most appropriate forms and procedures for defining and applying educational purposes within schools. Particular kinds of discussions remain open. Certain aspects of the curriculum continue to make manifest the tension between focuses that fail to coincide.

It is logical that this be the case. First, because the disciplines dedicated to studying educational phenomena and processes and the methodologies of the disciplines themselves do not permit us to arrive at emphatic conclusions resulting from the arguments made. The complexity of a subject such as the curriculum, the variety of educational realities submitted to analysis, and the fast pace of change within these realities make it very difficult to clearly define curricular focuses. Second, underlying most of these discussions is a divergence of ideological options that are not only inevitable given the social and socializing nature of school-based education, but are, in our opinion, legitimate and desirable as long as they are explicit and thus can be analyzed and accepted or rejected by society.

On the other hand, it is extremely valuable to have venues such as this meeting in which education authorities analyze and assess once more the trends taking place in curricular reform and ponder the possible consequences of their decisions.

This document merely attempts to be one more source of reflection which perhaps will contribute to the carrying out this task. To this end, we will here briefly identify from our point of view what are currently the major discussions and tensions in the area of the curriculum. Once this global perspective has been presented we will treat with a bit more detail three points or themes that seem to us to be especially relevant.

CURRENT DISCUSSIONS on the school curriculum

We may group most of the themes that are the object of special attention to and discussion of the curriculum into four broad areas: the social function of school-based education in general and of primary education in particular; the selection, characterization, and organization of school-based learning; the role of standards and of student achievement assessments; and the processes of curricular reform and change.

In the first of these areas, referring to function *or functions that one wishes school-based education to play in social, political, and economic organization and on governability*, there are three principal questions that are the subject of discussion. The first makes manifest the tension between the needs of the employment market and of personal development when it comes to defining the function, organization, and structure of education systems (Azevedo, 2001; Hargreaves, and Fink, 2003). Should school programs be designed based on the competencies the acquisition and development of which the employment market requires? Or, on the contrary, should they be designed based on the capacities that people require in order to have a full and satisfactory life both for themselves and for those with whom they live? Is it possible to combine both sources? Does this question allow for different answers depending on the levels of education about which one speaks?

Here also we find reflections regarding the apparently contradictory forces of globalization, on the one hand, and the rebirth of nationalism and minority group identities on the other (Moreno, to be published). Undoubtedly, it is not easy to reconcile statements about desired general competencies for all human beings being desirable in themselves and for an increasingly globalized market, with the no less certain reality (provoked in part by the same mechanisms) of the growing value of national or ethnic identity. From this perspective, education for citizenship would seem to be one of the most important school subjects (Cox, 2002).

Finally, the reflection about the social function of schools alludes to a third discussion which although long-standing, continues to be of great relevance and which me may express in terms of the tension existing between quality and equity; inclusion and segregation (Ainscow et al., 2001; Terwel, 2005). The debate about comprehensiveness, attention to the diversity of education needs of students that are the results of their social and cultural origins and of their personal characteristics, the controversies about organization into heterogeneous groups or by abilities are, among many others, some clear exponents of this discussion.

In the second section, which treats the *selection, characterization, and organization of school-based learning*, there are also four major themes. The most important in our opinion is that of the definition of basic learning in school curricula (Coll, 2004; Comisión Europea, 2004; EURYDICE, 2002; OCDE, 2005). What is it that every future citizen should learn, and that therefore must be taught in every school? Re-thinking school curricula in terms of what is absolutely essential and relieving them of the excess of content with which they are currently burdened in most education systems is an urgent and priority task but a difficult one to carry out through consensus.

The issue of competencies is closely linked to this theme. However, although it is true that discussion in this area has focused largely on its basic character, reflection is not limited to this aspect only. Besides illuminating the need to treat that which is absolutely essential, the concept of competence contributes other undoubtedly valuable theoretical aspects regarding the kind of learning that one wishes to help to construct (Perrenoud, 1998; 2002).

The academic and space-time organization of the curriculum is that last point that we wish to highlight in this second section (Eisner, 2000). Is it possible to teach in the knowledge society within a school that maintains a stagnant structure of disciplines imparted in closed time periods in classrooms that continue to be organized in lines and columns? Moreover, are the conditions present required for making a break with the strictly disciplinary logic?

The third section, dealing with discussion regarding *the function of standards and student achievement assessments in the definition and impulse of curricular reforms*, includes themes which may be considered as especially relevant at the present time (Agrawal, 2004; Barnes, Clarke and Stephens, 2000; Darling-Hammond, 2004; Elmore, 2003). After an initial euphoria, which in some cases has even led to present the establishment of achievement standards as an alternative to the school curriculum, various studies carried out on the repercussions of these policies have more clearly defined the positions and highlighted the insufficiencies and indeed the risks of very radical efforts. The need to "align" curricula and standards, making both more coherent and complementary is today a principle accepted by many educators. However, many themes continue to be the subjects of discussion and discussion in this section. The tension between *"high and low stakes*", the crisis of professional identity that at times leads to these kinds of assessments, the activities that would be necessary in order to carry out in and with schools that show unsatisfactory results, and the use of rankings are only some of them.

The need to "align" curricula and standards, making both more coherent and complementary is today a principle accepted by many educators.

Finally, the existence of *different focuses in the design, planning, and management of processes of curricular reform and change* continue to be important on the agendas of governments as well as international agencies and organizations involved with education.

The analysis of education systems of different countries makes it manifest that there are significant differences between them and, what is perhaps more interesting, within them, depending on the regional or local authorities (Dussel, 2005; Moreno, to be published). The *top-down* vs. *bottom-up* focus of reform models, or the more recent models of "partnership" and "sited reforms" (Fullan, 2000), the arguments in favor of a post-modern concept of the curriculum (McDonald, 2003), levels of curricular decentralization or activities in favor of school autonomy are some of the themes that illustrate the amplitude and substance of this fourth section.

Obviously, all of these are strictly interrelated. Our enumeration merely seeks to show the quantity and variety of the fronts that are open in this field, offering a report on themes that of course leaves out much that is equally interesting. Among those that we have enumerated we have chosen three that in our judgment are especially relevant at the present and which we will treat below in more detail: the identification and definition of kinds of basic learning; the definition of educational intentions in terms of competencies, and the role of learning standards and achievement assessments in the processes of curricular change and reform.

The highly negative implications for the quality of school-based education of overburdened and excessive curricula are well-known.

BASIC LEARNING:

DECISIONS REGARDING WHAT TO IS TO BE TAUGHT

What knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values should people acquire in order for them to develop within the societies in which they live? What so we want students to learn in school, and consequently what should we try to teach them? What kinds of learning should all students acquire in primary school? These or similar questions have often been at the center of discussions of education, especially, as is the case currently, when societies face new challenges.

For some years the debate on essential kinds of learning has increasingly reflected the tension generated by the need to meet demands that appear to come from different directions. On the one hand, in the new social, economic, political, and cultural scenario contributes to migratory movements, globalization processes, digital-based information and communication technologies, knowledge-based economies, etc., the need to incorporate new content into the curriculum appears increasingly evident. Their is a widespread conviction that in this new scenario, skills and content essential for the exercise of citizenship are not well reflected in school curricula. In reaction there is much pressure to correct this fault. This demand has been strengthened as a result of the decreasing social and community responsibility for education (Coll, 2003) that has led to transferring to school-based education the responsibility for some kinds of learning that until recently had been assumed by other socialization and training institutions (families, churches, political and labor groups, diverse associations, etc.).

Nevertheless, in many countries a large proportion of primary school teachers continue to feel (and we agree with this sentiment) that it is practically impossible for students to learn and for teachers to teach all of the content included in current curricula, and leads to underline the need of a revision of the curriculum in a direction the opposite direction; that is, aimed at reducing learning content. Indeed, the highly negative implications for the quality of school-based education of overburdened and excessive curricula are well-known.

In the face of this situation, under various names –*basic training, basic common culture, basic skills, basic competencies,* etc.– and from different ideological, pedagogical, psycho-pedagogical, and didactic perspectives, the need to redefine what indeed is essential in education has begun to appear in contemporary pedagogical debate (Gauhier and Laurin, 2001; Coll, 2004). In order to summarize some of this discussion and to contribute to its development, in what follows we will briefly comment on some items which, in our judgment, should be kept in mind in this effort to re-define that which is essential to school-based learning.

I. A first consideration is related to acceptance of a principle to which little or no attention has been paid but one that has important implications for decision-making regarding what to teach in primary and lower secondary education. It may be stated as follows: at these levels of education *one cannot teach everything that we would like children and young people to learn; nor certainly everything that is it is good that children and young people learn.*

The content overload that characterizes the curricula of primary and lower secondary education in many countries is in fact the result of repeated accumulation in successive processes of school curricula revision and up-dating. In effect, contrary to what one would expect, the introduction of new content has practically never been accompanied by a symmetrical and balanced reduction of others, and even less so by a restructuring of the curriculum as a whole. The solution adopted, although realistic and pragmatic from the point of view of social dynamics and management of corporate conflicts, is almost always less rational from the perspective of pedagogy and of time management of teaching and learning. When faced with new "urgencies" and social necessities what usually occurs is not the substitution of new content for old, but rather amplification and the introduction of new content.

Choices must be made. When current content is increased or new content or competencies introduced into the primary and lower secondary education curriculum, others must be cut or excluded. Curricula and school hours are not elastic. Overloaded curricula that do not take this fact into account are an obstacle to meaningful and functional learning, sources of frustration for teachers and students, and an added difficulty to moving forward toward inclusive education.

II. Second taking this principle and its implications into consideration suggests exploring, and in this case establishing a distinction between *that which is basic and absolutely necessary and that which is basic and desirable* in the primary and lower secondary education curriculum.

The term "basic" is usually employed within the framework of the school curriculum and when referring to achieving goals in education –expected student learning defined in terms of competencies or learning content– with a multiplicity of inter-connected and inter-related meanings. The content and competencies identified as basic in order to justify their presence in the school curriculum always go back to the kind of learning considered necessary for students. The multiple meanings of the concept resides not so much in the supposed need for the learning, but rather in purpose for which obtaining such learning is considered necessary. Therefore, the presence of the contents or competencies in the primary and lower secondary education curriculum is usually defended by arguing that their learning is necessary in order to achieve one or several of the following proposals:

a) to make possible full exercise of citizenship within the framework of the society of reference;
b) to be able to construct and develop a satisfactory life project;
c) to assure balanced personal, emotional, and affective development;
d) to be able to access other future educational processes with a guarantee of success.

One cannot teach everything that we would like children and young people to learn.

The multiplicity of purposes of primary and lower secondary education explains, at least in part, existing pressures on the school curriculum for incorporating content and competencies considered to be "basic" in one or another of the senses mentioned here. One could well ask, however, if these different meanings of the word "basic" referring to school-based learning are equally relevant in the different levels of primary and lower secondary education –pre-school, primary, and secondary– and above all we would do well to ask ourselves if the learning of the contents and competencies included in the primary and lower secondary education curriculum, or proposed to be included into it, do indeed contribute to guaranteeing what one intends by their inclusion. It might well be that even though all of the basic content and competencies fit into one or another of the meanings mentioned, all are not equally "absolutely necessary" for achieving the purposes that justify their presence in the curriculum, although all of them are "desirable" in that their learning favors the achievement of such purposes.

What is *absolutely basic* thus refers to those kinds of learning which, if not achieved by the end of the primary and lower secondary education cycle, determine or have a negative impact on the personal and social development of the affected student, limit his or her life project, and place the student at clear risk of social exclusion. Moreover, these are kinds of learning the achievement of which is very difficult to obtain after the period of compulsory education. The *desirable basic*, for its part, refers to those kinds of learning which, although contributing significantly to the student's personal and social development, do not have a negative impact if not achieved. Moreover, they are kinds of learning that can be "recovered" without great difficulty beyond the period of compulsory education.

This distinction is admittedly problematic, and we cannot escape the difficulty involved in having to decide what concrete contents and competencies belong to the category of the *absolutely basic* and what to the *desirably basic*. Among other reasons, this is so because finally, the decision will depend on the importance granted to different exceptions granted to the concept "basic". It is not the same, for example, to place the emphasis on the idea of avoiding the risks of social exclusion, and to guarantee access to subsequent educational and training processes; to stress the social and cultural context in which we find ourselves, and the function or functions that we think school-based education must fulfill in contemporary society. We are also aware of the dangers that the distinction brings in that it can be wrongly interpreted as a "back to basics" in the traditional meaning of this movement.

However, in spite of all of this, it does in our opinion comprise a point of reflection that should be present in decision-making regarding what to teach and what should be learned in primary and lower secondary education. We are not proposing "slimming down" the curriculum the curriculum of primary and lower secondary education, limiting it to the contents and skills linked to learning that one can define as absolutely basic. Nor is this a hidden proposal to "lower the level" through the reduction of learning content. What we are suggesting is, first, to submit all content and skills currently included in the curriculum of primary and lower secondary education –and those that may be proposed for future incorporation– to an inquiry regarding to what extent and in what sense they can be considered to be "basic" while rejecting those that do not pass this test. Second, we wish to identify, among the set of retained content and skills, those that result in learning, the lack of attainment of which, at the end of primary and lower secondary education, lead to the negative consequences mentioned above for differentiating between that which is *absolutely basic* and what is *desirably basic*. Third, we suggest granting a differential treatment and priority to content and skills identified as absolutely basic; both in terms of teaching activity and of attention to diversity, processes of evaluation and certification of learning, and of comparative studies on the degree of fulfillment or attainment of achievement standards and the quality of school-based education.

III. A third aspect to which special attention should be given in the effort to "redefine that which is basic in primary and lower secondary education" has to do with the classic theme of *curriculum sources*. The criterion is this case should be, in our opinion, the search for a balance between taking into consideration education and training requirements derived from social demands –and in this especially from the labor market– , those resulting from the personal development processes of students, and those stemming from the social and cultural project –the type of society and persons– that one wishes to foster through school-based education.

We have two brief comments in this regard. The first is that the development of primary and lower secondary education curricular proposals clearly demonstrates the coming and going and alternating importance granted to these three sources within decision-making on school content, and which is a function of the political, social, and economic dynamics belonging to the particular historical moment. During the current period, characterized by large-scale changes in these dynamics, especially for the economy and for the world of employment, the accent falls once again on the priority granted to the need to satisfy the education and training needs stemming from this source. The risk that this carries of introducing bias into the selection of basic content and skill is evident. Also evident is the risk that this bias, in case it continues to grow, ends up again provoking an alternating movement aimed at compensating for it through the emphasis on other sources.

Our second comment is to call attention to the ideological component which in our opinion is inevitably contained in the task of "re-defining what is basic and primary in primary and lower secondary education" and, in general, in decision-making about what to teach and learn. These decisions come back, as we have noted, to the ends and purposes of school-based education and through them to an ideological project about the type of society and persons that one wishes to contribute to and make possible. Perhaps in this regard it is well to underline the value of the distinction between the *absolutely basic* and the *desirably basic* in order to search for a broad social agreement about education. Not reaching agreement about that which it is *absolutely basic* for students to learn places in doubt the very existence of a shared social project. Attainment of a broad social agreement in this regard thus seems not only to be desirable, but necessary in order to maintain social cohesion. On the other hand, not reaching agreement about what is *desirably basic* reflects different views within current and future society and places in evidence the existence of different ideological options regarding the shared social project that one wishes to construct. In this sense, attainment of a broad social agreement in this regard is perhaps useful at some historic moments, but surely will be more difficult to achieve, it not equally necessary, and on some occasions may not even be desirable if it leads, as can happen, to ideological homogenization around a single way of thinking.

IV. A fourth issue that should be introduced into decisions regarding the content of primary and lower secondary education, and which interacts with those mentioned above (especially with the proposal of taking into consideration the distinction between the *absolutely basic* and the *desirable basic*) is that regarding *the respective responsibility of school-based education and of other education scenarios and actors* in the processes of human development, socialization, and training. This is a question of making an effort to differentiate to the extent possible between the kind of learning the attainment of which is basically the responsibility of schools, learning that is a shared responsibility between schools and other scenarios and actors, and learning in which school-based education clearly has a secondary or complementary responsibility.

Not reaching agreement about that which it is absolutely basic for students to learn places in doubt the very existence of a shared social project.

We cannot continue to go on thinking about and making decisions regarding the primary and lower secondary education curriculum as if schools and teachers were the only scenarios and actors involved in citizen training. As we know, this way of proceeding has led to placing on the shoulders of school-based education an impressive accumulation of expectations and demands in regard to the learning that should be fostered in students, with all the curriculum overload and high risk of school failure that this implies. Nor can we continue to think about and make decisions about the primary and lower secondary education curriculum as if the traditional education scenarios and actors –especially the family, peer groups, and the immediate community environment of students– continued to assure the learning for which they have traditionally assumed responsibility.

An effort must be made to commit and share responsibility with those education scenarios and actors that have a growing influence on citizen education and training. This is the case both in regard to *absolutely basic* and *desirable basic* learning as well. Moreover, special attention must be given in the school curriculum to the kinds of absolutely basic learning the realization of which, having been assured traditionally by other education scenarios and actors, is no longer the case. And of course, one should question the presence –or at least the extent to which they should be present– in the school curriculum of some content and skills the learning and acquisition of which increasingly takes place outside the classroom.

V. Another aspect that has had and continues to have a decisive influence on the identification and definition of basic learning has to do with the fact that primary and lower secondary education has traditionally been assimilated by initial education; that is, the process of development, socialization, and training of people that takes place during the period of compulsory education. All national education systems have been organized and still function in large measure under the supposition that the training acquired during these years forms a basis upon which all subsequent personal develop depends. During the six to ten years of compulsory education, depending upon the country, one must guarantee the satisfaction of *all* basic learning needs. In short, everything is organized as if, once compulsory education is finished, it makes no sense to speak of primary and lower secondary education.

At all moments or phases of our lives, basic learning needs arise that need to be satisfied.

The identification of primary and lower secondary education with initial compulsory education is another of the factors that explain the overload of content typical of the curricula at these education levels, since one is obliged to see as basic all of the learning that has a decisive influence on the late lives of people in any and all areas of activity.

The growing importance granted to life-long learning has made clear, however, the existence of basic learning and training needs that cannot be adequately satisfied, or only partially and incompletely so, during the phase of compulsory education. Primary and lower secondary education is not an exclusive characteristic of compulsory initial education. At all moments or phases of our lives, basic learning needs arise that need to be satisfied. Primary and lower secondary education, understood as the provision of systematic and planned help directed at fostering the attainment of some kinds of basic learning essential for the development and well-being of people at different moments and phases of their existence, *extends throughout life.*

From the perspective of the processes of curricular review and up-dating aimed at making decisions regarding what is to be taught and to be learned in primary and lower secondary education, recognizing this fact has important implications. In effect, once we have identified some kinds of learning as *absolutely basic* or *desirable basic* it obliges us to question whether they should be included in the period of compulsory education (and in this case at what level of profundity) or, due to their nature and characteristics, whether they should be part of subsequent education and training. Moreover, this obliges us to broaden our current view of primary and lower secondary education, assuming with all of its consequences the need to plan and to organize the satisfaction of learning needs which are no less basic even arising at ages more or less distant from those of compulsory education.

VI. The sixth point of reflection that we wish to treat is in regard to the currently well-known proposal to approach identification and definition of what should be taught and learned in primary and lower secondary education *in terms of competencies*. This alternative has been one of the solutions occasionally proposed in order to deal with the content overload that tends to characterize the curriculum at these levels of education. To the extent that the concept of competencies is based on the mobilization and application of knowledge, and in consequence always has a behavioral referent or correlate, the use of competencies in establishing a curriculum does indeed help to differentiate between *absolutely basic* and *desirable basic* learning.

One must remember that a particular skill or competence may possibly be developed or acquired through different kinds of knowledge, or at least kinds that are not totally identical.

However, using the concept of competencies by itself will not solve the problem of content overload. Moreover, the identification and definition in terms of competencies of the learning that is expected of students does not permit us to do without content, although at times the way of presenting curricula developed from this perspective, as well as the justifying arguments, may suggest the contrary.

In effect, just as happens in the case of curricula that define expected student learning in terms of skills, competencies go back to the mobilization (Perrenoud, 2002) and application of *knowledge* that can be of different kinds (knowledge, skills, values, attitudes). The emphasis –undoubtedly justifiable and in our opinion appropriate and opportune– on the *mobilization* or *application* of certain kinds of knowledge may lead us to forget the need for such knowledge. But the fact is that they are always there even when they are not identified and formulated explicitly as happens at times for competency-based curricula. In order to acquire or develop a skill or a competency, one must assimilate and appropriate a series of knowledge and know and *in addition* learn to mobilize and apply them.

In this sense, defining only what to teach and learn in primary and lower secondary education in terms of competencies can be misleading if we do also indicate the *knowledge associated with the application and development of the competencies* selected. In effect, even an apparently reasonable list of competencies may easily carry with it what is in fact an unwieldy volume of associated knowledge. Furthermore, one must remember that a particular skill or competence may possibly be developed or acquired through different kinds of knowledge, or at least kinds that are not totally identical. In short, even in the case of some primary and lower secondary education curricula defined in terms of competencies, it is wise to make an effort to identify the content and knowledge in a broad sense –knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes– that make possible the acquisition and development included in them.

The simultaneous employment of *key competencies* and *basic skills* associated with them thus seems to us to be another of the essential points in current efforts to "re-define what is basic in primary and lower secondary education".

VII. One of the issues in which one perceives with greater clarity the implications of the proposal of simultaneous use of key competencies and associated basic knowledge is the need in deciding what is to be taught and learned in primary and lower secondary to take into account both the learning needs derived from the immediate social and cultural environment as well as those resulting from the process of globalization. Or to express this in other terms, both the learning needs related to the exercise of *citizenship within pertinent societies* as well as those related to the exercise of *world citizenship.*

If one accepts the proposal to meet equally both types of learning needs, the simultaneous use of competencies and knowledge associates with them will be very useful. In effect, the definition of what is to be taught and learned exclusively in terms of key competencies may result in a process of curricular homogenization that can render invisible, and even hinder cultural diversity. Basic learning –above all absolutely basic learning– defined only in terms of competencies will probably be the same or very similar in all societies. However, in different countries and societies the adoption and use of these competencies take on their true meaning within the framework of various socio-cultural activities and practices (in the Vygotskian sense of the expression) that require of participants the mastery of some specific knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that are not reducible to a disembodied and decontextualized application of the competencies involved.

Taking into account knowledge associated to competencies is not only a necessity, in our opinion, for assuring their acquisition and development; it is also a guarantee for developing curricular proposals that are compatible with the aspiration to educate students for the exercise of "universal citizenship" rooted in the social, cultural, national, and regional reality of which they are a part.

VIII. The final point of reflection to which we will refer has to do with the idea of using the concept of *literacy training* and identification of the “new” and “old” literacy as a platform for decision-making about what is to be taught and learned in primary and lower secondary education[1]. As Emilia Ferreiro (2001, p. 56 and 57) reminds us, the term "*literacy*"–refers to "lettered culture", and the term "to be literate" "to be part of a lettered culture". As an initial approximation we can say, taking this characterization as a point of departure, that in the generic sense, the concept of literacy refers to a particular culture (lettered, mathematical, scientific, technological, visual, etc.), and “being literate” means being part of this culture. Cultures are characterized by the use of particular symbolic tools –written language, mathematical language, scientific language, technological language, visual language, etc.), by the existence of socio-cultural activities or practices (reading a newspaper to be informed, reading scientific and professional texts to be up to date, reading poetry to gain pleasure, etc.), and by the use of particular knowledge associated with these practices (knowing what a newspaper is, where to find one, how it is organized, how to judge the reliability of the information it offers, how it is organized, etc.).

The idea of using “new” and “old” concepts of literacy in the identification and definition of basic learning therefore involves focusing efforts first on identifying the “cultures” of which the students may be a part, and second on providing a description of them in terms of symbolic tools, socio-cultural practices, and knowledge. All of this has the purpose of using this description as a guide for decision-making regarding what is to be taught and learned in primary and lower secondary education.

In concluding this section, we return to the set of points of reflection that we have set out above, formulating a series of interconnected questions that can aid in guide us in curricular decision-making about what is to be taught and learned, within the framework of current attempts to redefine that which is basic in primary and lower secondary education:

- What are the cultures that students should be able to be a part at the end of their primary and lower secondary education in order to not be outside of today’s and tomorrow’ s society? And to be able to construct and develop a satisfactory life project? And in order to be able to access subsequent educational and training processes with guarantees of success?

- What degree and what level of knowledge and mastery of symbolic tools, socio-cultural practices and their associated knowledge must students reach in order to be a part of these cultures?

- What learning, defined in terms of competencies and associated knowledge is absolutely necessary in order to attain the level of knowledge and mastery sought in each case? What knowledge, without being equally absolutely necessary, is also desirable to provide during the period of primary and lower secondary education? How may one project this learning beyond the end of primary and lower secondary education?

- What kinds of learning are basically an exclusive responsibility of schools, and what kinds should schools share responsibility with other educational scenarios and actors? To what extent is this responsibility really shared with other educational scenarios and actors?

[1] See NCREL and Metiri Group, 2003; Coll, 2006.

COMPETENCIES and the definition of the intentions of education

In the above section we have analyzed the vital importance as well as the difficulty of correctly defining that which is basic in the curriculum, briefly indicating the relation that the concept of competencies has with this process of selecting the intentions of education. The objective of this third section is to develop in greater detail the contributions as well as the limitations of the competencies approach.

According to the OECD DeSeCo project (2002, p. 8)

"*A competency is the ability to respond to individual or social demands or to carry out an activity or a task. This external focus, guided by demand or function, has the advantage of calling attention to the personal and social demands faced by individuals. This demand-centered definition should be complemented by a view of competencies as internal mental structures in the sense that they are aptitudes, skills, or dispositions inherent to the individual. Each competency rests on a combination of inter-related practical and cognitive skills, knowledge (including tacit knowledge), motivation, values, attitudes, emotions, and other social and behavioral elements that can be mobilized jointly in order to function effectively. Although cognitive skills and the knowledge base are essential elements of a competency, it is important to not be limited to the consideration of these components and to also include other aspects such as motivation and values.*

"A competency is the ability to respond to individual or social demands or to carry out an activity or a task".

For its part, the European Commission (2004, p. 4 and 7) states:

"*The term 'competence' refers to a combination of skills, knowledge, aptitudes, and attitudes as well as the disposition to learn and to know how to learn. (...) Key competencies are a multi-functional and transferable package of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that all individuals need for their personal development, inclusion, and employment. These should have been developed by the end of the period of compulsory schooling, and should serve as a basis for subsequent learning as part of life-long learning*".

These definitions highlight some essential components of the concept of competency. The first refers to the mobilization (Perrenoud, 2002) of knowledge. According to this focus, to be competent means to be able to access and use the knowledge one has in the face of a problem. Undoubtedly, this dimension of learning is fundamental, which doesn't mean that it is completely novel. The definition of the functionality of learning as one of the indicators of its meaning has long been present in constructivist theories of learning (see, for example, Ausubel et.al., 1978).

The integration of different types of knowledge that students should acquire through school and other kinds of education is another essential component of the concept of competency. It therefore accepts the distinct psychological nature of human knowledge –one learns conceptual knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes in different ways. Therefore, one makes consider this specificity when teaching and evaluating students (Coll, 1991). However, using the concept in order to understand reality and act upon it according to one's goals involves mobilizing in an articulate and inter-related manner these different kinds of knowledge.

The concept of competency highlights a third aspect: that of the importance of the context in which learning is produced and in which it is to be subsequently used. A focus on general skills emphasizes the need to teach students how to transfer what they learn into a concrete situation as well as many others. The generalization of learning is not produced through abstraction from one context to any other, but rather from using a particular skill in various contexts –something that should therefore be thought about and planned in order to be carried out in a systematic manner within the school (Martín and Coll, 2003).

Finally, the objective of making competencies a basis for continuous life-long learning involves developing metacognitive capacities that make possible autonomous learning. A competent learner is he or she who knows and regulates knowledge self-construction processes, both from the cognitive and emotional point of view, and who moreover can use knowledge strategically, adjusting the specific circumstances of the problem faced (Bruer, 1993).

All of these ingredients of the concept of competence are in our opinion quite correct but not new. Those curricular models which have for some time given special emphasis to skills and to the selection and definition of education intentions have long held these assumptions to a greater or lesser extent. However, the important thing from our perspective is to analyze, together with to the undeniably important contributions that we have here pointed out, the limitations and risks that uncritical assumption of the concept of competency may involve for current curricular reforms.

First, as we have noted above, the identification and definition of the learning expected of students in terms of competencies does not permit us to exclude content. Moreover, defining basic learning solely in terms of competencies can be misleading, since their acquisition is always associated with a series of knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that even though implicit, are nevertheless implied. We have also alluded to the risk of cultural homogenization that may accompany the definition of basic learning in terms of competencies when the latter are separated from the socio-cultural practices within which they are inevitably contained.

We would now like to mention another risk that has to do with the false appearance of ease in the selection and definition of basic learning, as a consequence of the importance attributed in this focus to student behavior. If one absolutely denies the advantages involved in emphasizing the mobilization and application of content, the broadly-held idea that it is relatively easy to identify basic learning and to arrive at a consensus about them by defining them in terms closer to student behavior seems to us a mistake. The answer to the question of what to teach and learn in the most concrete terms is essential in the establishment of educational intentions. But before answering this question it is necessary to pose and to try to respond to another: *for what do we learn and for what do we teach?* This demands, among other things, profound reflection about the cultural relevance of learning and about the social function of school-based education. This reflection becomes much more complex than the identification of particular actions that are difficult to question. But such reflection is essential and unavoidable, and should not remain hidden in favor of an apparently technically easier solution –one which also apparently involves a lesser ideological commitment. Finally, the competency focus does not solve the problem of how to assess them properly. As happens in the case of skills, it is not easy to maintain continuity and coherence in a decision-making process that must be carried going from competencies necessarily defined in a general and abstract fashion to concretely assess student tasks that allow us to determine the degree of mastery attained of the implied skill or skills.

Competencies are a referent for educational activity and should be able to aid students in constructing, acquiring, and developing knowledge. Consequently, they are a referent for assessment of what all students have acquired at the end of primary and lower secondary education. However, competencies, like skills, are not directly subject to assessment. One must choose the best content to be able to work with them and develop them, defining the sequence and degree according to the different levels of courses; establish more precise assessment indicators (attainment targets, standards, assessment criteria, achievement levels, …) and choose the right tasks that one finally asks the student to carry out. The difficulty of not "lose the thread" of the competencies or skills in this complex process is undoubtedly very great (Martín and Coll, 2003).

The competency focus is therefore directly involved with the debate on standards –a subject to which we will dedicate the last section of this tex – although the problem of assessing competencies is not exhausted by this point. It would also involve, among other things, analyzing the proposals resulting from the perspectives of authentic assessment, understood precisely as that assessment based on the valuing of competencies (Gulikers, Bastiaens and Kirschner, 2004), a problem that goes beyond the present reflection and that we limit ourselves here to merely pointing out.

Certainly, and to conclude this section, the major danger of the concept of competencies lies in the fact that the novelty of the construct, assumed at times with excessive enthusiasm by governments and international agencies and organizations, has led many to believe that it can resolve in one sweep, or at least diminish without much loss, a series of very complex curricular questions and themes. Certainly these questions, especially those related to decisions regarding basic learning in school-based education, will not magically disappear if we stop talking about skills and begin to express ourselves in terms of competencies. On the other hand, due to the apparent but deceiving facility that it offers for defining and making concrete education intentions, the generalized and acritical use of the concept of competencies can contribute to further clouding the criteria that underlie these decisions, removing them from analysis and public discussion and presenting them as the only ones possible and desirable when in fact they are always the result of particular options.

LEARNING STANDARDS, achievement assessment, and curricular change

The use of student achievement assessments for determining the degree of efficacy of a curriculum, of the teaching or functioning of education systems, has shown spectacular development in recent decades (OECD, 2003). Various international organizations have for some years sponsored the carrying out of comparative student achievement studies in key areas of school learning (basically mathematics, science, reading, and writing) as a strategy meant to foster quality and equity improvement in education[2]. Many countries have created institutions specifically charged with assessing the education system and have put into place plans for periodically and systematically assessing student achievement at particular times during their schooling. Within this context, the proposal to place assessment at the very heart of curricular reforms is a natural result (Agrawal, 2004). Student achievement assessment is presented as an instrument that can provide the information necessary for conducting and guiding curriculum revision and up-dating and through these, improving the efficacy and quality of education (Solomon, 2003).

Among the many and diverse factors that have contributed to the disseminating and acceptance of the scheme that links achievement assessment to the planning and carrying out of curricular changes, there are three that have a determining role. The first is the emphasis on the *regulatory function* of assessment; that is, the idea of using information provided by assessment in order to make decisions aimed at introducing corrective measures, and consequently to produce improvements in different components or elements of the education system and in its operation. The second factor is the increasing importance attributed by societies to the *accountability function* of assessment; that is, using the results of assessment in order to demonstrate the degree of attainment of the objectives sought by –or the degree of fulfillment of– functions entrusted to a person, a group, a level, or any other element of the system. The third factor is the *establishment of standards* of quality in education, frequently defined in terms of levels of achievement to be attained –what students at a particular grade level should know or know how to do.

The confluence of these three ingredients is the basis for a new wave of education reforms that, beginning in the United States and supported by the philosophy of the federal *No Child Left Behind* law, has progressively extended to many

2 This is the case of the *Programme for International Student Assessment* -PISA- (http://www.pisa.oecd.org), of the OCDE, the *Third International Mathematics and Science Study* -TIMSS- (http://timss.bc.edu) and the *Progress in International Reading Literacy Study* -PIRLS-, all fostered by the *International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement* -IEA-, to cite only some well-known examples.

There are studies that show that assessment can act as a "motor" or "lever" for curricular change.

other countries and has largely contributed to placing student achievement assessment at the center of efforts to improve education as well as at the center of curricular reforms (Darling-Hammond, 2004).

Are the expectations attributed to the connection between school achievement assessment and putting into place education improvement processes justified? The results of research carried out to date oblige us to be cautious in answering this question. On the one hand, there is empirical evidence that, under certain conditions, the use of information provided by student achievement assessments can lead to education improvement (Schleicher, 2005). Furthermore, there are studies that show that assessment can act as a "motor" or "lever" for curricular change when there is an alignment between expected student learning results as reflected in the curriculum and those that are assessed through achievement tests (Barnes, Clark y Stephens, 2000; Webb, 1997).

On the other hand, there are studies that how unexpected and negative results of reforms that place their emphasis primarily or exclusively on the assessment of learning standards (Darling-Hammond, 2003; Haymore Sandholtz, Ogawa & Paredes Scribner, 2004; Sheldon & Biddle, 1998). There are also studies and research entirely critical of the results of education and curricular reforms that emphasize student achievement tests (Berliner, 2005).

Allow us to present, within the framework of this discussion, a work recently carried out that seeks to describe and analyze the role played by student achievement tests on the curricular changes that have taken place in Spain between 1990 and 2005 (Coll and Martín, to be published). The first and most important of the conclusions of this work is the almost total lack of connection between both processes. Between 1995 and 2005 eight primary student and seven secondary student achievement assessments took place in Spain. Moreover, between 1990 and 2005, two large-scale primary school curricular reforms have taken place (in 1991 and in 2003), and another equally large-scale secondary school curricular reforms (in 1991, 2000, and 2003). Except in one case[3], we have been unable to document a direct or indirect impact of the results of achievement assessment on the nature and orientation of the proposed curricular changes. O particular note is that since the end of the 1980s, the official discourse in Spain has fully incorporated the argument that he results of education system assessments, including the results of student achievement, are a key instrument for identifying and acting upon factors and processes that determine its quality. Among these are the curriculum and its operation in schools and in classrooms. Since 1993 there has been an institution called the *National Education System Quality and Assessment Institute* officially charged with periodically and systematically carrying out this assessment.

Another interesting conclusion of this work is that four of the five large-scale curricular reforms that took place in Spain during the period studied (1991-2003), both in primary and secondary education, are directly related to the promulgation of general education laws, the so-called LOGSE and the LOCE - that introduced profound changes (in the first case of less impact but nevertheless significant, and in the second case in the structure and organization of teaching. Although neither from the pedagogical nor from the normative point of view do they need to be so, the fact is that curricular reforms in our country have been associated with changes that affect the education system as a whole and have resulted in the promulgation of sweeping laws. It does not appear that this will change with the recently promulgated *Ley Orgánica de Educación* (LOE)[4], there having been announced the imminence of a new curricular change at all levels of Spanish primary and lower secondary education.

[3] Assessment of the *Reforma experimental de las Enseñanzas Medias* began between 1983 and 1987, previous to LOGSE.

[4] Ley Orgánica de Educación 2/2006. May the 3th . (BOE nº 106. May, 4 -2006).

One of the consequences of this fact is that the reasons offered in official discourse and documents in order to justify the new curricular proposals are mixed with those offered to justify more global changes in the ordering and structure of the education system, and that in both cases the confrontation of ideological and political options has been very important. We may recall, for example, the ideological and political debate that arose around the so-called *Humanities Reform* at the end of the 1990s, and which was the harbinger of the compulsory secondary education reform in 2000 and then of LOCE, in 2002, and of the subsequent curricular reforms of 2003. We also note the discussion around comprehensive basic education (an option of LOGSE) vs. the segregated and differentiated training-based option (LOCE), and the decision to close the curriculum, establishing its prescriptive elements –objectives, content, and assessment criteria– cycle by cycle in primary education or course by course in obligatory secondary education (an option of the 2000 and 2003 curricular reforms) rather than setting them for the whole set of each phase (an option of the 1991 curricular reforms).

Ideological arguments and options in favor on one or another option are mixed with pedagogical, psycho pedagogical, and didactic arguments.

In these and in many other cases, the different curricular options present carry with them structural options with strong implications for the organization and functioning of schools, In these and many other cases, ideological arguments and options in favor on one or another option are mixed with pedagogical, psycho pedagogical, and didactic arguments. In short, in these and in many other cases what is in question behind the alternatives presented, whether of structure or ordering of the system, the model, organization, or curriculum content are the *education intentions* considered by be priority and the suitability of one or another structure of the education system or of one or another curriculum, for achieving these education intentions to the greatest extent possible.

It is far from our intentions to generalize these conclusions, which are necessarily limited to a very particular period of time of the recent history of the Spanish education system. Independent of their specificity, however the attention they call to the degree of attainment of education intentions as an ultimate referent for gauging the suitability of a particular curriculum –and also of course of a particular structure of the education system– provides food for thought that can help us to better understand and judge the range and limitations of the scheme that places achievement assessments at the center of processes for designing and carrying out curricular changes.

To begin, the force of the scheme appears in all of its intensity when one view it from this perspective. Education intentions manifest themselves in the curriculum in the form of the knowledge, skills, values, attitudes, or competencies that we wish students to acquire or develop as a result of teaching. To the extent, therefore, that student achievement assessments are able to effectively provide reliable and valid information about the degree to which students learn that which one wants them to learn in the terms established in the curriculum –objectives, content, standards, competencies– it is evident that such assessments become valuable instruments for an appropriate and correct management of curricular reform processes.

However, the fact of placing an emphasis on education intentions as the ultimate referent of the curriculum also highlights some limitations and weaknesses of the scheme and which should equally be mentioned. Perhaps their greatest weakness lies in the assumption that it is possible without great difficulty go from the results of student achievement assessments to the factor that explain these results; that it is possible to make inferences about the causes of achievement directly from their measurement. And what is even more complex and arguable is the assumption that the causes to which one attributes achievement results lie unequivocally in the area of the curriculum.

We currently know that the process through which the education intentions established in the curriculum or in a list of standards are manifested through particular learning experiences for teachers and students within schools and classrooms, and through them in certain levels of achievement, is highly complex and that the process is influenced by a multitude of factors. Attempting to even partially reconstruct the process in a reverse sense in order to identify and judge the curricular factors directly involved in it is a task that is certainly much more complex and filled with uncertainties than the admittedly simplified reading we are presenting here can suggest. It is not an impossible task; but it is costly and one with predictably debatable results, and one that requires enhancing information on student achievement with other "diagnostic" information on the organization and functioning of schools, and with "process information" regarding the educational practices carried out in the classroom.

But the weakness is even greater, if possible, when we examine the more propositive and proactive side of the scheme which suggests the utilization of information on student achievement *in order to make decisions* on the curriculum. Even supposing that the precautions adopted allow us to go back and reconstruct the process in reverse, thus being able to formulate reasonable conjectures about the incidence of factors and processes relative to the curriculum on observed student achievement levels, how can we logically derive through them concrete proposals for curricular change? Between the results of achievement assessments, their interpretation, and their projection into concrete proposals of what to modify in the curriculum is an epistemological leap that can only be justified by resorting to elements very far, in the strict sense, the scheme that we are analyzing.

In other words, the key element in decision-making processes involved in carrying out curricular changes are not the results of achievement assessments, but rather the interpretive filter used in order to derive, from them, concrete proposals for action. And the main ingredient of this filter are precisely the education intentions the achievement of which assessed achievement is definitely an indicator and which constitute, as we have mentioned above, the ultimate referent for judging the suitableness of a particular curriculum. In short, achievement assessments can and do provide extremely useful information regarding the degree of attainment of education intentions; but they are not the source from which these intentions flow, nor are they an appropriate instrument for their legitimization.

In this same line of thought, the scheme that we are treating ignores a fundamental fact: that all curricula are to a great extent the reflection and manifestation, more or less precise and defined according to the case, of a particular social and cultural project. Thus, curricular change proposals are frequently much more a reflection of social changes, and consequently of changes in the social and cultural projects of dominant groups, than the result of the internal dynamics of the education system or a consequence of the results of student achievement assessments. And thus as well the weight and importance of ideological arguments and options in curriculum revision and up-dating processes. The Spanish case to which we have referred offers clear and illustrative examples of both aspects, and thus leads us to suspect that perhaps it is not, in this sense, so singular as it would seem at first glance.

Finally, curricular change processes are never the result of decisions that can be explained or justified solely from schemes of "rationality" proper to curriculum design and development. Other factors and other dynamic always intervene which, if seen from the perspective of the scheme that we are discussing, appear as unacceptably irrational. But in reality they respond to other logics, to other rationalities such as the conflict of ideological options or countervailing interests that are always present in curricular change processes (Fiala, to be published).

Curriculum, assessment, and teaching and learning specialists view each other with suspicion and function with relative independence and mutual lack of knowledge of their respective proposals and actions.

Of particular significance in this regard is, in our judgment, the great impact that student achievement assessments typically have on the communication media; especially when it is proved, as it was in the Spanish case, that these results have little or no impact on the range and orientation of subsequent curricular changes. Perhaps the underlying reason for this disassociation between, on the one hand, the media impact of the results of achievement assessments, and on the other their scant influence on subsequent curricular changes, must be sought in the fact that in reality what is being transmitted is not, or is not only, the direction and content of curricular changes. What is being transmitted is also, and above all, the support that such results can offer to one or another ideological option and priority in the establishment of education intentions.

To the weaknesses and limitations mentioned above should be added others of a more intrinsic character that can equally contribute to understanding why, on occasion, as happens in the Spanish education system, there is a lack of connection between student achievement assessments and curricular change processes. Allow us to mention two of these to which, in our opinion, not enough attention is always given. The first refers to the timing and rhythm necessary for carrying out achievement assessments and curricular change, and manifestly distinct in both cases. While the former can be carried out with relative frequency, the latter require longer periods of time.

The second has to do with the procedures and conditions necessary to carry out one and the other, which are equally different. In countries in which there is an official prescriptive curriculum, as is the case in Spain, curriculum updating and revision processes normally require a legal change. In all cases, furthermore, it is necessary to have broad social support as well as the involvement and good-will of teachers. On the other hand, achievement assessments do not generally require previous legal changes in order to be carried out, and although it is desirable that they have social support and the acceptance of teachers, neither of these are vital.

The reflections and arguments offered here speak in favor of a more critical and prudent utilization of the scheme that sees student achievement assessments as a central element in carrying out processes of curricular change. On the one hand, the scheme should be used together with other strategies and other sources of information, as for example the assessment of other aspects and processes involved in the organization and functioning of the education system. On the other hand, although information provided by achievement assessments can be of great value to judge the degree of attainment of education intentions, it is highly doubtful that they can by themselves guide and justify curricular change processes.

It would be advisable, in this sense, to complement efforts carried out during recent years to foster assessment institutions and programs with similar efforts aimed at developing criteria and procedures that facilitate the use of their results in curricular decision-making processes. It is necessary to establish close collaborative links at the State level between, on the one hand, agencies charged with achievement assessment –and consequently responsible for making pronouncements on levels of attainment of established learning standards– and on the other hand, those responsible for fostering and monitoring curricular revision and up-dating processes.

As Popham (2004) has said, both in the academic field and in planning and management of education policies, all too often curriculum, assessment, and teaching and learning specialists view each other with suspicion and function with relative independence and mutual lack of knowledge of their respective proposals and actions. This does not exactly contribute to achieving the desired alignment between expected student learning results, that which is taught and learned in classrooms, and that which is assessed through achievement tests. By not overcoming this situation one runs the risk, as has been shown in the analysis of the Spanish case, of maintaining and reinforcing the gap between achievement assessment and curricular change processes. And this, as we have shown, while continuing to carry out both while completely disconnected from each other.

What is perhaps even more serious, one runs the risk of surreptitiously and mistakenly granting to the scheme a capacity that by itself it does not possess nor can possibly have: that of generating and legitimating the education intentions that mark the orientation and content of curricular changes.

FINAL COMMENT:
EDUCATION INTENTIONS AND THE CURRENT NATURE OF THE CURRICULAR DEBATE

Far from losing their current nature, curricular subjects continue to be at the center of efforts to improve school-based education. It is not a coincidence that in the specialized literature the expressions “education reforms” and “curricular reforms” are frequently used synonymously. Academic debates about the “crisis” of the curriculum as a field of study and research, and proposals for the re-conceptualization of curricular studies (Pinar, 1988; Wraga & Hlebowitsh, 2003) have not made problems related to the curriculum disappear along with what one wants students to learn and, in consequence, with what one wants teachers to teach in schools and in classrooms. Not only have theses questions not lost their current nature; as we have had occasion to argue, they have acquired even more relevance, if possible, during the last ten or fifteen years as a consequence of the challenges of all kinds faced by modern societies and of the growing suspicion that it is necessary to profoundly change formal education in order to confront these challenges. As Moreno states (to be published, p. 208).

"Education reform all over the world is increasingly curriculum-based, as mounting pressures and demands for change tend to target and focus on both the structures and the very content of school curriculum".

Neither the emphasis on results defined in terms of learning standards, nor the increasingly generalized adoption of the skills focus or the importance granted to achievement assessment as a strategy for fostering education quality improvement processes contradict the above statement. In all cases, what is in question are education intentions; how they are defined, how they are formulated; how they are prioritized; how they are attained; how it can be proven whether they have been attained or not. These are all curricular questions *par excellence*. And they are undoubtedly decisive questions because, without intending to be grandiloquent, is there anything more important from the point of view of the quality of education than defining education intentions?

Someone could respond with reason that just as important as defining education intentions is being able to carry them out. Obviously. But surely we would be in agreement as well that efficacy, success, and quality education do not consist in achieving just any results; but those that we consider to be the right ones. We know that on road that must be taken in order to achieve particular education intentions many difficulties will arise; so many that it is very easy to become lost. That is so. But in our opinion it is not less so than the measures that must be taken in order to navigate with greater possibilities of success in this swampy terrain that is the curriculum. We must be guided by the very education intentions that we pursue. To point out what one thinks that it is essential for our future citizens to learn is not sufficient in order to assure that such learning will be constructed. But it does mark with a certain clarity the direction to follow.

The question of *how* we should teach our students in order to foster to the maximum their learning processes is not far from the *what* we want them to learn and the *why* we want them to do so. Even less independent are decisions regarding the *what* and *how* to assess the degree to which one achieves desired intentions. This hierarchy in the sequence of the definition and development of the curriculum is not incompatible with the circularity and recursivity that should precede design and development processes in order to contribute to their progressive improvement. But it makes manifest the beginning of a process, and with it the transcendence of this first step.

The role of guide that education intentions perform in regard to other school reform decisions is not limited exclusively to the rest of the elements of the curriculum. Not all professional development focuses are, for example, equally coherent with the intention to develop in students autonomous learning competencies that allow them to continue to learn throughout their lives. Initial and continuing teacher training should therefore take into account education intentions, as should the type of teaching materials or the support of other professionals that might be needed within schools (supervisors, psycho-pedagogical aids, socio-educational services, etc.) to name only some of the fundamental aspects of any reform process.

Throughout this text we have paid attention to three themes that seem to us to be essential in the current curricular debate: the definition of that which is basic; contributions of the competencies focus; and the function of standards. The three undoubtedly have their own identities. But the three revolve around the problem of education intentions defined through the expected results expressed jointly in terms of cultural competencies and knowledge. Arriving at the correct definition continues to be for us one of the fundamental challenges of any education reform.

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Curriculum change and Teacher Professional Development

WITHIN THE AGENDA OF EDUCATION FOR ALL (EFA) GLOBAL ACTION PLAN

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UNESCO FRAMEWORK, Progress and Challenges

Since the adoption of the Dakar Framework of Action (2000), there has been tangible progress in trying to attain the Education for All (EFA) goals by 2015[1], particularly related to the expansion of formal schooling and the reduction of gender disparities. Five results are outlined by UNESCO (2006) as major indicators of progress[2]. At the same time, in order to fully achieve the EFA goals by 2015, UNESCO points out six urgent challenges:

In order to fully achieve the EFA goals by 2015, UNESCO points out six urgent challenges.

I. Strengthen the policies and the programs of early Childhood Education and its positive effects on the primary level;

II. The increase in formal schooling enrolment based upon different approaches and strategies;

III. Make basic education free, which will improve the learning opportunities of more poor people;

IV. Give adequate attention (in terms of policy, content and learning material) to adult literacy closely tied to the local community demands and needs;

V. Remove obstacles to girls' access to schooling as well as approach issues of gender equity in schools;

VI. Improve the educational quality that could lead to valuable knowledge and the development of competencies.

The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005, focusing on the quality imperative, asserts that Education for All cannot be achieved without improving quality[3]. On the other hand, recent studies[4] clearly show that social and emotional learning programmes significantly improve students' academic performance as they are highly complementary in getting good results.

1 The six goals refers to the expansion of early childhood care and education, the provision of free and compulsory primary education for all, the promotion of learning and life skills for young people and adults, the increase of adult literacy by 50 per cent, the achievement of gender parity by 2005 and gender equality by 2015, and the improvement of the quality of education. See: portal.unesco.org/education/en/ev.php-URL_ID=42332&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

2 These results refer to:

I. Nearly 20 million new students in Sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia entered primary schools;

II. 47 countries achieved universal primary education;

III. More girls are enrolled in primary schools;

IV. The number of secondary students rose substantially –more than four times the increase in the number of primary students;

V. In about 70 of 110 countries surveyed, public spending on education increased as a share of national income". See UNESCO. 2006. *Education for All (EFA). Global Action Plan: Improving Support to Countries in Achieving the EFA Goals. Edition of 10 July 2006. A basis for enhancing collective effort among the EFA convening agencies*. Paris: UNESCO.

3 The report emphasizes two critical dimensions:

I. "Learners' cognitive development as the major explicit objective of all educational systems" and

II. "Education's role in promoting values and attitudes of responsible citizenship and in nurturing creative and emotional development". See UNESCO. 2005. *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005. Education for All. The Quality Imperative. Summary.* Paris: UNESCO.

4 The New York Times, Shriver T. P. and Weissberg, R. 2005. *No Emotion Left Behind. 16th August 2005.* New York: The New York Times.

In order to improve educational quality, UNESCO outlines a number of needed conditions that should be met, such as well-trained teachers, good and sufficient learning materials, the use of appropriate languages for learning, adequate instruction time and an emphasis on literacy as a tool of learning, structured teaching, as well as clean, safe and child-friendly schools supported by good principal leadership.

One of the main objectives of the Education Sector of UNESCO is to develop a more comprehensive vision and articulated strategy which is currently designed and implemented through the EFA Global Action Plan. This Plan should help countries in developing an integrated response to the existing challenges for achieving the EFA goals. The plan can provide a good opportunity to help recreate, renovate and strengthen the role of curriculum in educational reforms, in particular through a shift:

I. From access to success in approaching the real and continued democratization of educational opportunities;
II. From policies and programs mainly made by inputs to those carefully based on wide open processes of educational quality;
III. From a curtailed vision of Basic Education assimilated to the primary level to one that fosters and encompasses Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education.

The Global Action Plan clearly states that the six EFA goals altogether form the Basic Education Agenda, which reaffirms the holistic approach well embedded in the conceptualization of EFA goals at Dakar (2000). This implies a significant cultural and political change in the ways we understand the education system and its interrelated parts, much more in the idea of overcoming a segregated and insulated vision of each educational ladder or sub-systems which has been extremely harmful to students' learning opportunities. Furthermore, the removal of institutional, pedagogical, curricular and teaching barriers between Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education is a critical step in further democratizing Basic Education, not only by increasing enrolment and the completion rates but mainly by ensuring real access to pertinent knowledge and skills (the relevant curriculum).

The Global Action Plan clearly states that the six EFA goals altogether form the Basic Education Agenda.

The sole consideration of access as the critical dimension of educational equality has proven insufficient and there is much evidence of consistent gaps between enrollment, completion rates and learning outcomes. The acquisition of pertinent knowledge and skills is an increasingly leading reference that informs the policy and curriculum framework so as to define the scope of the concept of educational quality.

For example, in relation to the Sub-Saharan African countries, the ADEA (Association for the Development of Education in Africa) points out[5] that today nine out of ten children enter school and out of these nine, six complete Primary Education. Within this last group, only three master the basic learning.

In Latin America (Opertti 2005)[6], the strong growth in enrolment in Initial Education, universal Primary School attendance, the increase in the completion rates of Primary and the progressive universal access into Lower Secondary Education, and the marked growth enrolment in Lower Secondary Education that also reflects the high number of over-age students[7], are indicative of practically irreversible trends, of relatively consolidated results and a real democratization of schooling opportunities among the socially more deprived sectors.

5 Vespoor, A. 2006. *La lettre de l'ADEA. Volume special V18N1 Biennale ADEA 2006.* Paris: ADEA.

6 Opertti, R. 2005. *Basic Universalism and Educational Reforms. Seminar "Constructing a New Social Policy in the Latin American Region – Basic Universalism". INDES, 5 to 7 October 2005.* Washington D.C.: IDB (Interamerican Development Bank).

7 UNESCO. 2005. *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005. The Quality Imperative.* Paris: UNESCO.

However, the greatest risk in this process of increasing school-attendance is that the relevant content and the indispensable minimum quality levels are progressively deteriorating. The whole system is beset by high dropout rates concentrated in the poorest sectors of the population[8].

International organizations are also taking into account the impact of policies and programs (typically the loans and technical cooperation programs) mainly aimed at facilitating access to educational services through, for example, investments in physical facilities and educational equipments. A recent World Bank evaluation report (2006) on the support to Primary Education states that the great majority of Primary Education projects have been explicitly orientated towards achieving objectives of access expansion and much less on those ones centred on improving students' learning outcomes[9]. A supply side approach mainly channelled through the creation of new schools within easy walking distance of home, the hiring of more teachers and the support to community involvement, have been the principal responses to the goal of enrolment expansion.

Bearing in mind that near 90% of the World Bank lending to Primary Education has taken place since the beginning of the EFA movement in 1990, it is clear that a considerable part of the available international funds for EFA has followed a pattern of delivery of services and inputs mainly related to facilitating access as the pillar of educational equity.

The World Bank evaluation report mentioned the need of emphasizing the achievement of basic knowledge and skills in literacy and numeracy as key factors in reducing poverty, and not just carrying out programmes whose principal concern is circumscribed to increase enrolment and completion rates. Moreover, the progressive reduction of the learning outcome gaps between the poor and the more advantaged children should be highlighted as a core issue as we understand that these gaps greatly feed economic and social disparities in national societies[10].

The priority given to learning outcomes should also be seen as an opportunity to revise and redefine the way in which international programmes are designed, structured and implemented, taking into deep account that frequently there is a tendency to include certain conditions, inputs and resources as necessary without a careful consideration of their justifications, their contents and their integration in a common policy framework. The proper logic of project design and management should be changed. How is curriculum incorporated? Is it seriously considered under a long-term perspective, in international programmes that support countries in attaining EFA goals?

Many times educational investments taken in an ample sense are conceptualized and defined as valuable inputs for achieving educational quality devoid of a substantial vision around the purposes and the objectives of education as well as of a solid curriculum framework. One good example of a sort of a "shopping list input approach" could be the value given per se to the increase in instructional time without paying enough attention to its purposes, contents and impact as well as how teachers and students accept, react and adapt to them. Asking quality for what and for who is a needed societal question that constitutes the first critical interface between stakeholders coming from inside and outside the educational system.

8 Marcela Gajardo indicates that in the fifth year of schooling only 63% of poor children in South America and 32% in Central America and the Caribbean remain in the education system. These figures are 15% and 6% respectively for the ninth year. Gajardo, M. 1999. *Working Document No. 15. Educational Reforms in Latin America. The Balance of a Decade.* Santiago de Chile: PREAL. See Page 41.

9 The World Bank, Independent Evaluation Group (IEG). 2006. *From Schooling Access to Learning Outcomes: An Unfinished Agenda. An Evaluation of World Bank Support to Primary Education. Executive Summary.* Washington D.C.: World Bank.

10 See for example the outcomes of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) which assesses how far students near the end of compulsory education have acquired some of the knowledge and skills (Mother Tongue, Math and Sciences) that are essential for full participation in society. You can consult the outcomes of the 2003 assessment in which 41 countries participated, in the document "Learning for Tomorrow's World – First Results from PISA 2003". See: www.pisa.oecd.org/document/55/0,2340,en_32252351_32236173_33917303_1_1_1_1,00.html

CURRICULUM as a Way of Attaining Quality

WHY Curriculum Matters?

Curriculum issues, either in explicit or implicit way, are inextricably linked to the current thinking and action on educational concerns and reforms around the world. Juan Manuel Moreno (2006) outlines that "Education reform all over the world is increasingly curriculum-based, as mounting pressures and demands for change tend to target and focus on both the structures and the very content of school curriculum"[11]. He also highlights the inextricably political nature of the curriculum debate which is marked by "ideological clashes, conflicts of interest and difficult process of consensus building". When we discuss curriculum orientations we are contributing to drawing the future of national societies, its well-being and its development.

We aren't advocating a sort of curriculum determinism as an all encompassing explanation of what happens in education. What we outline is the permanent need of a close and careful look at how the curricula are conceptualized and organized as a sound way of designing and implementing reforms linked to core definitions of what we wish and expect of the role of education in society. At least four issues arise as the most significant ones in the current regional debates about educational and curricula transformations[12]:

I. How to foster the vision of education as a right, an ample and a profound citizenship education, from childhood to the tertiary level covering cultural, political, economic and social aspects;
II. How to facilitate in education a balanced personal development that could contribute to a happy, healthy and self-rewarding life;
III. How to bring to reality the idea of education as a key economic and social policy in promoting national development and in raising economic competitiveness;
IV. How to acknowledge and move forward on education as an irreplaceable factor in improving the well-being of the poorest population, in combating exclusion and in contributing to closing the equity gaps in the household income distribution[13].

It is quite difficult to advance in improving the processes and the outcomes of educational quality without developing a comprehensive curriculum vision that justifies why and what is relevant and pertinent (basic and needed) to teach to children and young people according to an overall interpretation of societal expectations and demands. This interpretation is always debatable and controversial, and is deeply grounded on historical, ideological and political concerns and arguments. A good example is the passionate discussions about the objectives and the content of National History programs in Secondary Education, particularly in post-conflict societies[14].

11 Moreno, J. M. 2006. *Chapter 11. The Dynamics of Curriculum Design and Development. In School Knowledge in Comparative and Historical Perspective. Changing Curricula in Primary and Secondary Education (edited by Aaron Benavot and Cecilia Braslavsky).* Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre. Pages 195-209.

12 The IBE worldwide Community of Practice in Curriculum Development (2005 onwards) carry out during this year a series of regional seminars (Asia and Latin America) centered on the issues of Basic Education which contribute to the identification of an inter-regional agenda based on common problems and challenges;
see http://www.ibe.unesco.org/cops/workshops/COPs_Workshops.htm

13 For example in relation to Latin America and the Caribbean, a good discussion around equity, development and education can be found in: The World Bank. 2003. *Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean Breaking with History? Chapter 9 Policies on Assets and Services. 9.1 Education.* Washington: World Bank.
In regards to the European educational systems, Denis Meuret thoughtfully discusses the complex relationships between equity and efficiency based on PISA results (2000 and 2003): see Meuret, D. 2005. *The Equity of Educational Systems: A Better Construction of the Concept (original in French).*Geneva.

14 IBE has produced a series of country case studies - Bosnia and Herzegovina, Guatemala, Lebanon, Mozambique, Northern Ireland., Rwanda and Sri Lanka - that examine "the role of educational policy change in social and civic reconstruction and the redefinition of national citizenship within the context of identity-based conflicts; see IBE-UNESCO. 2004. *Studies in Comparative Education. Education, Conflict and Social Cohesion (edited by Sobhi Tawil and Alexandra Harley).* Geneva: IBE-UNESCO.

When we approach the need of deliminating and selecting issues to be included in the curricula, we must face the historical problem of an overloaded curriculum and the notorious difficulties in removing contents when new educational reforms are implemented. Cesar Coll and Elena Martín (2006) have outlined in a recent seminar organized by UNESCO Education Regional Office for Latin American and the Caribbean (OREALC), that "the curricula and the school hours are not elastic"[15] disregarding students' expectations and needs as the central focus of the educational system. Coll and Martín establish the distinction "between what is basic and absolutely necessary and what is basic and desirable in the basic education curriculum"[16]. Moreover they point out that the absolutely basic refers to the core learning that is essential to fostering the personal and the social development of the student, allows them to carry out their life projects and facilitates social inclusion.

Frequently, the discussion around what to include or to exclude from the curricula is not aligned with the analysis of the role of education in society but instead, more related to maintaining historical disciplinary identities and traditional forms and contents of knowledge organization as well as to the strong influence of corporative interests around them. Christian Cox (2006) refers to the "cultural hardness of the organizational categories of knowledge and the isomorphism observable between such structuring and teachers' professional identity"[17].

We must face the historical problem of an overloaded curriculum and the notorious difficulties in removing contents when new educational reforms are implemented.

The Higher Secondary Education reform in Argentina (1997 onwards) is a good example of the problems and the bottlenecks that arise when an attempt is made to define curriculum categories based more on problems and projects than on disciplines. When it comes to implement the curriculum change, authorities were compelled to design a more traditional curriculum based on disciplines in direct response to teachers' close defense of their historical disciplinary identities. Cecilia Braslavsky (late IBE Director, 2000-2005), who was in charge of this process of educational reform, considers that "an attempt to change the frontiers between disciplines also implies redefining teachers' positions and identities"[18].

15 Coll, C. and Martín, E. 2006. *The curriculum at debate. The Curriculum: the Current Debate, Basic Learning, Competencies and Standards. Document Presented in the Context of the Second Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of the Regional Project of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean /PRELAC).*Santiago de Chile: OREALC-UNESCO.

16 Ibid. Coll, C. and Martín, E. 2006.

17 Cox, C. 2006. *Chapter 14. Cecilia Braslavsky and the Curriculum: Reflections on a Lifelong Journey in Search of Quality education for All. In School Knowledge in Comparative and Historical Perspective. Changing Curricula in Primary and Secondary Education (edited by Aaron Benavot and Cecilia Braslavsky).* Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre. Pages 245-258.

18 Braslavsky, C. (editor) 2001. *Los procesos contemporáneos de cambios de la educación secundaria en América Latina: Análisis de casos en América del Sur. In La Educación Secundaria. ¿Cambio o inmutabildidad? Análisis y Debate de Procesos Europeos y Contemporáneos.* Buenos Aires: Santillana.

The problems is not only related to the redefinition of the traditional boundaries among disciplines in response to the changing epistemological nature of how knowledge is constructed, validated and finally applied in daily life, but also about how the new knowledge organization really impacts on the processes of teaching and learning in the classroom. For example a social sciences syllabus could surely be a better way of providing and sharing with students more comprehensive frames of reference to understand the world they live in than a traditional syllabus mainly made by History and Geography as separated and disconnected subjects. But it could also generate a lot of confusion and uncertainty if teachers and supervisors oppose the new syllabus and not even try to understand it. It is what is called by Jacinto and Freites Frey[19] "resistance to face a reform"[20].

A likely temptation is to return to the past, to a "more comfortable and less troublesome" pre-reform stage.

A likely temptation is to return to the past, to a "more comfortable and less troublesome" pre-reform stage as a reaffirmation of traditional teaching identities and knowledge boundaries, and bearing, specially to the students, all its consequences in disengaging more and more the curriculum from today's societal challenges and opportunities. In quite opposite terms, we can try to be more in tune with epistemological changes in knowledge construction and development which pose the urgent need, among other aspects, of working curricula changes in Basic and Teachers' Education based on common approaches, objectives and strategies.

Besides this, there is an increasing recognition – at least in Latin America– that the reform proposals based on training teachers mainly through a making-aware and sharing-information process have very limited impact. They are in fact very inattentive to the historical and cultural profile of teachers. Beatriz Avalos (2006) clearly states that "experience and research shows that this type of initiative (training approach) does not produce good results in terms of changes among teachers"[21]. We address this issue in the following point.

A CURRICULUM Vision

Essentially when we discuss the challenge of achieving better levels of equity and quality as one main concern, trying to understand and profit from their mutual implications and synergies, we are addressing the analysis of the curriculum visions that contextualize and inform the relationships between these two concepts.

Many times we hear and read the argument that the attainment of a high-quality education has been damaged due to an explosive and quite chaotic enrolment democratization processes in Primary and Secondary Education. At least three issues should be taken into consideration:

I. It is more different to talk about the objectives and the content of quality education mainly related to the expectations and to the needs of the most advantaged students than under a perspective of including all of them through the diversification of curricular pathways and of pedagogical strategies. Inclusion as a broad concept supports an equitable high-quality education. UNESCO (2005) defines inclusion as a process of encouraging and responding to the diversity of students' needs through the participation in the learning, in the culture and in the communities, and also reducing the exclusion that is generated from within and outside the education system[22].

19 Cited Avalos B. 2006. *The curriculum at debate. Curriculum and Teachers' Professional Development. Document Presented in the Context of the Second Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of the Regional Project of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean /PRELAC).* Santiago de Chile: OREALC-UNESCO.

20 Based on the educational reforms taken place in Argentina, Chile and Uruguay, Jacinto and Freites Frey conceptualize three ways of receiving a reform:

I. passive acceptance (adherence to the letter but not to the spirit);

II. creative adaptation (the new and the old are introduced in appropriate ratios into the school context) or

III. resistance as it was mentioned. See Jacinto, C., Frentes Frey, A. 2006. *Ida y vuelta: política educativa y las estrategias de de las escuelas secundarias en contextos de pobreza. Estudios de casos en América Latina.* Buenos Aires: IIPE (work prepared for the International Handbook on School Effectiveness, print in process).

21 Ibid. Avalos, B. 2006.

22 UNESCO. 2005. *Guidelines for Inclusion: Ensuring Access to Education for All.* Paris: UNESCO.

This implies changes in the contents, approaches, structures and strategies which can lead to including all boys and girls under the premise that the primary institutional responsibility is to educate everyone.

II. The increase in enrolment rates particularly at the Primary and Secondary levels, as major indicators of concrete advances in the attainment of EFA goals, is an on-going democratization process that allows moving forward on educational equity mainly through access to formal schooling, but it is very far from achieving the goal of providing quite similar conditions of success to everyone independent of their backgrounds. The agenda of educational change, in both developed and developing countries, is deeply influenced by the precept of giving a real chance of success to each child. The idea of "No Child Left Behind"[23] supposes indeed a renovating and a removing vision of how we understand and see children and youth culture, encompassing sound combinations of social and emotional learning and academic performance.

III. Quality education deals with both processes and results along the different levels of an equity continuum – access to and completion of the compulsory schooling period through pertinent and significant learning that can lead to a decent personal and social involvement in society. Quality shouldn't be simply regarded as the sum and the accumulation of conditions and inputs that proved to be relevant in improving the processes of teaching and learning, but also highlights the importance of giving them content within a framework of educational policy and a curriculum vision. We can agree, for example, that good school leadership is a potential positive factor in improving educational quality, but for which objectives, under which conception of curriculum and school, and by what content should it be fostered?

The Association for the Development of Education in Africa (ADEA) has been applying a praxis approach that consists in learning from the action to improve the action. ADEA outlined a series of key factors in improving the quality of education and the students' outcomes –for example, the relevance of local planning and management, the principals' role, teachers' professional development, the importance of the language of instruction and direct financial support to schools.

Quality shouldn't be simply regarded as the sum and the accumulation of conditions and inputs that proved to be relevant in improving the processes of teaching and learning.

The impact that could be attained through these factors is clearly linked to core definitions about why and what to teach in Basic Education as well as to the educational and curriculum framework that contextualize and support them[24].

[23] The educational reforms currently underway face the challenge of giving to each child a real opportunity of attaining a high quality and pertinent education during the compulsory school period. For example, this is one of the great concern that informs processes of educational change in countries such as:

a) China - in an international seminar held at Geneva (6-8 July 2005 organized by IBE with the objective of setting up the worldwide Community of Practice in Curriculum Development) Zhou Nan-Zhao outlined the profound Chinese curriculum change based on the challenges, among others, of transforming the teaching and teacher centered education into learning and learner centered as well the college-bound cognitive learning into multi-dimensional learning for higher learning, for the world of work and for responsible citizenship.

b) France where the importance of providing conditions and opportunities through a common cycle of compulsory schooling is central to the development of each student in terms of successful educational results, continuing its formation, building up its own personal and professional future and being able to succeed in life (Orientation law about the future of the school -original in French-, 2005, see www.loi.ecole.gouv.fr). In the recent neighborhood riots ("banlieu"), one key issue still under discussion is whether the society and in particularly the state through its schools network, provide pertinent schooling opportunities to children and youth people living in socially deprived areas.

c) Great Britain whose White Paper on Secondary Education establishes that "our aim is to transform secondary and post-secondary education so that all young people achieve and continue in learning until at least the age of 18" (White Paper on 14-19 Education and Skills, 2005, see www.dfes.gov.uk).

[24] Ibíd. Verspoor, A. 2006.

Curriculum, with ample conceptualization and understanding as well as its careful implementation in a needed and fluent feedback relationship with the design stage, could be a wonderful opportunity to set up substantial goals and objectives as well as feasible strategies within a common educational policy framework. But it could also be, under a narrow minded and prescriptive vision, an implacable burden to implement changes. Even under processes of educational reforms, the way curriculum is interiorized by supervisors, principals and teachers, could lead to perpetuate practices totally contrary to the changes pursued.

The prescriptive top-down vision is linked to certain miscomprehension and underestimation of teachers' role in educational reforms. Avalos rightly states that "through their long teaching careers, teachers have developed their own opinion about what to teach and about how things should be done"[25]. They cannot be considered as mere executors of "others" designs and plans disregarding their backgrounds, visions and feelings about educational and curricula reform.

Naively we can convince ourselves that we are facing an implementation problem, and thus focus our efforts in carrying out training programs as a possible solution, but in reality, we can hold a curtailed vision of the design process without much interaction and awareness from what happens in the field. What are the visions, the attitudes and the practices of teachers, principals and supervisors? Consequently one issue under discussion is the crucial relevance of how we construct and develop a curriculum vision with key stakeholders in order to foster and sustain substantial transformations that allows us to move on in an integrated way on the issues of quality, efficiency and equity. This is, for example, a key aspect of the approach that sustains the draft Action Plan for the Second Decade of Education in Africa (2006-2015)[26].

From the UNESCO International Bureau of Education's perspective, the curriculum is at the same time a political and technical issue very much embedded in the complex interfaces between society, politics and education, involving a wide range of institutions and actors. The interfaces are complex, dynamic, controversial and non-linear under the vision of curriculum as a continuous development of processes and outcomes.

A broad view of curriculum comprising values, skills, knowledge, attitudes, and competencies as well as social and cultural returns could help us to understand it as a complex and multidimensional process, or in a comprehensive vision, as the hub of educational change. As suggested by Braslavsky (2002) the curriculum can be defined "as a dense and flexible contract between politics/society and teachers"[27]. To foster this conception we could look for adequate and dynamic combinations of universal concepts that substantially support operational procedures (density) as well as clear and real opportunities and margins to choose between options and to be able to implement them (flexibility). And also be aware of the existence of two possible situations that go in the opposite direction of density and flexibility:

I. An educational system with "insufficient national guidelines" for curriculum management and evaluation –a good example is a wrongly conceived decentralization process that transfers "everything" to the local levels as if they were homogenous, and does not maintain a well equipped national unit to lead and monitor.

II. A rigid overloaded sum of disconnected procedures and rules that curtail school autonomy and the initiative spirit of its actors –a good example is a highly centralised ritualised education system whose schools must ask for permission to implement community activities following multiples channels and rules.

25 Ibid. OREALC-PRELAC, Avalos, B. 2006.

26 African Union (2006). *Report of the Decade of Education in Africa (1997-2006), Revised Draft, May 2006.* African Union: Addis Ababa (Ethiopia). Page 65.

27 Braslavsky, C. 2002. *The New Century's Change: New Challenges and Curriculum Responses*. New Delhi: COBSE-International Conference.

Teachers are deeply involved in the process of curriculum change as curriculum developers.

Marc Demeuse and Christine Strauven (2006) state that a global vision of curriculum should include the learning outcomes to achieve, the pedagogical and the didactic strategies around the process of learning and teaching, the didactic and the pedagogical supports for teachers and students, the disciplinary contents, the evaluation of the learning outcomes and what has been achieved, and the management of the curriculum[28].

Under a comprehensive vision of curriculum, teachers are deeply involved in the process of curriculum change as curriculum developers including periods of co-design and of co-implementation but mainly as key historical actors among others, in discussing which curriculum is most suited to society expectations and demands. In any educational reform that expects to be successful, teachers are irreplaceable sources of legitimacy in the conceptualization and in the definition of the role of curriculum in society, which doesn't imply the mere acceptance of their visions and their proposals. There is indeed a need of acknowledging their role and make it public and clear for all key stakeholders as a critical foundation of the collective construction on curriculum change.

Curriculum issues are neither endogenous nor exogenous to any person and to any institution. The curriculum expresses and reflects the values, the attitudes, the expectations and the feelings of a society (see 2.1 above) towards its well-being and its development as well as the complex mix of stakeholders' visions and interests which often times are contrary to each other. It is both controversial in political and in technical terms and we should recognize its conflictive nature.

Under wide different formats and structures, curriculum encompasses foundations, visions, objectives, contents, inputs, processes and outcomes mainly related to the ways of conceptualizing, organizing and implementing the processes of teaching and learning. A comprehensive vision of curriculum can lead us to better understanding how to address critical issues of educational quality as part of the curriculum agenda and within a vision of Education as a Public Policy.

It should be recalled that the curriculum can be viewed as both a product (the "what") and a process (the "how"). Both aspects are equally important. Quality learning needs, as prerequisites, both solid curriculum documents that reflect a society's vision of what and how students should learn, and innovative implementation strategies that lead to a friendly learning environment and inspired teaching and learning practices. When we speak of curriculum development as a process, we refer to five dimensions (Gimeno and Perez, 1993): what is prescribed and regulated within the political and administrative realm, what is designed for professors and students, how it is organized in a school setting, the curriculum in proper action and the curriculum evaluated[29].

BUILDING UP the Curriculum

The process of building up the curriculum has its unique feature in each national setting as a complex outcome of the interpretations and mediations that key stakeholders do of society demands and needs. There isn't such "successful" international model to follow. Instead of importing and buying models, we should focus on finding out a delicate equilibrium between global society and national needs. As Cox (2006) indicates, if such balance is not attempted, "is there not the risk of contents (globally referred or aligned) without context (national socio-economic realities)?" [30]

[28] Demeuse, M and Strauven, C. 2006. *Développer un curriculum d'enseignement ou de formation. Des options politiques au pilotage. Introduction.* Bruxelles: de boeck. Pages 9-28.

[29] Gimeno, S. and Pérez, G. 1993. *Learn and Transform Teaching (original in Spanish).* Madrid: Publisher Morata.

[30] Ibid. Cox, C. 2006. Pages 245-258.

Conceptualization of diversity as a socio-pedagogical working tool that could lead to inclusion through the application of multiple didactic strategies.

On one hand, there is a clear tendency towards a certain universalization of curriculum concerns and issues which is related, among other aspects:

I. To the globalization process and its expectations and requirements as well as the need to respond to them;

II. To a increasing recognition of the relevance of core common issues –for example citizenship, environmental and HIV&AIDS education;

III. To significant similarities in the structure, contents and methods of new curricula proposals[31] (Meyer, 1999);

IV. To an increasingly awareness that curriculum change faces similar implementation challenges in different world regions as outlined by the IBE[32]. Braslavsky (2004) noted that the educational systems are build up more in relation to an imagined than a real society and that the imagine forms of progress are quite similar in all parts of the world[33].

On the other hand, the emergence, the development and the consolidation of national and local identities, with a growing self-esteem build up around native cultures, languages and knowledge –for example the cases of African countries in general and of indigenous people in Latin America– question a curriculum vision which leaves aside the consideration of multiculturalism and the respect for diversity as opportunities to facilitate and advance in inclusion as well as to improve educational quality. It is much more than a problem of establishing the right of each person to an education based on diversity, of contextualising knowledge and of highlighting local realities and their cultures. It primarily implies the conceptualization of diversity as a socio-pedagogical working tool that could lead to inclusion through the application of multiple didactic strategies.

For example the debate in Africa around the utilization of native languages in education is linked to a double objective, not always in tune between each other, of consolidating national and local identities, and of facilitating children access to core competencies and knowledge in their mother tongue language.

The bilingual model is under question. Among other factors that justify this appreciation Adriaan Verspoor (2006) mentions insufficient teachers' training, poor pedagogical materials in African languages, lack of cultural pertinence of the programs and absence of clearly defined national linguistic policies[34]. In replacement of the bilingual model, an additive one is proposed which combines the utilization of African languages as instructional for a 6 to 8 year period and the international/official language through an education of good quality. It is quite a big promising challenge for the additive model to find out ways of introducing students to universal knowledge and skills based on a revalorization process of native cultures and languages and at the same time of close nearness to global realities.

The troublesome equilibrium between global and national realities could be addressed by a historical competence of a genealogical nature as defined by Braslavsky. Cox (2006) outlines Braslavsky's concept that implies the use of tradition (traditional type), the examples of other nations or cases (exemplary type), criticism (critical type) and interpretation and creation to build future realities[35].

31 Meyer, J. 1999. *Globalization and the Curriculum: Problems for Theory in the Sociology of Education.* Lisbon: University of Lisbon (presented at the International Symposium, University of Lisbon, November 1999).

32 The set of regional seminars done by IBE from 1998 onwards on curriculum development and capacity building allow the identification of many significant commonalities between different world regions regarding curriculum design, management and evaluation. See IBE-UNESCO. 2005. *A Community of Practice as a Global Network of Curriculum Developers. Framework Document.* Geneva: IBE-UNESCO. www.ibe.unesco.org/COPs.htm

33 Braslavsky, C. 2004. *Desafíos de las reformas curriculares frente al imperativo de la cohesión social. Reforma Curricular y Cohesión Social en América Latina. Informe Final del Seminario Internacional organizado conjuntamente por la Oficina Internacional de Educación y la Oficina de UNESCO para Centroamérica en Costa Rica (5 al 7 de noviembre del 2003 en San José, Costa Rica).* Ginebra: OIE/UNESCO. Pages 36-47.

34 Ibid. Verspoor, A. 2006.

35 Ibid. Cox, C. 2006. Page 255.

This historical framework could be a way of giving pertinence, meaning and content to core universal competencies that many times are conceptualised and defined in highly abstract terms with no clear links to national and local realities. How we contextualize and apply competencies facing concrete situations?

Moreover Braslavsky (2004) suggested the possibility on moving forward on developing a "glocal" curriculum[36] which can embrace certain trends that seem to be increasingly universal. She mentioned:

I. Global comprehensiveness –core subjects such as Mathematics, Languages and Sciences aimed at promoting an Education for All, the teaching of English as a foreign language and the incorporation of transversal themes related to worldwide concerns (for example, to sustainable development).

II. The progressive openness of the curriculum structure to activities that are defined at the school and local levels.[37]

III. New approaches in teaching disciplines such as the resolution of mathematical problems in daily life contexts, and the communication approach in mother tongue instruction.

IV. An increased concern for instruction hours of religious education. An study done by Jean-François Rivard and Massimo Amadio (2003) indicated that in half of 73 countries under analysis, religious education appears at least one time in the instructional time of the first nine years of schooling either as compulsory or optional courses[38].

V. The emergence of multicultural education as a cross-cutting theme which can be approached by a group of disciplines or even all of them under different formats (compulsory/elective). Many times this is also linked to the renovation of learning strategies and methodologies (for example, practice negotiation and peaceful handling of conflicts).

A curriculum conceptualization around universal concerns and issues, based on the approaches by competencies, could provide clues in looking for an adequate equilibrium between global and national realities insofar as we understand that the set of resources we can mobilize in developing competencies –for example, values, attitudes, knowledge and skills – for approaching situations are processes of historical and social construction whose intentionality and meaning is defined by institutions and actors in a dynamic way.

AN AGENDA to Move Forward

ROLE AND DIMENSIONS of Teacher Development

It is clear that advancing on the EFA Global Action Plan requires as a needed condition the construction, sharing and appropriation of a curriculum vision, from childhood to tertiary education, among stakeholders. The progressive build-up of this vision is based on the assumption that teachers' professional development fully informs the design and the implementation of curriculum change in Basic Education. Curriculum is defined, as mentioned above (see 2.2), as encompassing foundations, objectives, contents, processes and outcomes, therefore, teachers' visions, concerns and practices are essential components of defining and putting into practice the core ideas, values, attitudes and behaviours set up in the curriculum.

Teachers should not be solely regarded as implementers of the curricula, holding a traditional vision that separates the design from its concrete development in schools and classrooms, and forgetting that teachers are historical actors and that their historicity is an irreplaceable element of the processes of curriculum change. Ivor Goodson (2006) says that the key lacuna in externally mandated change (for example, driven by globalization and marketization as external forces to the educational system) is the link to "teachers' professional beliefs and to teachers' own personal missions"[39].

36 Ibid. Braslavsky, C. 2004. Pages 36-47.

37 An IBE study (2002) about instructional time in 23 countries revealed that 15 of them include a portion of time allocated to diverse options, to elective disciplines and to the planning of school activities. IBE-UNESCO. 2002. *A Review of Time Allocated to School Subjects: Selected Cases and Issues.* Geneva: IBE-UNESCO (ABEGS-IBE collaboration on time-related factors in schooling).

38 Rivad, J F. and Amadio, M. 2003. *Teaching Time Allocated to Religious Education in Official Timetables. Prospects, Quarterly Review of Comparative Education. 33(2):211-217.*

39 *Goodson, I. 2006. Chapter 12. Socio-Historical Processes of Curriculum Change. In School Knowledge in Comparative and Historical Perspective. Changing Curricula in Primary and Secondary Education (edited by Aaron Benavot and Cecilia Braslavsky).* Hong Kong: Comparative Education Research Centre. Pages 211-220.

Educational reforms cannot move aside the past as if reality could be completely manipulated by "new forces with no history".

Change sustainability for implementing the EFA Global Action Plan heavily relies on developing a historical consciousness of how, under a perspective of the long-run, conditions and situations as well as institutions and actors do inform and shape the present and the future of any change. Educational reforms cannot move aside the past as if reality could be completely manipulated by "new forces with no history". As Goodson asserts (2006), a posture of "optimistic newness" tend to predominate based on the naïve and risky assumption that reforms are to be implemented, not to be discussed, and moreover, that it is possible to rapidly remove all the "obstacles" and "burdens" of school cultures and institutions. They don't take into account that the education sector is one of the most traditional and difficult to change, and it is not by ignoring or minimising the conflictive cultural and political nature of education, that we are going to move forward.

We believe that teachers' development taken in an ample sense can contribute to legitimate and strengthen change sustainability. Merle Tan (2006) conceptualized three dimensions of teacher development that are "intertwined, interactive and interdependent"[40]:

I. ***Personal development:*** emphasize being reflective, strengthen professional growth and renovate ideas around the teachers' profile.

II. ***Social Development:*** the reconfiguration of the meaning attributed to the teachers' role through the sharing of visions, beliefs and experiences with other colleagues.

III. ***Professional Development:*** development of subject matter knowledge and skills; emphasis on the visions, beliefs and conceptions that underlie the utilization of different types of teaching activities and finally the update of knowledge.

Denise Vaillant (2006) outlines a network of four factors that can contribute to attain a teaching profession of quality[41]:

I. High social recognition principally related to attract the best candidates for the teaching profession.

II. A stimulating labor environment that can establish decent labor conditions and an appropriate system of incentives that can help to retain good teachers and professors.

III. Excellent pre- and in-service teachers' education with a close look on its impacts on what happens in the classroom and what students learn.

IV. The evaluation of teachers as a way of improving both the practices and the overall performance of the educational system.

One critical issue is the way we understand and conceptualize an on-going dynamic process of teacher development which ought to be very much in tune with teachers' fears, apprehensions and expectations towards the new curriculum, with their knowledge base historically constructed and with their roles (felt, imagined and real) as part of the processes of curriculum change. Spaces, opportunities and materials should be provided to teachers in order to share and discuss with other colleagues what it is expected from them and moreover, as Avalos outlines (2006), generates controlled trials of curriculum implementation showing that they can "go further" with their students[42]. Teachers must feel motivated, confident, secured and supported to take a risk, and a great challenge is to break the cultural, social and pedagogical isolation that frequently teachers feel and that is part of a troublesome reality.

[40] Tan, M. 2006. *Curricular Reforms: Implication for Teacher Professional Development.* Seminar-Workshop on the Management of Curriculum Change, June 7 – 10, 2006, Diliman, Quezon City. Philippines. Philippines: IBE-UNESCO, Philippines Social Science Center. See: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/cops/workshops/Philippines/Philipp_manchange.htm

[41] Vaillant, D. 2006. *Documentos de Trabajo de la OIE sobre el Currículo Nº 2, julio de 2006. SOS Profesión Docente: Al Rescate del Currículum Escolar.* See: http://www.ibe.unesco.org/resourcebank/working_papers.htm

[42] Ibid. Avalos, B. 2006

Traditionally teaching has been, as Philippe Perrenoud (1996) stated, a solitary activity[43], hardly done in group and with a highly rigid labour division. Teachers see themselves as the sole person on charge, especially in Secondary Education where the relationship with the subject they teach is much more important, in many cases, than the feeling of belonging to the school. In Primary Education, there seems to be a more engaged relationship between the institution and the teachers due perhaps to a larger sharing of sensibility towards children demands and needs, to a better institutional atmosphere that promotes working group, to a more fluent communication with the community, to a syllabus much more integrated than in Secondary Education and to have a single teacher commanding the process of learning.

What is the mission of teachers in today's society? Are teachers the moral reserve of a society that learns to live together[44]? Are teachers the cultural reference of an open society? Are teachers' active and appreciated members of a society that foster development and equity? These questions, among others, and the progressive search for multiple answers can constitute key factors in attaining a perdurable and effective teachers' professional development policy.

Positive answers to these questions cannot be attained within a context of a progressive pauperization of the teachers' status, low self-esteem, questionable cultural prestige and bad working conditions. The very process of reinventing the teacher profession[45] stems primarily from redefining their societal role as the core backers of a better ethical society (Opertti, 2005).

Certainly a solid and enduring political will is deeply needed to try to overcome the paradoxical nature of teaching[46] as stated by Andy Hargreaves and Leslie Lo (2000). This paradox rests on the fact that at the same time that we expect from teachers that they build learning communities, contribute to the knowledge society and strengthen the innovative capacity, flexibility and disposition to change, teachers are also the victims of cutbacks in public social expenses and of a lower respect and trust from society. There is a widespread perception that messages are really confusing and contradictory, and with at least a double meaning.

What we do need is a clear societal and political endorsement of a highly renovated teachers' status sustained on a public engagement around a progressive plan of improved working conditions and accompanied by transparent accountability procedures of learning procedures and outcomes. Teacher must fell that they matter to the society, that their mission and role is critical to the well-being of citizens and that their work is significant and worthwhile for multiple stakeholders.

KEY QUESTIONS Concerning the EFA Global Action Plan

Some key questions can be formulated as discussion points in the implementation of the EFA Global Action Plan.

I. Are we talking of a conceptual curriculum framework common to an expanded Basic Education – Childhood, Primary and first cycle of Secondary Education- and to Teacher Education made by foundations, objectives, approaches and strategies around the concept of Education as both a human right and a pillar of personal and social development?

[43] Perrenoud, P. 1996. *The Teaching Profession between Proletarization and Professionalization: Two Models of Change. Prospects, Quarterly, Review of Comparative Education. 26:3.*Geneva: IBE-UNESCO.

[44] The approach of "Learning to live together" can be consulted in: IBE-UNESCO. 2004. *Studies in Comparative Education. Learning to Live Together: Building Skills, Values and Attitudes for the Twenty-First Century.* Geneva: IBE-UNESCO.

[45] Opertti, R. 2005. *What Kind of Teacher Profile is Desirable and Necessary for Supporting a Broad and In-Depth Vision of Curriculum Change? Conditions and Opportunities for a New Deal. 1st International Forum on Teacher Education: Teacher Education Reform Teacher, Professional Standards and School-Based Teacher Development. 25-27 October 2005, Shanghai, China.* East China Normal University: Shanghai.

[46] Hargreaves, A. and Lo, L. N. K. 2000. *The Paradoxical Profession of Teaching at the Turn of the Century. Prospects, Quarterly Review of Comparative Education. 30:2:181-196.* Geneva: IBE-UNESCO.

This implies, among other things, a shared concept of citizenship education, a similar epistemological and methodological approach in the conceptualization and in the definition of the disciplinary identities and in the elaboration of the syllabus, a solid coincidence around the idea that students' expectations and needs are the centre of the education system, the development and the consolidation of teachers' team work in schools, the need of linking in a better way the teaching of disciplines to the school mission, and a certain degree of timing coordination between reforms in Basic Education and Teachers Education.

Is the approach by competencies a possible alternative to work out a common curriculum framework for these educational systems at different levels? A good number of countries, many of which in Africa and in Latin America are currently implementing educational reforms based on the approach by competencies[47]. These reforms frequently imply significant changes in how the process of learning is addressed and carried out, in the types of activities done by the students and in the expected learning outcomes[48]. The changes pursued can't be only supported by intensive training and/or by a teacher education model that accompany the changes in Basic Education. In many cases, we can generate "explosive mixes" that do a great deal of harm to the legitimacy, the durability and the outcomes of educational reforms. We should encourage, from the very beginning of the Basic Education reform, the changes that are deemed as needed in teachers' education if we want to introduce a new curriculum approach based on competencies.

The EFA Global Action Plan should take carefully into consideration what we have to change in teacher education to fully support the attainment of a high-quality equitable Basic Education. If prospective teachers continue to be educated under an institutional, pedagogical and curricula approach of an elite nature, far from proposing ideas, strategies and tools that can give to each child a real opportunity of educational development and success, advances in EFA goals could be very limited despite all the past and current efforts.

II. Are we thinking of a renovated teachers' personal, social and professional profile deeply embedded in key stakeholders expectations and demands as a way of fostering and consolidating the needed changes in school and classroom practices?

Teachers' involvement cannot be only limited to the revision and to the introduction of changes in the training programmes under the idea of strengthening the role of teachers as curricula implementers. The enhancement of teachers' professional development, comprising pre-service, in-service and school-based activities, should be part of a vision of curriculum change that heavily emphasizes the different processes that could lead to the improvement of classroom practices.

47 IBE-UNESCO. 2006. *IBE Newsletter. Educational Innovation and Information, The Debate on Competencies. [Number 12, December 2005].* See http://www.ibe.unesco.org/publications/innovation.htm

48 One good example is the pedagogy of integration; see Xavier, R. 2001. *Une pédagogie de l'intégration. Compétences et integration des acquis dans l'enseignement.* Bruselles: de Boeck.

We should encourage, from the very beginning of the Basic Education reform, the changes that are deemed as needed in teachers' education if we want to introduce a new curriculum approach based on competencies.

Moreover, it has to be sustained in a double, mutually implicated change – the teaching profession and teacher education. But we must be also aware that changes are very slow and troublesome[49], and that in one way or another, key societal actors from inside and outside the educational system should be involved from the very beginning in the process of both recreating the role of teachers in society and the reinvention of the teaching profession.

The pedagogical orientations towards school and classroom practices is a key aspect of teachers' professional development through the generation of permanent links between pre- and in-service training and also in overcoming the profound intellectual and professional isolation that many times teachers face and feel themselves in their daily activities.

III. Are we open to know and understand more in-depth how teachers position themselves and apprehend the reform concepts, which type of content and by what ways they share it with their students? How do students position and act themselves, and how and what they effectively learn?

If we fully assume that teachers are co-designers and co-implementers of educational reforms, a more in-depth comprehension and knowledge of teachers' values, visions, attitudes and behaviors is desirable and needed. How do they view themselves in today' societies? How do they think that the globalization process affects them? How secure they feel about their teaching profession and their knowledge base? Which threats do they perceive from society and from the proper educational system? Do they feel that they belong to an education system? What really motivate them to teach? Which type of gratifications they expect from teaching? How do they feel about students' social and cultural diversity? These questions, among others, are key elements that can provide good understanding around the more profound motives that help explain teachers' postures on educational reforms.

Many times teachers refuse educational reform not precisely due to its content but to a series of motivations that are more related to their perceptions of their rights and responsibilities around the processes of learning and teaching. If they feel that the reform affects their teaching identity and their perceptions of their roles and self-esteem, probably they will react negatively regardless of what it is proposed. This reaction is frequently accompanied by an overloaded ideological discourse with no much educational content.

The progressive development of educational reforms should take note of all the potential barriers that impede an open and constructive dialogue. If a reform is to be seriously discussed, teachers should have spaces and opportunities to construct collectively under the feeling that they are respected as professionals. It is the foundation of a healthy process of educational reform.

[49] For example the Green Paper on Teacher Education in Europe (2000) stated that "the core of teacher education has not been subject to substantial reform over the past thirty years", principally in relation "to the goals and contents of initial teacher education (especially for secondary level teachers), to the continuous professional development of teachers, and to the relations between initial and in-service components". See Thematic Network on Teacher Education in Europe. 2000. *Green Paper on Teacher Education in Europe. High Quality Teacher Education for High Quality Education and Training.* Umeá (Sweden): TNTEE Editorial Office.

But we must also take into consideration that even under a friendly climate to introduce curricular reforms, teachers might reject the proposals because among other factors, their knowledge base is insufficient, fragile and old and they have not the competencies that are required to understand and develop new concepts and approaches. This is probably linked to the outcome of a teacher education syllabus that is very much overloaded in contents and poor in the development of skills and capacities, narrow minded in the conceptualization of the curriculum and of pedagogical approaches, and extremely conservative in the defense of a traditional disciplinary ethos. Any change that implies significant ruptures with the traditional teacher education syllabus, contribute to generate suspicion, fear, distrust and misunderstanding. Teachers should convince themselves, and this implies time and patience, that by opening their minds, be receptive to new ideas, and by renovating their teaching practices, all girls and boys will probably have better learning opportunities. Under this perspective, EFA goals should have a valuable and rewarding meaning for teachers.

Any change that implies significant ruptures with the traditional teacher education syllabus, contribute to generate suspicion, fear, distrust and misunderstanding.

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY of Practice in Curriculum Development (COP)

The constitution and the development by IBE of a worldwide Community of Practice in Curriculum Development (COP) from 2005 onwards[50] covering the inter - and the intra-regional as well as the national levels, could be a significant and progressive response to the key questions we have formulated (see 3.2.) within a plural and propositional framework. It can be an opportunity for sharing and constructing knowledge among curriculum specialists and developers based on gathering and linking visions, experiences, research, documentation, training and cooperation on how and with which content we can contribute to highlight the teacher professional development as part of the processes of educational change in Basic Education linked to EFA goals.

The COP gathers some 350 educationalists, curriculum specialists and developers from all UNESCO regions[51] that have a recognizable and prestigious experience mainly in designing and in implementing research, policies, programs and projects around curriculum change linked to EFA goals. They come from different domains (ministries, public/private universities, NGOs, institutes of the civil society, international organizations on cooperation and financial matters, UNESCO staff at Paris Headquarters, Institutes, Regional and National Offices), their roles are widely different and complementary (researchers more or less academic/policy-orientated, scholars, ministerial curriculum directors and developers, deans of school of education, professors in charge of masters and doctoral programs in

50 The COP conceptual framework, its key concepts, activities and advances, can be consulted in www.ibe.unesco.org/COPs.htm.

51 Africa, Asia/Pacific, Arab States, Europe/North America and Latin America/Caribbean.

education, local and regional educational authorities at the country level, consultants in specific issues, managers of training programs and of curriculum reforms, key players in educational transformations taken place from the eighties onwards, authors of proposals on relevant educational changes and active writers and advocators on educational issues).

Five key dimensions regarding the role of the COP within the EFA Global Action Plan have been identified:

I. Take a leading intellectual role in orientating and in facilitating plural and constructive debates (face to face and on-line) and collective action on curriculum change and on the development of conceptual frameworks common to all levels of Basic Education (Childhood, Primary and Secondary Education) and to Teacher Education, involving multiple institutions and actors.

II. Foster the capacity building of educationalists on the issues of curriculum design, implementation, follow-up and evaluation about Basic Education at the regional (inter and intra) and national level, principally centered on how the curriculum approaches can contribute to democratize learning opportunities for all children.

III. Disseminate and exchange, in multiple languages, visions, approaches, practices and experiences about the attainment of EFA goals feeding the implementation of national plans within the Global Action Plan.

IV. Strengthen partnerships and horizontal cooperation among educationalists from different regions and countries, highlighting the South-South cooperation as a valuable instrument in order to share expertise, experiences and educational materials about an expanded Basic Education.

V. Promote the production and the dissemination of documents about the lessons learned and the pending challenges in implementing curriculum reforms in Basic Education from the perspectives of educationalists who have participated in different processes of curricular transformation with diverse outcomes.

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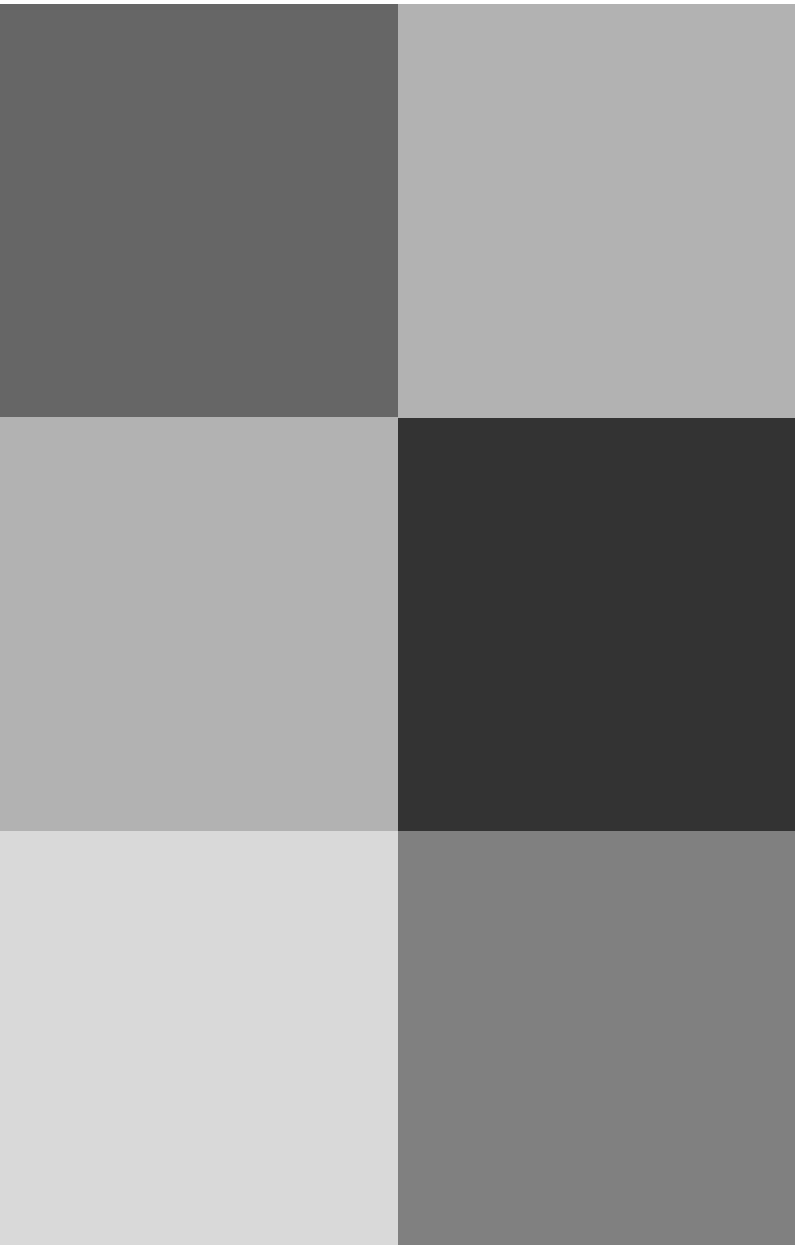

The curriculum, competencies, and the notion of teaching-learning

THE NEED TO RE-FORMULATE OUR CONCEPTIONS OF EDUCATION

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THE PROBLEM

The curriculum is an essential feature of modern education. Understanding the educational meaning of the curriculum depends, therefore, on our understanding of the phenomenon of education in general. And it is precisely here that the problem exists. Current conceptions of the curriculum are derived from an idea of education which, based on the scientific evidence that we now have on the specificity of that which is human, one may, and indeed must question, In effect, current conceptions of the curriculum are profoundly tied to a that of education limited to the dynamic between teaching and learning. And this even happens in the case of the most valuable ideas about the curriculum. It is so, for example, for the proposal of Lawrence Stenhouse. With the curriculum being basically "an attempt to communicate the principles and essential elements of an education proposal ...", these principles, for Stenhouse, involve issues such as "what it is that should be *taught and learned*?" and "how should one *learn and teach*?", etc. (Stenhouse 1984, p. 30), which is as result of his idea that both the school and teaching are defined by the responsibility to "plan and organize *learning*" (Stenhouse 1984, p. 53).

In short, when the purpose of education is limited to "learning and teaching", most of the debate on the curriculum is structured around this concept. We thus continue the tradition inaugurated by Juan Amos Comenio in his *Didáctica Magna*, three and a half centuries ago regarding the "method" and "art" of "learning to teach" (Comenio 1995, p. 52 y 53). All of this is in spite of the fact that, as we will see below, the arguments that guide contemporary thought lead to a different understanding of what education is.

This problem is accentuated today with the importance of the theme of competencies in discussions about education. One of the most important characteristics of competencies is derived from the fact that they are not direct results of the teaching-learning processes. On the contrary, as one of the most influential specialists of this subject states, competencies "are not taught; they are learned" (Lévy-Leboyer 2000, p. 115). In effect, the development of competencies is basically the result of learning processes that the individual is able to carry out by using their own experience in that competencies are basically "the fruit of an experience actively sought and exploited by who participates in the experience" (Lévy-Leboyer 2002, p. 133). In this sense, it is taking advantage of the experience which is truly instructive. Consequently, the development of competencies comes from the dynamic between development and learning processes; a dynamic that has until now tended to remain invisible, both for pedagogical theory and practice and for education policy.

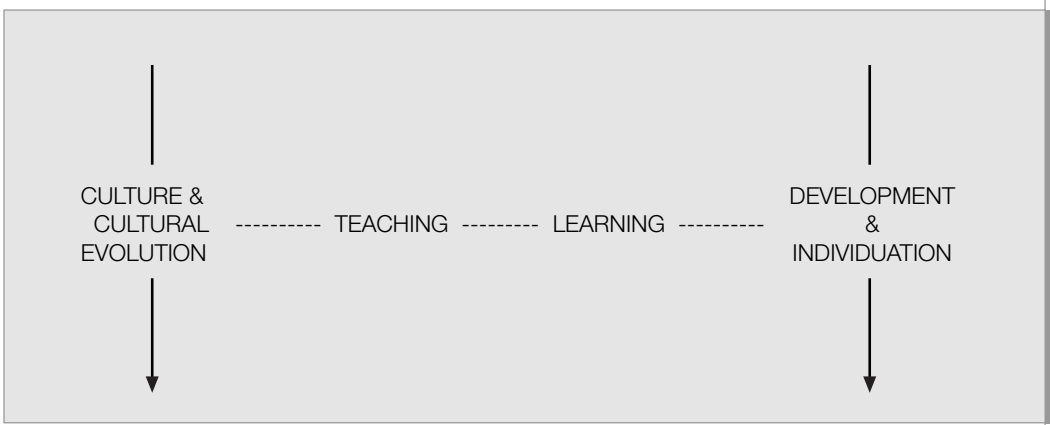
In this work, we will seek to show that an appropriate conception of the curriculum as a process with educational meaning, should be based on a conception of education in which the curriculum is not reduced to a teaching-learning formula. This is especially so if one seeks to organize the curriculum around the development of competencies.

Competencies are basically "the fruit of an experience actively sought and exploited by who participates in the experience".

WHAT CAN AND SHOULD WE UNDERSTAND by "education"?

In a previous study (Molina, 2006) we suggested that education is, in its most generic sense, the kind of a process that represents a novel way to solve that which Waddington once remarked as the two most fundamental problems of "evolution" (in the terms of living) and "development" (that is, the phylogenesis of the species and the ontogenesis of the individuals of the species, Waddington 1963). We suggest here that, upon beginning an evolutionary path that is at the same time biological and cultural, the human species begins to depend both on the social 'transmission' of cultural attainments of this evolution, and well as 'assist' with these human development achievements through carrying out intentional teaching and learning experiences. And we suggested that education is for this reason a process that is responsible both for the evolution of our species as well as for the development and ontogenesis of its individuals as human beings.

If we wish to represent the complexity of the educational process by using a simple formula, perhaps we should refer to an image such as the following:



This formula helps illustrate that four major processes take place in education. First, there is the *cultural evolution process* in which the human species is committed as a whole. This process continually, and in a complex and heterogeneous manner, makes use of innovation and cultural interchange between many individuals, groups, and cultures that make up our species and is historically expressed in the production and accumulation of cultural achievements (ideas, techniques, etc.) that must be somehow transmitted and in some proportion, to new generations and to other members of the species, preferably through teaching. Second, there are *teaching processes* that human communities and societies design and carry out intentionally in order to transmit culture, duly subject to some form of selection and transposition, in order that it can be learned, given new meaning, and assimilated by certain individuals through their own intellectual processes. Third, there are *learning processes* through which individuals take ownership of and assimilate specific elements of the cultures around them, enriching them with their own development and construction as subjects. Fourth, there are *processes of development and individuation* in which each of these individuals carries out as part of their human ontogenesis and which are especially fostered by their learning –within the framework of their participation in cultural processes in general and within the context of their participation in instructional processes in particular.

We can thus think about education as a rich and complex conglomerate of various moments, relations, and processes. For example, the relation between *cultural evolution* and *teaching*, carried out through particular processes of cultural selection and didactic transposition. Or the relation between *cultural evolution* and *learning*, when someone learns something directly from reading Shakespeare or Sherlock Holmes. Or the relation between *learning* and *development*, when people develop professional competencies by learning from their work experience. Or the well-known relation between *teaching* and *learning*, belonging to instructional processes, etc.

Education, then, is not a mere relation that can be thought about through a dichotomy such as teaching-learning. Education is a process of multiple, multi-form, and multi-dimensional relations in which human beings participate in the mental and cultural life that defines members of the human species, both collectively and individually in a particular moment of history and evolution. As the pioneer thinker Vygotsky suggested brilliantly at the beginning of the XX century, education is basically a social process in which individuals "*develop* within the *intellectual lives* of those about them" (Vygotsky, 1978). Education is thus a specific human phenomenon in which operate various and different processes and relations with these being "moments" of a large process which it is only possible to think about as being in continuous movement and flux and which is constantly producing and reproducing –always under specific socio-historic forms– the particular form of bio-psycho-cultural life that characterizes the human species.

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In this sense, education cannot be reduced to any of its specific "moments"; nor can it be thought about through only one of the relations that compose it. On the contrary, education is a phenomenon about which it necessary to think about as a "whole" in which occur and co-exist different processes and relations that, although possessing a relative autonomy, derive their meaning from the relations as a totality. This means in turn that education is a process that has no "center"; that it, it is a process that should be thought about as either de-centered or multi-centered. Thus, for example, the dual and persistent mistake that one commits, for example, in thinking that education reform consists in going from teaching to learning-based education.

AN ESSENTIAL MOMENT in educational processes:

THE RELATION BETWEEN LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT. ITS INVISIBILITY IN CURRICULAR THEORY AND, HOWEVER, ITS CENTRALITY FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCIES.

One of the most damaging consequences of the reductionist insistence on the notion of teaching-learning has been the invisibility created around the relation between learning and development –in spite of the fact that this problem has been a central one in scientific research on human beings, especially at the cutting edge between psychological sciences and the mind, neurosciences, and genetics.

One of the most damaging consequences of the reductionist insistence on the notion of teaching-learning has been the invisibility created around the relation between learning and development.

This invisibility has been present as well in the efforts of the most illustrious curriculum theoreticians and researchers. A clear example of this is offered to us by the contradictions of José Gimeno Sacristán in his 1981 book, *Teoría de la enseñanza y desarrollo del currículo*. On this occasion, Gimeno Sacristán recognizes something very important:

"In principle we see *development* as a process in which education plays an important role, *far from believing that it is a maturative development process.* Its direction *at the species level* has much to do with (non-school) education systems at the anthropological level. (...) Teaching theory should introduce it as a factor of learning *and of cognitive development*". (p. 151, our italics).

Gimeno Sacristán thus clearly saw the centrality of education and of teaching in individual development and ontogenesis. However, he at the same time continued to see teaching only as a "normative discipline of the teaching-learning process" (p.96) to a didactic model as one that only seeks to "understand the teaching-learning process" (p.135) and didactic theory as one that only "wishes to govern learning" (p.136). That is, he wasn't able to see the possibility that education and teaching perhaps have to do with learning *in its relation* with development, and therefore with the relation between learning and development.

For this reason, Gimeno Sacristán, in spite of stating that the psychological sciences offer "two aspects that are of fundamental interest to us: the theory of development, and the theory of learning, as well as the relation between both" (note that here he only alludes to the relation between both *theories*) (p.136), ends up recognizing that although "in psychological theory it is a times *difficult to distinguish both aspects, learning and development,* given that development is conceived as a continual learning process that passes through a series of phases characterized by the possibilities of learning according to mental structures that as a result of these become available. When learning is conceived as a dialectical interaction between individuals and their surroundings, development will then be the diachronic feature that demonstrates this process. Thus, for example, *it is difficult to conclude if the theory of Piaget is one of development or of learning, because it simply both at the same time*" (p.151, our italics). Finally, confronting the *difficulty* of distinguishing learning from development, Gimeno Sacristán them makes an important decision: "This is an issue that we simple mention and that here *will not occupy us*" (p. 151, our italics).

We should first note that statements such as this by Gimeno Sacristán reveal a lack of understanding of Piaget's argument –for whom development simply is *neither* "a continual process of learning" *nor* are mental structures a direct result of this process; *nor* is development a simple 'diachronic feature' that illustrates the learning process, etc. However, what is most significant is his conclusion that Piaget's theory is "the two things at the same time"; that is, a theory of development and of learning, with evades the crucial problem: understanding the complex *distinction* and *relation* that Piaget establishes between the two processes; a problem that Gimeno Sacristán states to not be his concern.

If I have lingered on these ideas of Gimeno Sacristán it is only because in my opinion, they represent an extreme case of the great difficulty of the intellectual tradition of the curriculum to open itself to the possibility of thinking about the relation of teaching with learning and with development as a triad of different processes the articulation of which is precisely one of the major challenges of the efforts of education.

In this sense, the introduction of the issue of competencies into the curricular debate has the virtue of relativizing the reductionist conception of the teaching-learning relation and to thus open the discussion to one of the key ideas of modern science: the relation between learning and development. This is because competencies have very special characteristics. Among them are the following:

a) Competencies involve the always specific articulated mobilization of personal resources (knowledge, attitudes, etc.) in the achievement of excellent performance of a task. Competencies thus represent both a capacity to *articulate* as well as to *mobilize* one's own resources in seeking excellence of performance.

b) Competencies emerge in individuals through the relation between *learning* and *development* processes. Individuals develop competencies through their capacity to learn from experience. Such competencies do not emerge directly from the relation between teaching and learning.

c) The development of competencies involves a *comprehensive personal change*. Besides acquiring competencies, what happens is that individuals become more competent. In this sense, competencies are not "things" but rather processual capacities of an individual.

d) The development of competencies depends basically on the capacity of individuals to self-manage their personal and professional development. In this sense, they affect our development as *subjects* in the exercise of our freedom.

This implies, among other things, that educational processes leading to the development of competencies cannot nor should not be thought of from the mere perspective of the teaching-learning processes. On the contrary, thinking about the development of competencies obliges us to revise the nature of educational processes in their specific complexity. And such complexity lies in the fact that education represents –in essence and as will have suggested above– the interaction between four processes: cultural evolution of the species, the socio-political action of teaching, learning, and individual development. In this sense, the subject of competency development represents a contribution to both to the renovation of some theoretical arguments as well as some strategic options and techniques that still remain in our education systems, in that they oblige us to specify our concepts about the nature of education and the complexity of its processes. In particular, as we have said, the concern for competencies leads to placing special attention on the arguments of modern science on the learning-development relation.

It was probably Dewey who inaugurated the modern argument on the issue in the area of education. Of particular importance in this regard is the difference and the relation that in 1899 Dewey established between "instruction" and "education". Commenting on the idea, attributed to Herbart, that there is no instruction that is not educational and no education that is not the result of instruction, Dewey makes the following argument:

"Certainly, instruction should be educational; that is, the teaching-learning process should lead to growth, and unless it leads to development, it will have the form, but not the reality, of instruction. (...) But (...) it would certainly seem to be an undue statement to say that all education takes place through instruction, since it is difficult to see how the idea of *education* can be reduced below its meaning to *a growth process maintained through learning*, and certainly there is learning without that which we habitually call 'instruction'. There is a learning process based on experience (...)". (Dewey 1966, p. 76-77, our italics).

With this argument, Dewey makes clear, among other equally important ideas, that instruction and its teaching-learning processes are one thing, and learning-development processes are another (development maintained through learning processes, independent of whether this learning is achieved or not through instruction). Even more important, Dewey suggests that what is really essential and defining for the idea of education lies precisely in its character of being a "development process maintained through learning" thus representing the teaching of only one of possible manners of achieving necessary learning in order to maintain the growth process and with the other being the great possibility of learning directly from experience without the direct mediation of instructional processes. In other words, individual human ontogenesis consists basically in a complex and multi-dimensional development process maintained through the mediation of learning processes, many of which (but not all) have been for their part mediated by teaching activities within the framework of instructional-type experiences.

With these ideas, Dewey broached an education issue that today is enriched by various other powerful lines of argument. In particular, we recall the constructivist arguments after Dewey. It is not difficult to note that the most important exponents of constructivism reinforce and enrich –with greater or lesser effusiveness– these ideas outlined by Dewey

It is important in this regard to recognize the undoubtable, albeit paradoxical, reciprocity between the arguments of Piaget and Vygotsky. In effect, in spite of their differences, both Piaget and Vygotsky distinguished learning and development as different processes; just as they clearly distinguished teaching-learning processes and the dynamic of learning-development. It is equally necessary to recognize that both the arguments of Piaget and Vygotsky allow one to think that among the development processes and learning processes their exist highly complex dynamic relations that cannot be understood using rigid hypothetical formulations.

In this sense, and in spite of his well-known emphasis on the endogenous dimension of cognitive processes, Piaget was nevertheless one of those who most successfully pursued and achieved a general understanding of human development –and in particular of cognitive development– as a process in which the endogenous and exogenous interact. Thus, in his effort to understand the nature of developmental processes, with ontogenesis of human cognitive capacities being one of them, Piaget developed a complex argument in regard to the process that he understood as "phenocopia"; that is, the process of *replacement* of exogenous *acquisition* by an endogenous *construction* (Piaget 1969, 1978, 1986), which according to Piaget treats both genetic evolution as well as the development of knowledge and human intelligence. According to this argument of Piaget, learning represents cognitive acquisitions equivalent to phenotypical variations (as such, due to action of the surroundings or of the experience of objects) that, to the extent that they come to imply an internal imbalance, act then as *actuators* of purely endogenous reconstruction processes (due to activities of the subject).

Although necessary, the action of surroundings and the efficacy of learning are never then of the instructional type, not being at any time either "transmission" or "fixation" of that which is acquired; rather, they are an endogenous reconstruction resulting from the organizational activity of the subject based on his or her own cognoscitive assimilation instruments and processes. From this comes the important conclusion that "*there is no exogenous knowledge*, but rather that they are captured through *contents* through sources that are of endogenous origin", given that, just as one can clearly appreciate in the case of the sciences, "data, to the extent that it is provided by the experience in question, constitutes a property of the objects one reaches, in this sense, through empirical abstraction. But it is only so in its *content*, and presents from the beginning a logical-mathematical form" (Piaget 1978, p. 140-141, our italics). It is in this sense that, among other things, knowledge is always a construction of the subject and never a simple exogenous acquisition. So much so that, even in the case of scientific knowledge transmitted expressly through instructional teaching-learning processes, they are not appropriated by the subject as such, but rather are confronted as mere contents able to be re-constructed by the subject and thus transformed into new knowledge. In other words, between learning and development there exists, according to Piaget, the solidarity and interdependence belonging to two different levels of processes that nevertheless comprise a unity (as Vygotsky argues as well).

With Vygotsky there occurs something similar to what happens with Piaget. In spite of his well-known emphasis on the instructional dimension of human development, Vygotsky saw the relation between learning and development as one of particular complexity and dynamism. In this sense, it is certain that in studying the relation between the development of scientific concepts –introduced by instruction (teaching-learning)– and the development of spontaneous concepts in children, Vygotsky observed that the former are developed before the latter, taking advantage of the systematic nature of instruction and cooperation with educators, arriving at the development of scientific concepts functioning as "propedeutic guides in the development of spontaneous concepts (...) that map out new paths for such concepts" (Vygotsky 1986, p. 149 and 152). It is also true that all of this led him to the now famous conclusion that "in general,

Knowledge is always a construction of the subject and never a simple exogenous acquisition.

instruction precedes development" (both in the development of concepts learned and in the development of psychological functions and mental processes involved in the learning and development of these concepts) (Vygotsky 1986, p. 185). However, it is also true that the former observations led Vygotsky to another crucial conclusion. Vygotsky observed that the development of both types of concepts takes place according to a peculiar "developmental principle" (Vygotsky 1986, p. 159).

The learning of the terms and meanings introduced by instruction was only the beginning of a process of developing the corresponding concepts through an internal mental effort of the subject himself. Therefore, even in the case of scientific concepts, the resulting learning of instruction was only the beginning of the development process of these concepts in children. That is, the concepts are neither acquired by repetition nor are assimilated as something given at the moment of instruction. Rather, they are the result of an active and complex internal mental elaboration on the part of the subject. So much so that what really occurs is that "while the *processes of instruction* follow their own logical order, *the awaken* and direct in the mind of the child a system of processes that is hidden from direct observation and subject to its *own laws of development", "developmental processes stimulated by instruction*" the discovery and understanding of which "is one of the basic tasks of the study of the psychology of learning" (Vygotsky 1986, p. 186, our italics).

All of this shows that, although it is true that Vygotsky is trying to demonstrate that it is possible to solve the crucial "question of the interaction between (mental) development and (school) instruction (Vygotsky 1986, p. 207 y p. 174), what his argument implies does not directly confront the issue of learning through non-instructional experiences. The solution given to this question allows us to think about the nature of the learning-development relation in general (independently of whether learning comes or does not come from instruction). In this sense, although it is generally true that learning derived from instruction is "a *necessary and universal* aspect of the process of the development of specifically human psychological functions" (Vygotsky 1978, p. 90), it is not less certain that the development of such higher psychological functions grants the individual precisely a capacity to learn from experience through the use of one's on intellectual instruments and the carrying out of one's own thinking processes. This is the case above all because –as Vygotsky would argue– the development of such psychological functions consists fundamentally in their "*cultural improvement*"; and this involves the increasing mastery on the part of the human subject not only of "the *items* of the cultural experience (content, concepts, etc.) but also "of habits and forms of cultural behavior, and cultural methods of reasoning" thus being able to construct "new methods of reasoning" (Vygotsky 1929, p. 57).

In this sense, for example, Vygotsky makes clear that "*a concept* is more than the sum of particular associative links formed by memory, more than a mere mental habit; it is a *complex and genuine act of thinking*" (Vygotsky 1986, p. 149). Therefore, a good learning of scientific concepts leads to the development of a capacity to think scientifically, and what characterizes scientific thinking is precisely learning directly from one's own experience through the processes of questioning (recall the argument of Dewey).

In short, we might say that the point of view of Vygotsky regarding the learning-development relation (and therefore regarding 'learning through experience') would be the following:

1. Learning and development are two distinct and different processes: "learning is not development", "our hypothesis establishes the *unity* but not the *identity* between learning processes and the internal processes of development" (Vygotsky 1978, p. 90-91, our italics).
2. Learning processes "*are converted*" into internal processes of development (ibid, p. 91, our italics).
3. Between these two processes "there are highly complex dynamic processes (...) that cannot be apprehended by a fixed hypothetical formulation" (ibid, p. 91).

It would be too much to say that this point of view of Vygotsky would be totally shared by Piaget, according to what we have discussed above.

"Our hypothesis establishes the unity but not the identity between learning processes and the internal processes of development".

"Necessarily, therefore, the development of the mind is always aided development from outside".

This important constructionist line of argument received important support from the ideas of Jerome Bruner. In 1966, Bruner stated unequivocally that "instruction is, after all, an effort to *assist* or give form to development" (Bruner 1966, p.1, our italics), given that "the most specific characteristic of human beings is the fact that their development as individuals depends of the history of the species, but not on history reflected in genes and chromosomes; but rather on that which is reflected in a culture that is outside of the organism and broader than the competence of a human being can contain. *Necessarily*, therefore, the development of the mind *is always aided development from outside*" (Bruner 1987, p. 65, our italics). In human beings, development is necessarily a process aided by culture. From this one concludes that, in terms of specific evolutionary innovation of the human species, culture is perhaps "the world to which we must adapt *and the toolbox to do so*" (Bruner 1990, p. 12, our italics).

With this argument, Bruner is able to articulate the two extreme poles through upon which the peculiar evolution of the human species is expressed and based: the phylogenesis / culture / species pole, and the ontogenesis / mental development / individual pole, an interaction that makes it possible to discover both the more generic senses of *education* and the more specific and subordinated senses of the *teaching-learning* process. Thus, it becomes clear that teaching-learning processes are only the central gears of the necessary *articulation* that should take place between the achievements of human evolution of the human species and the mental development of its different individuals (aided by culture) and all of which, together, makes up the phenomenon of education. In this sense one may appreciate that fact that it is Bruner's argument that leads us definitively to the representation of the education phenomenon that we have postulated from the beginning of our discourse.

Bruner's argument obliges us to place attention on the fact that for the human species, the development of individuals takes on a specific form, just as the process of our evolution as a species. Human development is characterized by being *aided from outside*, in a unique way compared to other species. The vital process of development through which we become human is therefore a process *necessarily mediated* by the historical and collective world of the *mental and cultural life* of our species (what Vygotsky thought of as "the intellectual life of those around us" and which Lorenz called "intellective life").

As we have seen, this concept of "aided development" is crucial for understanding the education phenomenon in all of its complexity, precisely because it leads to the enrichment of our conceptualization of human culture in an essential way. In effect, if there is no human development without the aid of culture, culture is then necessarily the constitutive instrument of what is human in every individual born biologically from other human beings.

The various elements of culture (language as such, scientific subjects, concepts, etc.) are all possible tools that can assist in development of the human mind if used as such. This is the argument that Bruner has been particularly convincing in presenting. This means that, for example, the sciences are true socially-constructed "ways of thinking" of which individuals can take advantage as thus use as instruments for their own thought and thus making possible an "amplification" of their thought capacities. Thus, for example, a discipline such as physics "is converted, then, into an operation of the human mind (...) it is an instrument of thinking or an ability, more than a theme" (Bruner 1987, p. 125). Among other things, it is for these reasons that Bruner had no doubts in 1965 in placing pedagogy among the "development sciences" (Bruner 1987, p. 79), which he considered to be a coordination of those disciplines concerned with the problem of assisting in human development.

Both the constructivist argument and that about competencies received important support with the argument that Donald Schön developed on the competence which he called "reflection on action" (Schön 1998, 1992). Probably the highest level of professional competence, "reflection on action" refers to the capacity possessed by competent professionals to operate in *undetermined* areas of their practice –precisely those areas that involve "situations of uncertainty, singularity, and conflict" and the solution of which requires a reflection *in* action on the present action so that while one "thinks about what one does as one is doing it" we can "reorganize what we are doing while we are doing it" (Schön 1992, p. 9 y 37). This competence makes a professional able to confront and resolve an undetermined situation based on looking at it as a "unique case", generating knowledge in its regard, understanding it, and finally transforming it according to certain objectives, all of this in the immediacy of the present.

"Students learn by doing and their instructors function more as tutors than as professors".

This is a competency, therefore, that mobilizes a strong component of *questioning*, characterizing this moment of professional practice as one of experimentation and investigation in the strict sense. It in fact is based on a "logic of questioning" in the full sense expressed by Pierce (1965), involving a though process unleashed by a "surprise", initiated by the adductive generation of hypotheses, and sustained by dialogue with the situation aimed at "determining it" and thus accommodating to it as a function of the technical and cognitive resources available to the professional in question. The professional thus confronts undetermined situations of practice as true "situations susceptible to design", with the *design* being for Schön that creative and constructivist activity of "transformation of an undetermined situation into a determined one". This corresponds precisely to the definition that Dewey offered for "inquiry" (Dewey 1938, p. iii).

The important thing for us is that Schön argues that the development of this competency cannot be the result of traditional instructional processes of teaching-learning. Development of this competency of reflection in action can only be the result of *experiences* of "learning by doing" *accompanied* by good "tutorial action". As Schön says very well: given that "one cannot teach students what they need to know, but one can guide them", then "students learn by doing and their instructors function more as tutors than as professors" (Schön 1992, p. 29 y 31). The truth is that Schön cannot be more categorical: "a practice such as design one can learn; but one cannot teach it through classroom methods (...) there are various characteristics that convert this process into something able to be learned and tutored, but not taught" (Schön 1992, p- 145-146).

Thus Schön suggest the possibility of thinking about the *development* of this competency as a result of a "*learning and tutoring*" process (Schön 1992, p. 206) more than as a result of processes of teaching-learning. In regard to the development of competencies, Schön's argument thus highlights the primacy of the learning-development dynamic while emphasizing "learning through experience". In this sense, Schön's constructivist perspective represents and amplification and enrichment of the arguments described above; this time around an issue of such decisive importance as the development of professional capacities.

We will conclude by stating that this constructivist perspective of the learning-development relation is totally in line with the ideas about that which is human held today in other areas of modern science, both in the neuro-sciences and in genetics as well as in paleontology and semiotics.

In my opinion, all of this leads one to recognize the complex and indissoluble complementation and articulation that exists –in a maximum degree in human beings– between genes, experience / learning, and development. And this means, among other things, that it is vitally important to consider the learning-development relation in order to think about the specific complexity of educational processes.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS (and opening to other problems).

My intention has been to argue that the curricular debate faces two serious problems –one very old and another more recent– coming from their traditional tendency to think of education based on the notion of teaching-learning. On the one hand, this impedes reaching a more correct understanding of the real complexity of educational processes. On the other, it can stop us from correctly confronting the issue of competencies.

In regard to these problems, I have sought to argue two things. First, that is necessary to think about "education" as a more complex process than that which sees it as "teaching-learning" allows. For this reason I have proposed a basic framework of an alternate formula more in accord with the hypotheses currently used by modern science regarding the specificity of that which is human. Second, I have argued that the relation between learning and development is a key element for thinking about education as the development of competencies.

Why is it so important to question the notion of teaching-learning as the defining idea of education? Among various other reasons, there is one that is essential to mention here: the notion of teaching-learning involves a conception of education that is based in an extreme manner on that which Michael Tomasello has called "under-estimation of ontogenesis" (Tomasello 2000, p. 48). Under-estimating ontogenesis involves under-valuing one of the dimensions of what is human and which contemporary thought –above all of the contributions coming from Darwin, Marx, and Freud– that have been gaining growing importance and regarding which increasing understanding is being gained. The notion of ontogenesis / development is one of the most important achievements of contemporary thought –above all since it allows us to think of human beings as a reality of evolutionary, historical processes, having autonomy and thus allowing us to abandon all notions of the *tabula rasa* or "empty organism" types and opening the way for an appropriate understanding of the human "subject" as such.

Thus, the importance of the arguments of those such as Piaget of whom even genetic researchers say deserves recognition "for being the first to take seriously the fourth dimension of human nature: the temporal dimension" (Ridley 2005, p. 149). Thus also the importance of arguments such as those of Vygotsky who opened the perspective on the socio-historical (and not only on the social) in the study of the mind and in human ontogenesis. And thus it is especially unfortunate that in the area of curricular debate the contributions of Piaget and Vygotsky tend to be seen as mere learning theories. As a result, their ideas are generally assimilated through the strict and reductionist notion of teaching-learning.

As has already been suggested, this "underestimation of ontogenesis" –represented in the notion of teaching-learning– can also be an obstacle for properly resolving the issue of competencies, considering that their development requires the articulation between learning and ontogenesis/development.

In this sense, it is perhaps important to point out that international projects as crucial and influential as "*Tuning Educational Structures in Europe*", a project that gives priority to the development of competencies and to obtaining learning outcomes as criteria for education training and achievement is content to foster changes within the teaching-learning relation without a critical review of neither the formula, nor the concept of education to which it is attached.

In effect, the project states that one of the advantages "the election of competencies as dynamic points of reference" (p.34) provides is the development of what the project recognizes as "a new education paradigm" (p.36) which basically involves replacing education centered on teaching and on the acquisition and transmission of knowledge for one centered on learning and on the student as a subject who learns. But as the project itself also recognizes –and immediately– this paradigmatic change would be one that takes place "*in* the teaching-learning paradigm" (p. 36, our italics); that is, this is more a change *within* the reigning "teaching-learning paradigm" than the advent of a new one. In truth, the argument offered by the *Tuning Educational Structures in Europe* project does not necessarily involve a paradigm change, in the sense of a new conception of what education is. The proposal of the project does represent an extremely important and crucial change at the level of education policy and strategy, and therefore –among other things– of curricular conception and policy at the level of higher education. But it does not break with the traditional conception of education centered on the notion of teaching-learning. Indeed, we may well conclude that the project represents the canonization of such a notion by granting it the character of a paradigm.

One of the advantages "the election of competencies as dynamic points of reference" (p.34) provides is the development of what the project recognizes as "a new education paradigm".

We can observe a significant rupture with the conception of education as teaching-learning is in the argument presented by the "Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (PRELAC)", approved in 2002 by the governments of the region. PRELAC recognized that "education has to do basically with fostering *changes* in students *through learning* that they construct *thanks to teaching processes*" (UNESCO/OREALC, 2002, p.12, our italics), and in which the right to education is fundamentally a right of all to benefit from "an education that provides a maximum potential for their *development* as persons" (p. 13, our italics). Education is therefore a process aimed at achieving the "*learning and development* of people" (p. 12, our italics), with learning being a way to assist the development process of each individual ("changes" attained "through" learning–recalling the argument of Dewey). It is for this reason that educational activities have as their central objective to "assure quality *learning leading to* life-long *human development* for all" (p. 11, our italics), and it is for this reason as well that the future "educating society" should be defined by the multiplicity of opportunities to "*learn and develop* the capacities of people" (p. 14, our italics).

The argument of PRELAC is thus a clear and enriching expression of this "amplified vision" of education that the world strategy of Education for All has propounded since 1990. It is a view that, for example, sees primary and lower secondary education as "the base for permanent *learning and* human *development*" (UNESCO 2000, p. 75, our italics). And it is important to remember that although this strategy seeks to concentrate attention on learning and gives priority to the satisfaction of basic learning needs, it nevertheless does so from the following conviction: "that increased possibilities of 'education' be translated into genuine *development* of the individual or society definitely depends on the individual truly *learning* as a result of these possibilities" (UNESCO 2000, p.76, our italics). In short, the meaning of learning is to serve as a means for education to be transformed into development (of the individual or the society).

Consequently, what we can observe in the strategy of Education for All, and particularly in the statements of PRELAC is solid progress toward an understanding of the phenomenon of education as a process that involves as it ultimate goal the articulation between learning and development –one that lends meaning both to the act of teaching and to the teaching-learning mechanism as a whole. This could point toward the definitive overcoming of the traditional underestimation of ontogenesis, thus incorporating the development dimension into the education debate –and especially into the curricular debate– with the various positive consequences that this implies.

One of these positive consequences has to do with recognition of the "right" to education. This can only be considered –in my opinion– as the recognized right of a person, to the extent that the person is involved in his or her process of development as a human being, that this person's learning needs be satisfied that are basic for fostering this process of development and individuation. The right to education is thus a right to human development and a right to learning. In this sense, the teaching-learning notion does not by itself allow for one to think about nor fulfill this right. This is so above all because the right to education means the right to go beyond that which is taught and, in fact, to go beyond the existing culture. If education only had to do with the transmission of culture and with its subsequent learning on the part of individuals, there would be no possibility of cultural innovation or transformation. If the latter does take place, it is because in learning, human beings develop their minds and capacities for thought, and hence their abilities to make inferences, of semiosis, and intellectual invention as part of their singular ontogenesis. The right to education, then, is the right of a subject to individuation, autonomy, and to participation in innovation and re-creation of a culture. It is the right to freedom.

The meaning of learning is to serve as a means for education to be transformed into development (of the individual or the society).

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Young people and citizenship in Latin America: CHALLENGES FOR THE CURRICULUM.

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"More than any other political system, democracy swims against the current – against the inertia that pervades human groups. Monarchies, autocracies, and dictatorships are easy; democracies are difficult and must be fostered and believed in".

(Giovanni Sartori, 1991)

INTRODUCTION

The context in which citizen education exists in our region is paradoxical. The present generation of young people in Latin America and the Caribbean is without doubt the most educated in history. At the same time, most of them do not firmly believe in democracy, in spite of the fact of living during a period in which the democratic ideal offered by school curricula has as never before external correlates in the predominance of democratic forms of government throughout the region (UNDP, 2004). This paradox raises questions about our societies and the traits of their political culture, about impacts of global trends, and also about the effectiveness of our education systems to foster active citizenship.

We will examine this subject from the perspective of a comparative analysis of recently-formulated curricula in countries of the region that identifies similarities and differences as well as noting relations with world trends in citizen education and the political development needs of our societies.

THE CONTEXT: NEW DEMANDS ON CITIZEN EDUCATION[1]

For a large part of our citizens, the meanings and loyalties awakened by democracy are still ambivalent and uncertain. According to an opinion survey on democracy in Latin America carried out in 2002 by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2004)[2], less than half (43%) of those surveyed have *democratic* orientations and opinions, 26.5% were categorized as *non-democratic*, and 30.5% as *ambivalent*[3]. Fifty-five percent of those surveyed would support and authoritarian government "if it could solve economic problems". A similar proportion (56%) stated that "economic development is more important than democracy".

This distancing of young people from politics and the public sphere should be of special concern to educators.

This distancing of young people from politics and the public sphere should be of special concern to educators[4]. Within countries of the region, the UNDP study found that age was a discriminating factor in regard to opinions about democracy. A significant percentage (28.7%); of young people 16 to 29 years of age (the group with the highest rate of schooling among those surveyed) have *non-democratic orientations* while 31.2% were classified as *ambivalent*, and *40.1%* as *democrats*. On the other hand, the evidence coming from an OAS- sponsored comparative study of civic knowledge and dispositions among secondary school students in Colombia, Chile, and the United States shows that currently, young people participate mostly in community and solidarity organizations, while voicing their distrust and distance from political organizations. Their social commitment is disconnected from political commitment and with the procedures and demands of democracy (Torney-Purta, Amadeo, 2004).

[1] This section is based on the work of Cox, C., R.Jaramillo, F.Reimers, (2005) Educar para la ciudadanía y la democracia en las Américas: una agenda para la acción. BID, Washington D.C.

[2] The study was based on an opinion survey of 18,643 men and women in 18 countries: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

[3] The ambivilant group are people with a "delagative" concept of democracy. "In principle, they agree with democracy, but they see as permissible the making of undemocratic decisions by governments if the circumstances so merit" (UNPD, op.cit. pag. 134). The concept of delegative democracy refers to countries which have free and honest elections, but in which governments (especially their presidents) feel authorized to act without institutional restrictions.

[4] "In recent decades, reading of newspapers, watching political programs on television, knowledge of subjects under public discussion, the act of voting, ant the belief that voting is a civic duty have diminished among young people in practically all established democracies" (World Bank, 2006, p.162). In the developed world, this phenomenon has provoked alarm as well as political and educational responses that explicitely seek to stimulate and make effective school-based learning for active citizenship. This is the case of the British government and its Advisory Group on Citizen Education (1998) as well as of a recent private U.S. joint (liberal and conservative) initiative bringing together researchers, educators, and policy-makers to diagnose the weaknesses of civic education in schools and to stress the political, social, and economic importance of decisively re-invigorating it." (Carnegie Corporation of New York and CIRCLE, (2003).

An opinion survey carried out at the end of the last decade and that studied concepts of democracy in three Latin American countries (Costa Rica, Chile, and Mexico) found that the meaning given by young people to democracy was different than that given by adults. Young people granted importance to the problems of diversity and to the protection of political minorities, while adults identified democracy with the concepts of order and electoral competence (Ai Camp, 2001).

The lights and shadows revealed in regard to the relation of young people with politics and democracy speak eloquently of the growing complexity of our societies and its impact on the new generation: social commitment that expresses solidarity on the local level while at the same time moving away from politics; valuing diversity and pluralism, and the rejection by many of electoral participation; integration into juvenile sub-cultures providing intra-group meaning and solidarity while expressing lack of interest in the larger society, while in many major cities of the region there has been an increase in violence and problem behavior that places these individuals outside the law.

DEMOCRATIC GOVERNABILITY and active citizenship

Faced by processes of social, economic, and technological change the speed and impact of which on traditional institutions and forms of social cohesion are unprecedented, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean are experiencing a proliferation of new problems and challenges. This proliferation is accompanied by the globalization of production processes and circuits as well as symbolic and material exchange that place enormously complex demands on politics, its institutions, practices, and culture. One is thus faced with another aspect of the paradox mentioned in our opening comment: the complexity of modern life demands more than ever democratic policy as a way of providing effective responses to both new and old problems. However, the younger generation, comparatively the most education in the history of the region, does not appear to be responding to the call.

On the other hand, the combination of challenges posed by poverty and governability demand for their solution an active citizenship that brings together the three dimensions of the classic definition of T.H. Marshall –political, civil, and social citizenship[5]– (PNUD, 2004), without which there can be neither solid development nor integrated societies. Such active citizenship involves a democratic culture, and what is the same, the construction and strengthening in both persons and society, of the value of that which is public and of politics, and fostering the ability to cooperate, participate, and resolve conflicts of another order of magnitude than that which is traditional.

It is evident that such a challenge cannot be met only through education. The fostering of active citizenship among young people requires joint responses within the institutional framework of a society that includes not only opportunities to vote and to be elected, but also opportunities to hold authorities accountable, have access to justice, and to be recognized as an actor and to participate in civil society. But the response of schools is vital because, the more complex the demands of a society toward politics, the greater the competencies required of actors in order to participate effectively, and therefore the greater the training role of schools.

In order for education in Latin America and the Caribbean to truly produce beliefs and competencies for active citizenship, we must profoundly increase learning opportunities currently offered by "civic education". For this it now possesses an unprecedented condition: the growth of democracy in the region. From an education perspective, this is of vital importance. Schools can now teach something that has presence and legitimacy in societies in which the competencies taught in the classroom have an external correlate –whether in fact, because democratic institutions operate effectively– or as a norm to judge the realities of the functioning of the political system when governing institutions are faulty.

[5] Political citizenship refers to participation in the exercise of political power (as voters, representatives, or authorities); civil citizenship refers to the rights of individual freedom (freedom of expression, of thought, the right to property, the right to justice); social citizenship refers to the right to a minimum of economic well-being and security (Marshall, 1965).

NATIONAL CURRICULAR responses

How may we characterize citizenship training curricula in Latin America during the 1990s? What are their orientations? We will answer these questions by looking at school curricula of Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, all three cases defined in the end of the 1990s as systems in the process of democratic recuperation[6].

VALUES

The three curricula cite as a generic referent the universal values of justice, truth, and the common good, in line with any similar definition since the middle of the XIX century. Beyond this generic level, the following values are pillars of their curricula for citizenship training:

I. the reference to *Human Rights* as a key moral criterion that defines the relations between individuals and the political order;
II. second, the value of *solidarity* as a basic item in regard to citizenship;
III. and third, *dialogue* and its requirements of tolerance and respect for differences as the principal way through which conflict should be processed within democratic systems.

Together with the similarities noted, there is an important difference that separates the school curriculum of Brazil from those of Argentina and Chile. In the latter there is a specific orientation that does not appear in the Brazilian documents analyzed: *responsibility* as a key criterion for participation. In addition, the curricular framework of Chile contains a values orientation *–personal freedom* (described as a "fundamental cross-cutting objective") that is not found in the curricula of Argentina and Brazil.

THE IDENTIFY referent:
FROM THE NATION TO GROUPS AND HUMANITY

The definition of the community in regard to which a child or young person is educated in order to feel that it is his or her own, and to which one owes adherence and loyalty, is undoubtedly one of the central and classic tasks of schools. Historically, the crucial referent for this in schools has been the *nation*. In fact, many traditional civic education courses in Latin America and in other parts of the world have been criticized for their nationalistic values and views.

The curricula of the 1990s may be clearly placed within a perspective different from the traditional civics courses and their focus on the nation, the State, and patriotism. The tenuous presence of the nation as a referent of that which is collective is notable in the curricula of Brazil and Argentina. And this is quite understandable, if one sees the 1990s as a reaction to military regimes that attempted to impose highly exclusionary nationalistic values. It is quite problematic as well. For if there is no cultural construction of the nation within the school system (taking the term in its most profound sense of community of origin and destination, one faces the certain risk of reducing that which is "common" to all, strongly present both in the logic of the market as well as a cultural climate that values diversity.

The new emphasis that marks curricula looks both below and above the traditional reference to the nation; "below" in the sense of locally-based social or ethnic groups, and "above" in the sense of the Declaration of Human Rights, which in its universality and precedence over the definitions of particular states redefines the locus of the moral regulation of politics, subordinating the nation to humanity.

[6] What follows is based on a content analysis of curricular reforms in the three countries in regard to citizenship training in primary and lower secondary education. C.Cox, Citizenship education in curriculum reforms of the 1990s in Latin America: context, contents and orientations, in F.Audigier,N.Bottani, Editores, Learning to Live Together and curriculum content, SRED Cahier 9, Geneva, 2002.

The reference to Human Rights as a key moral criterion that defines the relations between individuals and the political order.

This "slide toward the universal"[7] has a more global genesis than the history of authoritarianism and democracy in the three countries. A recent analysis of citizenship training curriculum trends in Europe and Asia detects a change in the "good citizen" model from one based solely on collective national norms to one increasingly based on transnational norms (Soysal y Wong, 2006). Moreover, in the essay that concludes a recent book on world trends that affect school curricula at the turn of the century (Benavot-Braslavsky, 2006), John Meyer notes disappearance of the "nation state" as a primary reference in citizen training in the school curricula of most countries, independently of cultures and degree of development.

Disappearance of the "nation state" as a primary reference in citizen training in the school curricula of most countries.

"It is assumed that the new individual should be able to function in and contribute to a social and economic system that transcends the national state (...) At times, direct references are made to globalization, but this is almost always at least explicitly present. Individual rights need to be placed within the global system. (...) The individual should be able to function as a supra-national citizen (...), and be able to think from a more universal perspective about local and national history (...) In other words, the individual student will become a member of a new identity under development called 'humanity'." (Meyer, 2006, p.266).

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS and processes

School training in citizenship can have an emphasis on political institutions and processes –(for example, the nation, the State and its organization, the law); or on the moral bases of life in society (values and attitudes regarding rights and duties; justice, discrimination, group identities). Although both dimensions of 'citizenship' (political and social) are closely linked, they are clearly distinguished in the curricula analyzed, with implications that are important to note.

The Brazilian curriculum is in sharp contrast with those of the two Southern Cone countries. It stresses learning objectives related to social citizenship over those of political citizenship.

Definitions within the Brazilian curriculum do not refer to political institutions of the democratic system. In the set of documents analyzed, there are not references to government. Rather, the curriculum includes various learning objectives referring to social citizenship (or to knowledge and skills to act on, cooperate with, or be opposed to injustice, discrimination, and inequality).

The curricula of Chile and Argentina, in contrast, stress political citizenship and its moral basis as the focus of this training. The two curricula grand key importance to objectives and contents referring to democratic institutions: the organization of the State and the government, the constitution, democracy as a form of socio-political organization, the principles of sovereignty and representation. Both curricular definitions also refer to democracy as a "way of life", and in this sense include "social citizenship", but in a subordinate manner.

PARTICIPATION

In regard to this key principle of democratic political culture, our analysis offers an ordering similar to that observed above. The Brazilian curriculum is clearly distinguished from those of Argentina and Chile, which in turn are similar to each other. However, the most interesting thing in this dimension is what unites the three education systems and what one may infer in terms of the political culture fostered by schools.

The curricula of Brazil fosters a view of political and social participation that is basically critical and more expressive than instrumental (it is more important to express one's own opinion than the consequences of an action). The repudiation and denunciation of discrimination and injustice, the manifestation of one's own political position, occupy a central place, while understanding of the legislative process and knowledge of instruments for strengthening citizenship are subordinated.

[7] An expression used by François Audigier in analysis of France´s State curriculum: "the disconnect in university preparation" that created a situation in which, "France, patriotism and the Nation" were not made part of the curriculum in a systemic and obligatory manner. F. Audigier, (1999).

In contrast, the Argentine and Chilean curricula do not place discrimination and injustice at the forefront, communicate a more positive vision of norms and institutions and respect for participation, and as note above, their definitions incorporate the concept of responsibility. In Argentina and Chile, participation objectives are formulated in terms of "responsible participation" in democratic life.

Beyond the differences of emphasis observed, in the three countries, objectives and content referring to participation skills are focused on the practices and value of *dialogue*. This is the only concept related with political participation practices that education seeks to foster. We shall return to this subject.

NORMS

In regard to norms and the approach of education for their teaching, the three curricula differ significantly. The Argentine curriculum defines norms as "recognizing and guaranteeing the dignity of individuals" and "the rule of law as a basis for living together and a procedure for the rational resolution of conflicts" (Ministerio de Cultura y Educación, 1995, CBC, p.361). That of Chile is predicated on the criteria of understanding and respect of norms that involve rights and duties, the basis for democratic relations. In contrast, the curricular parameters of Brazil identify as an objective "to critically reflect on social norms, seeking their legitimacy in carrying out of the common good" (Ministério de Educação e Esporte, 1998, p.91). Whereas the curricula of the 1990s in the Southern Cone countries did not encourage primary and lower secondary school students to question or evaluate norms, that of Brazil did so, proposing that they be evaluated and offering a standard against which they should be measured: the common good.

HISTORY and recent political memory

In regard to modern history, the three curricula refer explicitly to the breakdown of democratic government, political instability, and conflict. It is difficult to not recognize in the three school systems under consideration efforts to approach the task of building within the new generation a common memory in regard to the history of democratic break-down and profound and tragic conflict. The Brazilian curriculum does so by focusing more on social dimensions than on current politics. Its contents referring to political history do no go beyond "the post-1964 military governments". That is, they do not directly approach the transition to democracy (at the beginning of the 1980s). The curriculum does treat, however, socio-cultural dimensions of current definitions of citizenship. Primary school curricula in Argentina and Chile quite clearly and precisely define content about the respective crises of democratic regimes. In the case of Chile, official study programs even define in detail class activities and student homework in regard to the 1973 military coup. The objective of the activities is formulated as "strengthening and giving value to democratic principles, the acceptance of political and cultural pluralism, and respect for human rights" (Ministerio de Educación, 1998, p.52-53).

The table below presents a scheme of findings of the above comparative analysis, noting the similarities and differences between countries.

CONCEPTS AND EMPHASIS OF CITIZEN EDUCATION IN THE CURRENT CURRICULA OF ARGENTINA, BRAZIL, AND CHILE.
Source: C.Cox, (2002)

Concepts	Argentina & Chile (*)	Brazil (**)
Nation	Explicit references to national identity	Without explicit reference to the nation
Political institutions	Emphasis on institutions and political processes	Emphasis on the social and cultural dimensions of citizenship
Norms	Relation of acceptance of norms	Relation of questioning of norms
Participation	Emphasis on attitudes of responsibility	Emphasis on critical attitudes
History	Emphasis on modern political history	Emphasis on social and cultural analysis of society

(*) Based on Contenidos Básicos Comunes para la Educación General Básica (Min.Cultura y Educación, Argentina, 1995), and Objetivos Fundamentales y Contenidos Mínimos Obligatorios de la Educación Básica (Mineduc -Chile 1996).

(**) Based on "Parámetros Curriculares Nacionais", (Temas Transversais e Historia) Ministerio de Educação e Esporte 1998).

The differences observed between the curricula of Argentina and Chile, on the one hand, and of Brazil on the other, follow the principles of two views of citizen education that are based on the same three moral foundations –human rights, solidarity, and dialogue. But the give priority to different dimensions of citizenship. The Brazilian curriculum silences the political dimension while focusing on society and culture and giving priority to social citizenship. The opposite is the case in Argentina and in Chile, which emphasize political citizenship. Moreover, the Brazilian curricular parameters seek to educate in a relation of citizen with the establishment –whatever its referent– that is more critical than that demonstrated in the two Southern Cone countries.

The three curricula, on the other hand, show the paradigm change observed in most curricular reforms that took place in the world during the 1990s –civics education as a specialized subject placed at the end of the citizen training sequence.

FROM CIVICS EDUCATION to citizen education:
POLITICAL COMPETENCIES

The move from "civic education" to "citizen education" involves a new conceptualization of learning in the area, based on the notion of competence. This assumes going from focusing almost entirely on learning achievement to emphasizing *skills* and *attitudes* and the *environments* in which school relations take place and how this set of proposals directly or indirectly affect the ideas of government, politics, participation, and democracy.

The change can be described as a tripartite expansion *–thematic, quantitative,* and *instructional–* of traditional civic education.

I. It is *thematic* because the focus of knowledge content expands from political institutionality (nation, state, and government) to current problems in society such as equity, human rights, the environment, and scienc and technology within contexts of societies that deliberate about ends and means as well as about ways to resolve conflicts and why and how to benefit from differences.

II. It is *quantititative* because the presence of citizen training is substantially redefined. Rather than being placed at the end of the schooling sequence –the final grades of secondary education– it is present throughout, from pre-school until the end of secondary school. Rather than being a special subject, its contents are distributed among various subjects, as well as having cross-cutting objectives.

III. It is *instructional* because it proposes learning objectives that, together with knowledge, include skills and attitudes and the organization of the classroom or school that condition, mold, and educate students in social relations for political, civil, and social citizenship. The change also includes substantial enrichment of media and methods used in citizenship education in which the thrust of the new paradigm is a combination of study and practice, participation, debate, decisions, and collective action. The following table presents the dimensions of this change.

FROM CIVIC EDUCATION TO CITIZEN EDUCATION

CIVIC EDUCATION	CITIZEN EDUCATION
Focus on political institutions.	Dual focus: political institutions and broadening the theme of "current social problems" and conflict resolution skills.
Last years of secondary education.	Present throughout schooling.
Aimed at acquisition of knowledge - content focused.	Aimed at acquisition of knowledge, skills, and attitudes within contexts of practice and emphasizing participatory and democratic relations.

Source: Cox, C., R.Jaramillo, F.Reimers, (2005).

The reformed curriculum of the 1990s in the three countries examined present the characteristics noted above and are in this sense in harmony with world trends in this regard. After little less than a decade from their formulation, however, one should note new curricular challenges in this key area.

FIRST CHALLENGE: EDUCATE IN VALUING POLITICS

The first challenge is to respond effectively to the general disenchantment of young people with politics, as shown in regional surveys on this subject. In this regard, special attention should be given to curricular development policies in countries, to take care that the new emphasis on social citizenship, which responds to deep concerns within the culture of young people regarding diversity and solidarity with their immediate groups is not treated at the cost of treating objectives and content dealing with political institutionality and citizenship. The Chilean case is illustrative here. As a reaction to a drastic fall in voting rates of young people, and which caused questioning within the national senate in regard to the new citizen education curriculum, the Ministry of Education created a Citizen Training Commission that in 2004 reviewed the reform curriculum of 1998 and suggested two changes directly related to the "political citizenship" focus. First, it suggested a change in sequence so that content directly related to political institutionality, elections, and citizen participation would be presented at the end of secondary education (at 18 years of age) rather than at the beginning of secondary schooling as had been the case with the reform. Second, the commission proposed that it was necessary to emphasize content that treats in a special manner citizen responsibility as a moral and political virtue and that students be educated regarding the risks for democracy[8]. In regard to this last point the document presents something that in our opinion is relevant for many national contexts in the region:

The first challenge is to respond effectively to the general disenchantment of young people with politics.

"*A sure way to erode the effectiveness of citizen training, especially among secondary school students, is (...) to base it solely on the normative validity of certain principles about politics in a democracy. The contrast between high principles and the facts of life that dilute them or deny them, (...) worthy of being denounced in any real political system, is the first thing that young people note when explaining their disenchantment with politics. It is vital, therefore, to explicitly include in the curriculum teaching about the risks to democracy, about the dynamics of power that are a threat to its principles, as well as about the every-day, confusing and "disordered" character of collective subjects in a democracy*" (Comisión Formación Ciudadana, 2005, p. 151).

[8] Chilean and Colombian students assessed by the international civics test of IEA in 1999 (Torney-Purta. et.al. 2001), demonstrated low levels of knowlege regarding risks to democracy such as nepotism, monopoly of the communication media, or interfaces with justice. (Torney-Purta, Amadeo, 2004).

School experiences should effectively inculcate and develop a sense of the pertinence and value of identity.

SECOND CHALLENGE:
DEVELOPMENT OF POLITICAL COMPETENCIES

The curricular reforms of the 1990s are characterized by emphasizing the acquisition of *deliberation and participation skills* as a key dimension of effective citizenship education. In the three countries, objectives and content referring to participation skills focus on the practice and value of *dialogue.* This is the sole concept related to political participation practices that are proposed to be treated by education. None of the three curricula include specifically "political" skills. This omission is perhaps symptomatic of the political cultures of our region –that make weak or very abstract connections between the cultivation of democratic habits of daily life and the functioning and development of political institutions and processes at the macro level, and which tend to systematically emphasize participation in terms of demands toward, or against, the State while not fostering the activities of citizens in the search and implementation of answers to problems.

An analysis of citizenship in within the British curriculum (Schuller, 2001) shows what can be understood by specifically political skills about which our curricula, and certainly those of secondary education, should prepare students. Besides participation as involvement and action in a community group or association, the following skills are emphasized:

- Influence: guide participation and influence on group strategies or policies;
- Advocacy: be able to present and defend an argument;
- Conciliation: be able to resolve disagreements and conflicts;
- Leadership: be able to initiate and coordinate activities agreed upon with others;
- Representation: be able to speak and act on the behalf of others.

Citizen education appropriate for the current requirements of our countries should therefore go beyond participation as involvement that demands the ability to participate in dialogue. It should also provide instruction in specifically political skills such as those listed; at least the ability to represent others and to elect others, to mediate between opposing interests, and to conciliate in case of conflict.

THIRD CHALLENGE:
THE BALANCE BETWEEN CRITICISM AND CONSTRUCTION

A key point to be worked upon in the citizen training curriculum is the tension between order and criticism, or training in belief in and loyalty to the community and its laws, as well as in the critical skills needed in order to improve society and its laws. In an analogous sense, school experiences should effectively inculcate and develop a sense of the pertinence and value of identity, which is inseparable from a shared vision of one's own history, while providing critical tools and teach the maintenance of a reflective distance from the same. How to do so without provoking alienation on the one hand, and citizens unable to criticize and innovate on the other, is an especially important education challenge within a globalized environment.

In her last work, the curriculum theorists Cecilia Braslavsky proposed the concept of *historical competence* as a basis for global citizenship and a crucial component of educating for democracy. Competence in historical conscience of the genealogical type[9] is able to criticize as well as construct, and uses tradition, the examples of other nations or cases, criticism, interpretation, and creation in order to construct new realities (Braslavsky, Borges, Truong, et.al. 2006).

Within contexts of the marked social inequality and institutional weakness of democratic politics that characterize so many national contexts of our region, the achievement of the balance mentioned is perhaps the greatest challenge. For it is easier to link citizenship training to tradition; that is to the established powers, or to foster a critical view that rejects such a tradition in its totality, than to create a vision that uses both for the construction of a deeper and more just democratic order and which presents curricular objectives and content that contribute to creating a constructive relation with politics. How may we educate in attitudes and skills that foster the respect for law and the institutional framework while at the same time inculcating critical reflection skills that can lead to innovation and improvement within contexts of inequality and institutional precariousness? These appear to us to be the terms of the greatest challenge presented by our societies to the citizen training abilities of our school systems.

[9] Competence in historical conscience of the genealogical type transcends the traditional kind of historical conscience (comparisons with the past), examples (comparisons between nations), critical (rejection of existing models without presenting alternatives) by using the approaches of each in order to create and construct political action (Braslavsky et.al. 2006).

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Curricula, standards and assessment of the quality of education

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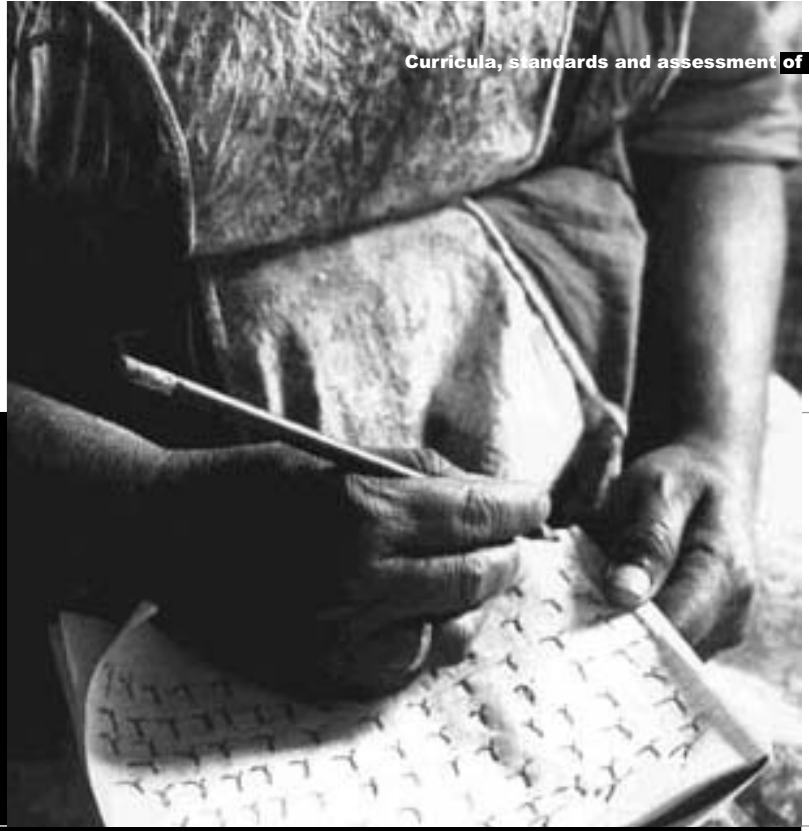
INTRODUCTION

I have been asked to address the subject of curricula, standards and assessment of the quality of education. Much of my presentation will be devoted to issues related to assessment of the quality of education. However, I will consider, briefly, the important role of curricula and standards that provide the foundation for discussing assessment of the quality of education. I wish to begin with a consideration of standards before commenting on curricula, for I believe that this is the natural order in which, as educators, we proceed with the development of these two very important aids to quality education.

The important role of curricula and standards that provide the foundation for discussing assessment of the quality of education.



STANDARDS and Curriculum

It is widely accepted that standards, or perhaps more to the point, educational standards, are statements about what students should know and be able to do as a result of schooling. Standards also help to define what performance will be accepted as evidence that the expected learning has taken place (McLeod,Stake, Schapelle, Mellissinos & Gierl, 1996). Educational standards reflect, in concrete terms, the mission that schools must fulfil. They provide guidance to teachers, students, parents, school administrators and other stakeholders about what should be accomplished at particular levels of the education system.

Standards have conventionally emphasized the knowledge and skills believed to be necessary for the later success of students (Darling-Hammond, 1997). However, recent discussions about education in the modern world, reflected in the Jomtien Conference on Education for All in 1990 and the World Education Forum at Dakar in 2000, suggest that some broadening of this emphasis is required. Standards, at every level of the education system must reflect, not only the knowledge and skills that should be acquired, but also the values and attitudes that that are increasingly important considerations in the world in which students will live and work. These would include elements such as character building, patriotism, a service perspective, tolerance, non-violence and respect for human rights and human life.

Curricula are derived from the educational standards. The standards provide broad scope for the educator to shape and structure a curriculum at the local or school level. The curriculum reflects what the school will do to help students reach the expectations outlined in the educational standards. It is concerned with what will be done in a school on a day to day basis to help students achieve the desired outcomes. Much of this may be incorporated into a written curriculum framework that gives the scope and sequence of what will be taught, as well as the instructional techniques and instructional materials that will be used.

Standards should focus on broad outcomes, leaving it to the classroom curriculum to customize the learning process to respond to the diversity of factors that impact on the teaching-learning environment, including students' educational background, socio-economic circumstances of students, resource availability in school, learning styles of students and local environmental factors. Reigeluth (1997) had taken issue with the use of standards that, in his view, were seeking to bring about the standardization of what students were taught in school, despite, as he put it "differences in developmental rates for learners of the same age, differences in opportunities to learn outside of school, differences in prior knowledge and skills, differences in interests, and many other factors" (p. 204). He had suggested the customization of standards as a way of responding to the differences among schools. However, it is suggested that the issue of differences in the circumstances of schools would be better addressed through the customization of the curriculum, based on standards that define, broadly, the expected learning outcomes.

THE QUALITY of Education

Standards and curricula are tools that guide the achievement of quality education. Much of the discussion in the literature on quality of education focuses on higher education, despite the fact that higher education institutions account for less than 10 percent of the global student enrolment in educational institutions (UNESCO, 2000b, pp. 116-117).

The Education for All initiatives and, more particularly, the Jomtien Declaration in 1990 and the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000, have contributed significantly to placing greater emphasis on the quality of education at the earlier levels of the education system.

Any attempt to suggest how the quality of education should be assessed must presume that the concept of quality of education is well defined. However, this concept of quality of education is still much debated and a clear definition has proven elusive, even in relation to higher education. The Ministerial Round Table on Quality Education in 2003 concluded that "quality has become a dynamic concept that has constantly to adapt to a world whose societies are undergoing profound social and economic transformation" (UNESCO, 2003, p. 1). The EFA Global Monitoring Report 2005 (UNESCO, 2005) also observed that "notwithstanding the growing consensus about the need to provide access to education of 'good quality', there is much less agreement about what the term actually means in practice" (p. 29).

While the definition of quality in education will, no doubt, continue to evolve, for the purpose of this presentation on curricula, standards and assessment of the quality of education, an operational definition of the concept of quality should suffice. Quality of education, in the context of this discussion, may be defined as the extent to which the delivery of the school curriculum is realising the learning outcomes established in the educational standards. For the purpose of assessing quality of education, two complementary dimensions of assessment are proposed:

I. Assessment of how well the internal processes are working to move students towards achievement of the outcomes established in the standards.

II. Assessment of the extent to which those outcomes have been met by students.

These two dimensions may be characterised as dimensions of "relative achievement assessment" and "absolute achievement assessment", respectively.

THE RELATIVE Achievement Assessment

No education system can hope to achieve satisfactory results without investing in the inputs that are essential for education in a modern environment. These include:

I. *Material resources* such as classrooms, school facilities, libraries, textbooks and other learning materials.

II. *Human resources* such as educational managers, supervisors and teachers.

Indicators such as pupil-teacher ratio, teachers' salaries, public expenditure per pupil and proportion of GDP spent on education will, therefore, continue to be important in assessing the quality of education.

A critical consideration is how well the internal processes are helping students to achieve the intended outcomes.

However, in assessing the quality of education in relation to curricula and standards, a critical consideration is how well the internal processes are helping students to achieve the intended outcomes. In an article on education reforms for quality assurance, Cheng (2003) defines three waves of reform, the first of which focuses mainly on internal effectiveness and related efforts to improve internal performance, particularly the methods and processes of teaching and learning in educational institutions. Much of what Cheng includes in his first wave of reform is consistent with this concept of relative achievement assessment. Relative achievement assessment is concerned, in general, with internal effectiveness and, in particular, with how the processes of teaching and learning are contributing to the movement of students towards the accomplishment of the desired outcomes.

Relative achievement assessment would require that the design of classroom instruction take into account the knowledge, competencies, values and attitudes that students bring to the classroom which may impact on, and affect the learning process. Some form of initial or diagnostic assessment of the standing of students on relevant cognitive and affective indicators should be undertaken, not only to provide a baseline against which later progress may be judged but, perhaps more importantly, to determine the areas of deficits which may require greater attention during the instructional process.

Relative achievement assessment is concerned with the extent to which classroom instruction is leading to progress by students towards achieving the intended learning outcomes. In this regard, the use of formative assessment would be an important tool of classroom instruction. Formative assessment involves the collection of evidence about the progress being made by students and using this evidence as feedback to improve both teaching and learning. Formative assessment and the use of feedback has, therefore, been characterised as assessment for learning (Assessment Reform Group, 2002).

Formative assessment provides feedback to teachers on what students have learned and the effectiveness of their teaching. On the basis of this feedback, teachers can plan interventions to guide students to cross learning hurdles and improve in areas where they are weak. In addition, formative assessment and the related feedback assist students in undertaking their own assessment of their progress, which in turn guides their self-improvement in areas where they are weak. (Airasian, 1997; Nitko, 1994). Such formative assessment for learning, places great premium on teamwork by the teacher and the student to achieve the desired outcomes.

Relative achievement assessment of quality of education will, therefore, include an assessment of the extent to which appropriate and innovative instructional techniques are used to obtain incremental progress towards the desired outcomes. The interest is in how well the interventions are helping students to cross learning hurdles and move them towards the accomplishment of the desired outcomes.

Absolute achievement assessment focuses on how well stakeholders' expectations have been met by schooling.

In addition to learning gains made by students during the period of instruction, relative achievement assessment is concerned with the learning gains made by students after the period of instruction has been completed. At appropriate intervals, therefore, the teacher is expected to undertake summative assessment of learning, of the students they guided.

Summative assessment has been defined as "the process by which teachers gather evidence in a planned and systematic way in order to draw inferences about their students' learning, based on their professional judgement, and to report at a particular time on their students' achievements" (Assessment Systems for the Future, 2005, p. 8). While formative assessment provides the teacher and student with information that guides learning, summative assessment provides information that may be used to draw conclusions about how well a student has attained the learning targets. It is concerned with what can be said about students' learning at the end of a particular learning journey.

Summative assessment that is undertaken for the purpose of reporting to the school community is an integral part of the proposed relative achievement assessment dimension. Such assessment may take place at the end of a term or at the end of a school year or at other times established by the school for the purpose of apprising students, parents and school administrators about the results of the efforts of the teacher at working with students over a defined period of time. It is part of relative achievement assessment in so far as it remains internal to the school and the immediate school community.

THE ABSOLUTE Achievement Assessment

While the extent to which the education processes are moving students towards the achievement of the desired outcomes is critical, wider stakeholder accountability is equally important. Wider stakeholder accountability is central to the proposed *absolute achievement assessment* dimension. This dimension is closely related to what Cheng (2003) describes as a second wave of education reforms, which emphasizes organizational effectiveness, stakeholder satisfaction and accountability to the public.

In this age of globalization and technological advancement where education is highly valued for the proper preparation of individuals to contribute to, and benefit from, social and economic development programmes within the local, national as well as international community, stakeholders transcend the immediate school community. Interested stakeholders include not only students, teachers, parents and school administrators, but also several Government Ministries, the private sector, and internal and external investors, all of whom have a stake in the acquisition of appropriate knowledge, skills, attitudes and values by students who are being prepared for life and work in the local, national and international community. These stakeholders include, as well, a number of institutions and interest groups in the wider national and international community that are investing in the improvement of education within and across national borders.

Absolute achievement assessment focuses on how well stakeholders' expectations have been met by schooling. Here, assessment of quality does not depend on the school's report of student accomplishments. It relies on independent, comprehensive, summative assessment measures that stakeholders regard as valid and reliable measures of the targeted outcomes of schooling and in which they can have confidence.

The dispassionate objectivity that is required for this absolute achievement assessment is captured thus, by the words of one writer who was addressing a related matter:

"*What is of interest is the final state of a student's knowledge and capability. It is of no consequence what the state of a student's knowledge and capability was at the beginning of the course. Nor is it particularly relevant what the state of the student's knowledge was at any point earlier than the end*." (Maxwell 2004, p. 4).

The "end", in this context, is the point at which the student is expected to achieve the outcomes defined in the educational standards. This may, for example, be the end of primary school, the end of junior high school, the end of secondary school or the end of a specified Grade.

Absolute achievement assessment requires an arm's length relationship with the school. This requires that the assessment be undertaken by an agency external to the school. The concern is not about internal processes and the extent to which the curriculum and other related inputs are moving students towards the desired outcomes. At issue is what schools have accomplished in relation to the targeted outcomes.

Such assessments are conducted, invariably, as part of a national, regional or international assessment programme. In Jamaica, for example, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture has a National Assessment Programme which assess the academic achievement of students at Grades I, 3, 4 and 6 at the primary level and another national programme at the secondary level, the Junior High School Certificate Examination that assesses academic achievement at Grade 9 (Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture, n.d.).

Within the Commonwealth Caribbean, the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC), which provides services to 14 member countries, plays an important role in absolute achievement assessment. The CXC has developed syllabuses that serve as regional standards at the secondary and immediate post-secondary levels. These syllabuses were developed in collaboration with the countries served by the Council and with due consideration to educational standards of the wider international community. The syllabuses provide parents, students, teachers, schools and Government Ministries of the countries served by the Council as well as the wider local, regional and international community with information and guidance about what a student is expected to know and be able to do after completing certain levels of schooling. The Council maintains an arms length relationship with schools in developing and administering examinations and in processing performance data and issuing results (CXC, 2005). Syllabuses that serve as standards, and the related examinations, are now available for:

I. *The Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate (CSEC)* that defines and measures outcomes for students who have completed the full cycle of secondary education.

II. *The Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examination (CAPE)* one-Unit courses of study that define, and measure, outcomes for students completing the equivalent of a one-year course of study at the post-secondary level.

III. *A pre-CSEC offering, the New Secondary School Examination* that defines critical knowledge and competencies that all students graduating from secondary school should have.

At this juncture of the history of the Commonwealth Caribbean, when the Region is seeking to refine existing mechanisms and to develop new ones for assuring a vibrant and successful Caribbean Single Market and Economy and to increase its participation in, and benefits from, the global economy, portability of qualifications across national boundaries is becoming increasingly important. CXC enjoys the confidence of the local, national, regional and international community that allows it to serve as an independent and objective assessor of the achievement of students in schools of the region in relation to educational standards it has helped to develop, which are linked to educational standards in the wider international community. The results of performance on CXC's examinations, therefore, provide for the Commonwealth Caribbean, an important source of absolute achievement assessment of the quality of education at certain levels. Other external examination agencies and organizations serve a similar purpose in other countries.

INTEGRATING VALUES and Attitude into the Assessment

As noted earlier, the affective changes that education should help to bring about are important aspects of the standards and should be reflected in the school curriculum. In assessing the quality of education, therefore, the expected affective outcomes should be included for both *relative achievement assessment* and *absolute achievement assessment*.

While standards and the related curricula often define affective outcomes, their integration into the assessment of the quality of education is, generally, not given the same attention as achievement in the cognitive areas. Yet, these are critical, expected outcomes of education in a world where globalization is both increasing diversification within communities and increasing contacts with other communities and cultures. As a result of such diversification and contact, issues surrounding perspectives and practices in relation to gender, religions, ethnicity, human rights, justice, and social, economic and political practices are becoming increasingly important. Not only is it important to define, in the educational standards and curricula, outcomes in relation to values and attitudes, it is equally important to integrate these into the assessment of the quality of education.

As part of relative achievement assessment, the student standing on the targeted attitudes and values should be assessed at the inception of a class. Instructional approaches should then be utilized, that would help to bring about desired changes. Much of what has been recommended in the discussion of relative achievement assessment would be applicable to the assessment of values and attitudes. The challenge would be to develop and use appropriate measures of values and attitudes that may be integrated into diagnostic, formative and summative assessment.

Teachers need to be trained in values and attitude development and change, and in the development and use of relevant affective assessment instruments.

The limitation in implementing a school programme for systematically assessing values and attitude as a part of the assessment of quality in education lies, perhaps, in the need for a more comprehensive preparation of teachers to undertake the task. This type of teacher preparation is often neglected. Teachers need to be trained in values and attitude development and change, and in the development and use of relevant affective assessment instruments that will allow for the assessment of progress towards bringing about desired modifications in values and attitudes.

The work of the Living Values Education Program (LVEP) that is implemented in 77 countries, including countries of Latin America and the Caribbean is worth noting. The Program offers training in values and attitude education in over 8,000 sites to educators, among others, through experiential values activities and practical methodologies (Learning Values Education, 2005).

The Program recently reported that as a result of its interventions “educators note an increase in respect, caring, cooperation, motivation, and the ability to solve peer conflicts on the part of the students. Aggressive behaviors decline as positive social skills and respect increase” (Learning Values Education, 2005, p. 6).

The Living Values Education Program holds the potential for more comprehensive training of teachers in (a) the design of values and attitude programmes that are responsive to educational standards and (b) the development and use of assessment instruments and procedures to assess the extent to which the desired affective changes are taking place.

With respect to the absolute achievement assessment dimension, student standing on the values and attitude outcomes defined in the standards should be assessed at the end of the relevant period of schooling. Despite the concerns of stakeholders about the values and attitudes of graduates of the education system, reflected, for example, in the goals and strategies of the Dakar Framework for Action in 2000 (UNESCO, 2000a), few, if any, national, regional or international assessment programmes, undertake the absolute achievement assessment of students on these expected outcomes of schooling. Yet these outcomes are an integral part of what is expected from quality education. The absolute achievement assessment dimension must, therefore, include the assessment of values and attitudes as part of assessment of the quality of education.

A programme such as the Living Values Education Program, with its international reach, seems to have the potential to assist the international community and the Education for All initiatives in achieving the integration of the assessment of values and attitudes into the proposed absolute achievement assessment of the quality of education. In any case, steps need to be taken to ensure that stakeholders are provided with adequate information about the outcomes of schooling with respect to the development of desirable values and attitudes that are defined in the educational standards. This is an area in which considerable work is still required.

SUMMARY and Conclusion

This paper proposes a framework for assessing quality in education, based on the outcomes defined by educational standards and curricula. It takes the view that educational standards reflect, in concrete terms, the mission that schools must fulfil while the classroom curriculum must customize the learning processes to respond to the diversity of factors that include student background, socio-economic circumstances, resource availability, learning styles and local environmental factors. Using an operational definition of quality as the extent to which the delivery of the school curriculum is realising the learning outcomes defined in the educational standards, the paper proposes that quality in education should be assessed on two dimensions, characterised as relative achievement assessment and absolute achievement assessment.

Relative achievement assessment is concerned with how well the internal processes are working to move students towards accomplishing the outcomes established in the standards; and is operationalised as assessment of:

I. The extent to which appropriate and innovative instructional techniques are used to obtain incremental progress towards the desired outcomes.

II. Periodic updating of the school community about the results of teacher assessment of the accomplishments of students in relation to the learning outcomes established in the standards.

Absolute achievement assessment, on the other hand, is concerned with assessment of the extent to which those outcomes defined in the standards have been met by students. Absolute achievement assessment:

I. Focuses on how well the expectations of a wider stakeholder community have been met by schooling.

II. Relies on independent, comprehensive, summative assessment measures that stakeholders regard as valid and reliable measures of the targeted outcomes of schooling and in which they can have confidence.

III. Requires that assessment be undertaken by an agency external to the school.

Finally, the paper highlights the need for greater attention to be given to the assessment of values and attitudes in measuring the quality of education.

Significant gains have been made in the Education for All movement since the Jomtien Declaration on Education for All in 1990. These gains are evident in the greater access to education that is provided by countries worldwide. The provision of quality education amidst expanding access is an area that requires close monitoring. Such monitoring is supported both by the development of standards and curricula to guide the requirements of the education process and by the assessment of the extent to which the desired outcomes are being realised. The proposed model for assessing the quality of education is derived from discussions that are already taking place in national and international communities and aspects of which are being implemented in various school communities. The paper is, essentially, suggesting one way of bringing the discussions and the initial practices into a formal framework for the assessment of quality of education.

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Educational standards: THE MISSING PIECE![1]

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Many changes occurred to the structures of our societies during the past decades, most of them caused by immigration, easiness of commuting and international markets. These changes increased heterogeneity in many aspects, interpreted my many as a threat to the concept of equity. Simultaneously, policies have shifted towards homogeneity by emphasizing equal opportunities and expectations for all.

Within education systems, countries are now looking beyond the national context and their own outcomes, towards other countries and what they are defining as appropriate levels of knowledge and skills. International standards have emerged from an increased interest in international assessments of student achievement and international comparisons in education. As a result of the high number of countries that are now involved in these large-scale international assessments[2], appropriate levels of performance are now associated by the top performances, even though there are contextual variables which are unevenly impacting performance across countries.

[1] Paper prepared for the II Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of the Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean (PRELAC), based on a previous paper prepared for the OREALC/UNESCO in 2005 entitled *Standards in Education – Implications and Experiences*.

[2] A few recent examples include the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS), the Second Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (SERCE), the Southern Africa Consortium for Monitoring Education Quality (SACMEQ), and the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, which later became the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Stud (TIMSS).

The word "standard" is defined as *something set up or established by authority as a rule for the measure of quantity, weight, extent, value, or quality.*

The internationalization of learning has become the new trend in educational policies, with an increasing need to clearly define what schools are supposed to teach, and what and how well students are expected to learn, thus, clarifying and adding transparency to the role of schools. This is the context in which equity also emerges. Although the concept of equity is clearly accepted, how it is to be implemented remains unclear.

Educational standards, a set of goals and objectives defining what students should know and how they should demonstrate this knowledge, is part of the agenda of governments and educators.

The word "standard" is defined as *something set up or established by authority as a rule for the measure of quantity, weight, extent, value, or quality*.

In education, their purpose is to establish and measure educational content. Despite a general agreement of what they are, they are referred to by a variety of terms including curriculum, curriculum frameworks, curriculum goals, lists of content, essential knowledge and basic competencies.

Our society clearly expects students to acquire and demonstrate a high level of knowledge and skills, which will allow them to be full participants in our society and future labor markets. Although every educator agrees with this principle, a problem remains on how to define what type and level of knowledge and skills students should acquire.

With the lack of clear directions and documented procedures of what is expected of schools, teachers are often left with the responsibility of determining what should be taught in their classrooms and the most appropriate way to assess what they taught. This lack of direction forces educators to develop their individual lists of content and performance expectations founded on their own views of what is important and expected. Thus, what is taught in the classrooms and how it is assessed are subject to high variability and impacted by the educators' own qualifications and ideas.

The problem with this approach is that as individuals, the educational and professional paths of teachers vary, thus increasing the variability of what occurs between classes and increasing inequality – the implemented curriculum will be richer and wider in some schools and often influenced by the social and economical background of neighborhoods and students. Within this framework, teachers would be responsible for deciding every aspect of teaching, for selecting what is to be taught to designing appropriate assessments. These needs add yet another burden to the already under-recognized and often under-trained teaching force. Teachers were originally trained to teach, rather than to determine exactly what is to be taught and to find the most appropriate way to determine students' success or failure –they require guidelines, particularly in the beginning of their career. In many countries the area of assessment, for example, represents a gap in the teacher training programs. Despite this, a constant task of teachers is to assess - this is what he/she does every day not only in promoting or retaining students but also in day-to-day activities such as when deciding if he/she should move to the next topic on the agenda or review the current topic one more time. The skills of teaching and assessing are connected and thus, appropriate training should be offered in both topics.

Standards are present in many aspects of our society from sports to international markets. Surprisingly, these standards are not a default in education, but this philosophy now drives education in many countries. Even when defined at a minimum level, standards ensure that a consistent set of objectives, knowledge and content are implemented across classrooms, schools and regions. They ensure that every student, independent of location and social class, will receive a minimum set of competencies. This can be interpreted as equity, but not without controversy.

In one side, many believe that the establishment of standards is likely to eliminate creativity, increase homogeneity and narrow content. Educators fear the higher imposition of standards, the federal control over what is taught and the limitation of content by a minimum common denominator that will narrow the curriculum. Standards are seen as a way to eliminate individuality of education by forcing uniformity and homogeneity across classrooms. Some are indirectly against standards because they are aware of their limitation as an isolated policy. In many cases, the opposition to standards is an indirect effect of standardization and opposition to standardized testing.

This view is challenged by educators within the standard-based system, which are likely to view standards as a positive step towards equity, higher achievement and a tool to minimize the impact of socio-economic background in the performance of students. Standards contribute to accountability by making educators responsible for the teaching and learning processes. Although standards define what should be taught in a consistent way, educators and teachers are still responsible for determining how the standards should be taught and therefore, creativity and innovative practices can still be integral parts of the learning process.

Although the formal value of standards is not agreed on the international debate, educators do agree with the need to define what students should learn and be able to do in each level of schooling in a more consistent and informative way. These guidelines of content, when applied to a broader context and used to guide instruction and assessment, are referred to as content standards –the first component of standards. Content standards are not synonymous with curriculum or teaching plans, as they only define what is believed to be the essential elements that education systems should deliver and students should learn. They will be used by educators in the development of a curriculum and by teachers for the selection of the best teaching method to address them –the creativity of teachers towards new teaching methods should always be welcomed and never limited. Teachers are still responsible for ensuring that instruction will be adapted to individual's student needs, thus, reemphasizing the importance of appropriate teacher training and qualification.

Despite controversies and the many evaluative and judgmental actions that exist during the process of setting standards, this process should be regarded as valid and indispensable. More importantly, there is a need to ensure that the standards cover the essential elements, that these are implemented consistently across classroom, and that their assessment is reliable and technically sound.

Content standards should be accompanied by acceptable levels of proficiency in a way that is realistic and meet the current needs, representing the second component to educational standards. Performance standards "describe the degrees of mastery or levels of performance". A clear definition of acceptable levels of performance is essential so that appropriate actions can be taken. Performance standards can be defined in a variety of forms:

I. Dichotomous categories of performance are established by a single threshold, such as passing/not passing, mastered/not-mastered or inadequate/adequate. Critics of this approach consider this method too limited for the heterogeneous population of students as it only describes improvement or gains for a few students, mainly those with performance levels around the threshold.

II. Multiple categories of performance are established by multiple thresholds, thus providing more information about students' performance, such as basic/advanced/proficient or through various levels.

The use of standards requires the involvement of every level of education. The definition of content and performance standards will be followed by the development of curricula, by the introduction of appropriate teacher training and capacity building, by the development of suitable methods and techniques, and by the revision and development of textbooks. This will ensure equity in opportunities for all students.

In centralized contexts where a more uniform teaching force and school facilities exist, the implementation of standards is more direct, but not without resistance and criticisms –reaching agreement within a wide community is always complex. The question remains on how to implement such concept in contexts which are based on high discrepancies between social and economic levels, school infrastructure, teacher qualifications and training, and economic situations. More than in the former group, these latter contexts could benefit from such a change. A standard-based system is likely to diminish the discrepancies of what happens inside the classroom by ensuring a minimum comparability of content between schools and equal opportunities for all students –but it will not limit the content being taught. In the case of teachers with low qualifications, standards and the associated curriculum become essential training and capacity building tools while also ensuring minimum levels of competencies for all.

In the case of teachers with low qualifications, standards and the associated curriculum become essential training and capacity building tools.

Simultaneously, standards should also guide the revision and development of textbooks and teaching methods. Together, these measures will result in a more uniform dissemination of knowledge and more homogeneous outcomes. The level of these outcomes will depend on how well contents and their associated measures are implemented and the extent to which they match what is judged to be essential and acceptable.

Discussion about standards should also include a reference to which level to set the standards. If they are set too high, there will be too few students achieving the standards but the ones who do will have greater advantage over the ones who do not; if they are set too low, there will be too many students achieving the standards.

A risk associated with both approaches is that in many situations success is defined by how well students met the standards –including a small group who will generalize 'meeting standards' as the main indicator of quality of education, a conclusion loaded with problems.

A solution for the first situation may be to better prepare and assist teachers hoping that better teaching will result in better outcomes. The solution for the second situation is more political and includes considerations of how well our system is addressing each student's need, and how realistic the standards and expectations are in relation to higher education and labor markets.

Also relevant is the impact of standards as a tool for decision making. If they are to be used in high-stakes decisions including graduation, certification, award of scholarships or simple promotion, the main focus will be on validation and comparability through transparency and documentation.

Students' commitment and motivation are also important dimensions. When standards are associated with low-stakes decisions, such as monitoring learning or verifying how well the system is working, the impact is directly on individuals and not on the system, and public accountability will be the main aspect. Particularly on the latter situation, the system should have a plan of action to intervene whenever appropriate and assist those who fail.

The development and implementation of standards will require an alignment of all aspects of teaching and learning, such as teacher training, curriculum development, training materials, remediation classes and assessment instruments to name a few. Additionally, the validity of this process depends on communication, documentation, transparency and a sense of ownership through the involvement of expert groups from every levels of society. Therefore, teachers, policy makers, local businesses, political members of the community, representatives from lower and higher levels of education, administrators, unions and representatives from minority groups are just a few of the groups that should participate during the process of defining standards. After all, these groups are either currently involved or will be involved in our students' lives. A total alignment between these various elements is necessary for this approach to be successful. A summary view is provided by Paul Barton who describes the standard-based reform and test-based accountability as a structure with four walls: the content standards, performance standards, the curriculum and the test.

A common belief is that the acceptance of standards should be voluntary, rather than forced to schools or teachers. Consequently, ownership and communication should be integral parts in the process of acceptance and adoption of standards. Teachers tend to reject the imposition of issues coming from higher levels of the government which are not fully explained or justified –they must accept standards as tools for improved teaching and learning and as essential elements in the process of quality education.

Also relevant is the impact of standards as a tool for decision making.

Although previous parts of this paper has focused on a lack of a single set of standards, a contrary situation exists in many other countries or regions which have multiple sets of standards that are simultaneously used and accepted by different groups. The costs of not having a single set of national standards is summarized by Noah into three categories:

I. *Cost of non-comparability:* complications in interpreting and additional costs for developing multiple versions of standards to serve multiple levels such as local, district or state;

II. *Cost of information:* higher costs to acquire "valid and reliable information" about individuals during decision making as these come from various sources;

III. *Cost of private substitutes:* multiple curriculum and assessment systems managed by private companies will replace a single national set of standards.

Around the world, standards have been used in different ways to accomplish different things. However, the existence of standards does not represent a situation without problems or controversies. The presence of standards, as single or multiple sets, is accompanied by another concern on whether it is realistic to expect all students to succeed at equal levels. Some countries include a single set of standards for all students, independently of ability or future expectations. Others, particularly countries where students are divided into tracks based on their previous performance, utilize multiple sets that are adapted to the students' own ability or the future they expect.

The existence of standards does not represent a situation without problems or controversies.

Canada, Germany and the United States are examples of highly decentralized countries, where standards became an integral part of their education systems. Education is under the responsibility of local governments (i.e., provinces, states or districts), who are responsible for developing and implementing standards and curriculum. Federal agencies have a very limited role in education issues, with this role increasing in some countries as a result of recent policies (i.e., *No Child Left Behind* in the United States). National assessments are part of the education context in Canada and the United States, but while in the United States the focus is on individual achievements, Canada focuses on the system. German educators and policy makers maintain concerns over standardized tests and the so called league tables of schools and the use of standards as a controlling instrument to reinforce the selectivity aspect of the German system. Education is also under the responsibility of states in Australia, who also decide what is taught and assess performance through local assessments.

On the other hand, centralized education systems exist in France and Japan, where education is under the responsible of the government. The government controls most aspects of education including the recruiting, hiring and training of teachers as well as specifying what is taught in schools. France provides schools and teachers with the control of choosing their own textbook, teaching methods and pedagogy. Monbusho, Japan's Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, develops national curriculum guidelines which are used as national standards, with the purpose to ensure equality of opportunities for all children. Despite this, the Japanese system offers flexibility for teachers or schools to adapt and make small modifications to the specified curriculum. In both of these countries, the national curriculum guidelines are widely distributed and easily available through publishers, internet and the government, and are used by publishing companies for preparing textbooks. While Japan expects all students to meet very high standards (with a few adaptations available), France is moving towards a situation the standards are being adapted to achievement levels or future expectations of students –not only through multiple types of secondary education but also through various version of the *baccalauréat*.

The value of standards and assessments in policy development is significant but they do not exist in isolation. The U.S. Government, identified three goals accomplished by standards that are presented here as convincing evidence:

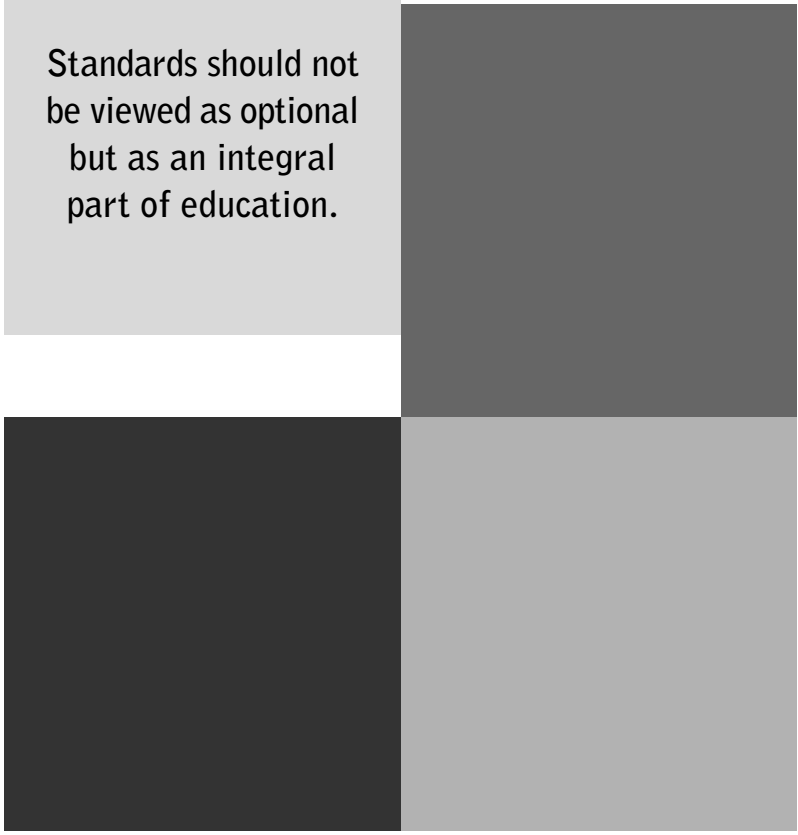
I. "Committing to high academic standards makes the unequivocal statement that all students are expected to excel academically";

II. "Standards setting engages parents and community members in a broad-based debate about what students should know and be able to do and strengthens the connections between state and local education reforms";

III. "Standards setting involves classroom teachers, parents and other members of the school community in the educational improvement process".

Standards should not be viewed as optional but as an integral part of education. Education quality will only be achieved through a combination of a broad involvement and awareness of all levels, appropriate policies, immediate actions and willingness to see the problem. The development of educational

Standards should not be viewed as optional but as an integral part of education.



standards should play a leading role in this objective as they alone will not guarantee success. They should also be accompanied by better teachers, schools, and educational materials as ways to motivate students. Teachers, as our principal source of information and dissemination of knowledge, should be valued and accepted as essential elements for our present and future and should be an integral part of this process.

The identification of a formal set of essential skills is not easy and likely to be criticized by many; therefore, all levels of society should be involved. On the other hand, the current reality which often is based on separate sets of skills in each classroom, school, district or state is even more problematic as it increases inequality and lowers the reliability in the system. This is likely to leave an even larger gap between the current status of education and what is considered quality education for all.

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Curricula and teachers

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We now clearly recognize how important it is for teachers to play an active role and the need for them to participate in developing educational processes.

INTRODUCTION

The "rediscovery" of the importance of the work of teachers in educational processes after a recent phase in which many education reforms in Latin America had identified as priorities infrastructure, equipment, administrative management processes, the production of textbooks, etc., allow us an overview and represents a significant advance that hands back the leading role to teachers –the same teachers formerly viewed merely as individuals trained to deliver a curriculum the more "teacher-proof" the better.

We now clearly recognize how important it is for teachers to play an active role and the need for them to participate in developing educational processes, managing schools, creating policy, and assuming responsibility for student learning as well as for their own. We also assume that emerging demands are marked not only by technological scientific development, but also by the current need to uphold values such as peace, equity, freedom, and democracy. This scenario undoubtedly presents new and different challenges to those of us responsible for teacher training (Robalino, 2005).

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¿WHAT SHOULD FUTURE TEACHERS LEARN during their initial training?

We have long asked, when thinking about initial training curricula, what future teachers should be taught. We have emphasized teaching, and in particular the contents of teaching. From a cognitive theory perspective, it may be more productive to turn the question around and inquire not only from the point of view of our "teaching intentions" but also from the perspective of learning and –more so– from an understanding perspective. We ask ourselves, what should an individual training to be a teacher understand; what should he or she be capable of knowing and doing with utmost flexibility?

Teacher learning is widely-studied. It is a subject that places the emphasis on training, on the personal process of identity building to be experienced by every future teacher, on building the conceptual foundations necessary to teach, and on the creation of a repertoire of strategies appropriate to the teaching situations to be confronted. It is evident that this focus is opposed to the concept of *specific preparation for a purpose* and to foolproof methods whenever possible. Rather, it argues that teacher learning is a task embarked upon by each and every teacher during his or her initial training. This is followed by a level of insecurity for the first two or three years of a job that the teacher continues to do for the rest of his/her life, even when specialized learning changes in relation to focus of attention or needs" (Ávalos, 2005:14).

From this perspective, what is required is for teacher training institutions to create *conditions conducive to learning.* We refer below to the concept of comprehension as performance and to its relation to the concept of professional competence. But for now we shall focus on how to define what is really important for future teachers to understand during their initial training and why we see teaching practice as the nucleus of such learning.

TEACHING PRACTICE: A COMPLEX AND MULTIFACETED SOCIAL PRACTICE.

Training teachers to work within the current scenario and using available knowledge involves training professionals capable of interacting in a particular field, one which we shall refer to as the *field of teaching practice*. Tentatively, we could say that what a future teacher should begin to understand during his or her initial training is teaching practice. This has to be carried out in a manner that allows the individual to continue building new and more profound understandings through practice.

Teaching practice is structured through the interaction of three functions: teacher-student-knowledge, and creates relations according to which the position of each of these elements determines the value and place of the other. In this sense, we see teaching practice as relational. Each practice acquires his or her meaning in a system of relations that mutually interact. This practice depends on this mutual referentiality of functions which in turn cannot be defined independently from it.

Teaching practice is structured through the interaction of three functions: teacher-student-knowledge.

The micro-space of teaching practice takes place within other broader venues represented by schools, the education system, and the societies that regulate their operations. However, the problem of teaching practice in these terms cannot be resolved from a pedagogical perspective alone. Such an endeavor requires construction of a model that takes into consideration this inter-subjective relation involved in teaching.

Knowledge, in this notion of teaching, acquires a particular epistemological status that explains the transposition from *knowing how to teach* to *knowledge taught*. At the same time, it requires an understanding of the way in which subjects connect with knowledge to produce both the world and themselves; understanding and understanding each other; transforming and manipulating things, producing meaning and using signs. In short, changing things and themselves. (Guyot, 1999).

This definition of teaching practice alludes to different dimensions of such practice (Lombardi,1999) and involves different tasks that should be differentiated when thinking about training.

a) Classroom teaching is the first dimension of practice. This dimension refers to the substantive task of teaching, the specific task upon which the identity of a teacher is defined. Two types of knowledge here come into play: academic or erudite knowledge related to the subject/s to be taught, and didactic methodological knowledge related to decisions of how to teach. The teacher must be familiar with the conceptual structures of the organized field of knowledge or discipline to be taught, as well as the forms of production and construction of the substantive concepts of academic subject. Thus, teachers must be familiar with the conceptual network of the sciences that they teach. They must be familiar with research methods, how discoveries are made and verified, how their disciplines communicate knowledge, and how it is transformed in order to be taught in the classroom.

It also requires knowledge of the learner; that is to say, of the cognitive, affective, and social processes which make learning possible. This knowledge and mastery of the discipline and its methods of conceptual development makes possible well grounded decision-making regarding what and how to teach.

b) Teaching as work. The labor dimension of practice is subject to the control of legal norms. The teaching task as a labor practice is subject to a contract that establishes duties and rights, economic conditions, and others (remuneration, work schedule, place, etc.). Teachers are required to be informed regarding the legal frameworks that regulate this dimension of their practice.

c) Teaching as socializing practice. From this dimension, teaching practices seek the secondary socialization of children and adolescents. It is a socialization activity that is knowledge-based. This aspect of teaching performance is part of the social contract between schools and communities, teachers, and families. Social messages of approval or disapproval are involved but these exert little control from the normative point of view. Teachers must have knowledge of the community, the context, and of students in their different phases of development.

d) Teaching as institutional and community practice. This dimension is modeled by explicit and implicit cultural mandates contained in the so-called school culture, as well as by the characteristics of the community of which schools are a part. It is a dimension of teaching practice acquired traditionally through the individual's experience of working in the school and living in the community, and for which little systematic training has been available. Such training requires knowledge that facilitates an understanding of institutional, organizational, and socio-community phenomena as well as of school management.

The focus and didactic contract of any teacher training program must take both of these dimensions into account. Of course, the substantive dimension to be considered is that of *teaching,* for this is what lends an identity to the teaching profession. Nevertheless one should not overlook interaction with the other dimensions as well.

If we return to the idea that teacher training must offer opportunities to learn and to build understanding of teaching practice, and considering not only its complexity but also its multifaceted nature, we then ask ourselves: how does one teach what is to be constructed? How does one develop an initial training curricula proposal that allows future teachers to develop an understanding of the contents of the different disciplines and fields of knowledge understood as knowledge to be taught, of the relations implicit in teaching and learning processes, of the learning process not only of children or young people, but in terms of the teacher's own learning process as well, of the reality of the school and its dynamics, of commitment toward public education, of the labor dimension involved in practice? How is it possible to develop an initial training curriculum that encompasses the changes and dynamics of changes derived from social demands and education reforms?

Current conceptual developments allow us to offer some answers to two key questions: what does understanding as performance mean? and how may we offer competencies training?

ABOUT LEARNING AND UNDERSTANDING. COMPREHENSION AS PERFORMANCE.

During the last fifty years, cognitive psychology has used different concepts to define "true learning"; to explain that which allows us to become active subjects in reality, members of a society capable of acting with discernment: *learning; genuine learning, understanding, meaningful learning*, are some of the more widely used terms.

Among the definitions that are powerful when we think about training processes are those that define *understanding as performance*. "To make a generalization, we recognize understanding through a *flexible performance criterion.* Understanding occurs when people are able to think and to act with flexibility based on what they know" (Perkins, 1999).

Not only do we acknowledge understanding through flexible performance; rather, understanding is flexible performance. Relating, operating, describing, comparing, differentiating, adapting, narrating, drawing, analyzing, deciding, representing, sequencing, organizing, etc., are activities that allow us to recognize understanding while allowing us to state that they *are* understanding itself.

In this sense, it is important to note that performances in terms of action involve not only and necessarily "actions observable at first sight". Complex mental processes such as conjecture and discernment are also performances –indeed, thinking itself is a performance.

Knowledge is constructed and may be arrived at in different ways, and not necessarily by following the same methods; and much less so through any particular uniform stimuli.

Learning is a complex process in which each subject re-defines reality based on a personal and unique reconstruction. This means that learning is not something that "you either have or don't have". Rather, it is a process constructed by each subject in a singular and personal manner.

Performances of understanding incluce the capacity to act flexibly with knowledge. Acting flexibly means being able to face new situations, create products, and knowledgably re-organize new information. It means available and fertile knowledge. Such action is not always one observable at first sight.

What kinds of training opportunities allow students to truly construct what we call understanding performances? Understanding performances are activities that require students to use knowledge in new ways and new situations. In these activities students re-reconfigure, expand, and flexibly apply what they have learned while at the same time exploring and building new learning based on the old. They assist both in the constructing and in demonstrating understanding.

"Reconfiguring" means that each new piece of knowledge becomes part of a network of knowledge previously constructed. Such integration not only modifies the new object of knowledge; it also changes the network itself. Each bit of learning reconfigures what has been learned and understood up to that moment. Appropriation is therefore much more than an addition; it is a reorganization that makes possible the attribution of new meaning, expanding previous understanding and granting new scope; applying such scope and putting it into play while testing a variety of new non-prototypical situations.

> "Understanding occurs when people are able to think and to act with flexibility based on what they know".

Designing a curricular proposal for teacher training in terms of understanding performances involves reviewing what performances we propose for teachers in training.

COMPETENCY TRAINING, training for professional practice

The challenge is to design proposals that incorporate training in practice while offering the possibility of optimizing the ability of students, future professionals, for *reflection in action*. This reflection in action involves the development of skills that make possible permanent development of teachers and for them to solve problems inherent to their professional practice.

As opposed to animals, which only learn and teach based on *demonstration*, human beings are able to teach and learn using other procedures Through *rehearsal, play,* or *simulation*, learners acquire the necessary experience under substitute conditions, without exposing themselves to the risks of a real situation, and on the basis of *description* which is demonstration based on the manipulation of mental images (Hamilton, 1996).

The question of recovery and use of that which is learned in acting situations is more critical in the case of professional training, and the tension between theory and practice is repeatedly evident in discussions on higher education in general and teacher training in particular. One trend is to place greater emphasis on practice as part of training. But, just as professionals are unable to avoid intervention, neither can they disregard the contribution made by a group of disciplines summarize knowledge on the object of their acting.

The challenge involved in teaching professional practice is in realizing that students need to learn relevant facts and operations, as well as how to pose questions for thinking about what do when faced with problems and how to clarify the links between general knowledge and particular cases. Students must learn to apply a kind of reflection in action that goes beyond existing rules, not only through the establishment of new methods of reasoning, but also through the construction and testing of new categories of knowledge, action strategies, and ways of posing problems. (Schön ,1997).

Perrenoud returns to the problem of how to recover and use knowledge acquired outside the context of one's work, refusing to analyze the problem in terms of the knowledge/action dichotomy and opting for the development of competencies.

"(...) *The misunderstanding consists in believing that the development of competencies involves renouncing the transmission of knowledge. Practically all human action requires knowledge, sometimes in a reduced manner and sometimes very broadly, whether acquired on the basis of personal experience, common sense, or from a shared culture of a group of practitioners or from technological or scientific research. The more the actions projected are complex, abstract, media-affected by certain technologies, and based on systematic models of society of reality are, the greater the demand for broader, advanced, organized, and reliable knowledge. (...)".*

The notion of competencies has many meanings. Personally, I define a competency here as the ability to act in an efficacious manner in a defined type of situation, a capacity supported by knowledge but not, exclusively dependent on it. In order to confront a situation in the best possible way we must generally make use of and associate various complementary cognitive resources, including different kinds of knowledge. The latter, in the regular sense of the word, are representations of reality that we have created and compiled according to our experience and training. Almost all action puts knowledge into operation, occasionally elementary and disseminated knowledge and occasionally that which is complex and organized in networks." (Perrenoud, 2000).

Understood in the way, the idea of competency stands out over and above the disciplinary dichotomy of action/knowledge. Competency, we reiterate, is the capacity to act efficaciously in a defined type of situation, one supported by but not limited to knowledge. "*A competency is never the pure and simple rational use of knowledge, action models, and procedures. Training through competencies doesn't mean turning our backs on the assimilation of knowledge. However, the appropriation of various pieces of knowledge does not allow for their mobilization ipso facto in action situations*." (Perrenoud 2000:9).

Adopting this position undoubtedly involves reviewing the organizational processes of teacher training institutions, their processes of teaching and assessment. What type of institution can generate opportunities for learning in this manner? Providing what types of experiences? Assessing and self-assessing based on what criteria?

THE TRAINING CURRICULUM. Description and evaluation of progress achieved in the region. QUESTIONS AND CONCERNS.

If we take into consideration simply the teaching dimension of practice and state that future teachers must be competent in order to teach, we are aware that this involves the power to articulate knowledge of disciplines and pedagogical knowledge "in context", in order to facilitate the learning of "the other".

This simple statement opens up a series of questions when it comes to creating curricular training proposals. In curricular training designs of the last 10 or 15 years there have been efforts to ensure that training is able to articulate different kinds of knowledge. But two tensions have been difficult to resolve: the relation between theory and practice, and the necessary links between disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge.

The extent of the relation between theory and practice has long generated one of the most intense and interesting debates surrounding teacher training and one that has undergone extensive theoretical development during the last decade (See Dicker;Terigi,1997; Davini, 1995; Ferry, 1990; and Schön, 1992).

"*Current trends in teacher training and efforts seek to overcome the traditional antagonism between theory and practice searching for new models for organizing teacher training in which both aspects are given the same level of importance. Practice is a fundamental part of professional teacher training. As such, it should be present from the very outset of teacher training*" (Aguerrondo, Pogré 2001:46).

Certainly, the relation between theory and practice, understood from the logic of understanding and of competencies, is not exhausted by the so-called pre-professional teacher training tracks. But even if viewed from this limited perspective, the inclusion of training tracks called "from practice" or "approaching reality and from building of practice" have had mixed results. Their early inclusion in curricular designs points toward a trend which, in many cases, has not modified the "applicationist" based logic used in their development.

The second problem arises from the need to link specific pedagogical and disciplinary content. Teacher training is acknowledged to be dual in nature. This means that it must combine training in contents specific to the discipline to be taught (academic training) with content referring to pedagogical and didactic knowledge. The latter is known as "professional training" since it addresses both the question of how to teach and the art of conveying an understanding of educational reality in general and school reality in particular. This dual training has led to various yet unresolved problems regarding the value attributed and the weight of each in teacher training curricula and in any in-service training design . Different kinds of power struggles will be involved, which inevitably arise or become evident in times of change (Ferry, 1991).

A number of countries in the region have organized their training proposals by identifying fields which they organize in pedagogical and disciplinary teacher training tracks, suggesting that they be taken simultaneously or successively. This differentiation, which may be useful when organizing training proposals, becomes an obstacle when seen from the perspective of teaching practice and the competencies necessary for its development. In many cases the organization of tracks leads to their dissociation. Such dissociation is also comes about due to the organizational structures upon which teacher training courses are dependent. Each of these tracks usually comes under the jurisdiction of different university departments or schools. Generally, there is very little contact between the two. Distrust and internal power struggles can come into play as well (Pogré; Krichesky, 2005).

It seems evident, therefore, that these two tensions –between theory and practice, and between disciplinary and pedagogical struggles– cannot be resolved by simply identifying the players or balancing out their presence. What is called for is a proposal that allows us to treat them in a different manner.

THE CURRICULUM: a political, epistemological, and identity option.

What has happened to initial training designs since the beginning of education reforms?

We can state that, with a few exceptions, the way in which teacher training *has accompanied* [2] education reforms has been through adding, reorganizing and/or exchanging curricular spaces or occasionally content. In cases where issues such as gender, inclusion, diversity, human rights, adults, rural matters, etc. have been included, this has been in the form of seminars, workshops, or units within existing programs and whenever the course load *has been unable to cope with so many additions*, specializations and/or specific teaching courses have been created.

[2] Note that the simple statement "has accompanied"is proof of a lack of system articulation, since it appears that reforms point in one direction and teacher training in the best of cases simply accompanies the reforms.

These inclusions, although occasionally being included in less traditional curricula have generally taken the form of workshops or seminars and have been unable to overcome the logic behind *collections of curricular designs*. (Bernstein,1988).

We here note Bernstein's identification of two types of curricula based on the notions of *classification and frameworking.* When reconstructing the organizational, epistemological, and identity implications governing school curricula, Bernstein made a distinction between one type of collection code and one type of integrated code. This researcher takes as criteria for his analysis classification and framework as a way of analyzing power and control relations, respectively. The principle of classification refers to the nature of the limits and to the differentiation between the curriculum contents. These may be either strong or weak, which affects both the division of labor of educational knowledge and organization strategies. By framework Bernstein refers to "the degree of control exercised by teachers and students in the selection, organization, pace, and timing of the knowledge transmitted and received in a pedagogical relation" (1988:84). Moreover, the strength of the framework also allows us to see the relation between the knowledge of everyday society and scientific knowledge. (Rifá Valls, 2003:2).

We know that in advanced, university and non-university training, and thus in teacher training, there is a strong collection code type of curricular tradition that is generally based on academic subjects. This has resulted in strong classification and frameworking –a predominance of disciplinary logic and organization into subjects with the teacher as the subject authority clearly distanced from students who do not participate in decision-making.

We also know that in the last 10 or 15 years, education reform, and teacher training processes have tended to be more flexible in terms of defining content to be taught (classification) and also in terms of autonomy (for teachers, but not for students) (framework). These experiences have generally been left to the initiative of particular institutions or groups of teachers while the predominant logic has not changed.

We know that in advanced, university and non-university training, and thus in teacher training, there is a strong collection code type of curricular tradition that is generally based on academic subjects.

It is evident that integration which has high costs for teachers, in terms of the effort required to coordinate decisions and resources, can take place at different levels: between teachers in different areas of knowledge or in the same area of knowledge. The collection type of curriculum, organized by disciplines, represents compartmentalized knowledge and learning based on the accumulation of knowledge.

A constant appears when we analyze different teacher training proposals. We see that, although classification has lost strength, the boundaries between academic subjects and departments continue to be strong. In short, the Balkanization of the teaching trainer community is in evidence through the fragmentation of space, time, and knowledge.

It is interesting to look at the scenario presented by Montsé Rifá Valls in the work "The integrated curriculum and transformations in knowledge and identity politics". In this work, the author analyzes reforms and curricula in Spain. But if we used it to analyze current teacher training proposals and curricula developments throughout the region we would surely find a much greater number of experiences marked by strong classification and frameworks of the collection code prototype.

TABLE I. Differences between the collection type curricula and integration curricula based on an analysis of the strength of classification and frameworking

	CLASIFICATION	
COLLECTION CURRICULUM	**Strong (+)**	**Weak (-)**
	■ Departments are closed and hierarchical units with regard to knowledge. Teachers are linked to these departments as a symbol of their category, which provides internal cohesion.	■ Boundaries between departments and teachers are permeable. Priority is given to pedagogical coordination. The model is model in its relations with the outside.
	■ Contents are not open to discussion, school subjects and their content are clearly delimited.	■ Contents maintain an open inter-relation and are discussed in order to facilitate cross-cutting relations.
	■ Identities are forged on the basis of a vertical organization. Due to specialization, the reproduction of pedagogical discourse is weak.	■ Power relations are more complex and teachers work toward a common project that guides pedagogical discussion.
	■ Creation of a specific identity among teachers and students with a clear sense of belonging to a group or a class.	■ Teaching identities are part of a strong social network and are concerned about integrating the differences that arise (between professors and students).
	FRAMEWORKING	
	Strong (+)	**Weak (-)**
	■ The selection of what is teachable and its form is determined by teachers (and administrators).	■ Students are involved alongside teachers in decision making which affects knowledge and learning.
	■ Relations between teachers and students are marked by the positional control exercised by the teacher over the interaction.	■ Relations between teachers and students are regulated by classroom interaction Teachers exercise personal control.
	■ Task organization is based on execution and individualization more than on joint work in the group.	■ Teaching takes place through work groups acting through cooperation and participation. There is no isolation between students or between tasks.
	■ The pace and velocity of learning are governed by the planning carried out by the teacher.	■ The pace of transmission and the sequencing of learning are guided by curricular development that can modify planning.
	■ Strict timing of knowledge transmission and reception between students and teachers. Intensified social regulations.	■ Timing of knowledge transmission and reception between students and teachers. is flexible and personal. Training aspects are prioritized.

INTEGRATION CURRICULUM

" Schools are the training ground of Institutes (....), since if pedagogical innovation does not take place in schools, it is not based in reality".

We now return to the initial question: what must a future teacher learn in his or her training? And let us return to the conceptualization surrounding comprehension and the concept of competencies as defined by Perrenoud. We can certainly infer that one of the possible solutions for reducing the gap between what we want and what we are achieving might be to attempt to develop curricular training proposals that come closer to the integration code. The difficulty lies in the fact that this can only be achieved through joint work with teacher trainers themselves, given that this kind of curriculum places into question the identify of teacher training institutions, their institutional cultures, and their modes of organization and management, modifying the tension between knowledge and power, of how people have learned to do things.

An analysis of some experiences of this type (Pogré, Krichesky, 2005) shows that a training proposal that attempts to go beyond the collection code involves a series of contradictions and risks. It is subjective and subjectifying construction process that goes beyond its mere formulation. It is difficult to imagine modifying a curriculum focus, however well-intentioned such modification might be, without the participation of the trainers themselves and without a review of institutional policies.

Bernstein points to four conditions in the integration curriculum. We will use only two of them to support the hypothesis that it is not possible to think of a proposal of this type without also taking into account how one might accompany this process:

I. There must be a consensus with regard to an explicit integrating idea. Reducing isolation demands a high level of ideological consensus, that can potentially affect the bonds between teachers, since visible differences can be experienced as threats;

II. Coordination between teachers functions as a socialization process for the teachers in the code, who learn how to read it and interpret it. This is a difficult task if they have not been trained in the art of reading a collection code, thus ensuring i maintenance of a roll. An integration code requires professionals with solid background who are open to ongoing training, and requires "much greater power in terms of synthesis, analogy, and a far greater ability to tolerate and enjoy ambiguity at the levels of knowledge and social relations" (Bernstein, 1988:102).

SOME IDEAS for continued reflection

How then can we generate what is going to be constructed? We maintain that a change in initial training generates conditions for learning and understanding practice in terms of developing the competencies required for a teacher, is only possible within the framework of different type of synergy between training institutions and the levels making up these institutions. This relation that needs to be built is perhaps the starting point for ensuring that teacher training is no longer neither "ahead of" nor "behind" reforms.

It is interesting that at a time when the boundaries between what is *inside* and *outside* institutions is being called into doubt in such an emphatic manner conceptually, training institutions continue to see themselves as impregnable fortresses. In many cases they work behind the backs of the levels in the system for which they train and use schools simply as "substitute wombs" to carry out frequently artificial pre-professional practices that have not gone beyond the idea of "rehearsal".

Not only has this type of link has proven to be of little use in the training of future teachers; it has proven to be an obstacle to the development of training institutions and to the trainers themselves.

"Schools are the training ground of Institutes (....), since if pedagogical innovation does not take place in schools, it is not based in reality. Within this framework, schools are important not only for the practice of future teachers but also for the joint learning of the entire teaching staffs of Institutes either through joint research projects, hands–on training of personnel, or technical-pedagogical assistance". (Aguerrondo; Pogré 2001:31).

The adoption of one type of curriculum or another is undoubtedly an epistemological-political, and not simply a political decision. It requires being willing to think of alternative modes of trainings institution organization[3] and of the government of training institutions. But basically, it requires training institutions to work together with schools, with the system, and levels that they are training in a synergetic relationship to ensure a change not only of schools but also of the proposals and the organization of training institutions.

Model 1	**Model 2**
What matters are the interests of the academic community.	Interests related to the context of application are most important.
Activities are organized around a discipline.	Activities of a trans-disciplinary nature are fostered.
Structure is homogeneous, hierarchical, permanent, and rigid.	Structure is heterogeneous, hierarchy is more level and transitory.
Operates independently of social issues.	There is greater social responsibility.
Quality control is carried out through norms defined by "good science".	Quality control is wider-ranging, more diverse, linked to the set of intervening agents.

[3] In order to think about the type of training institution that could make this possible we propose reviewing the paper presented by Gibbons (1998) at the World Conference on Higher Education organized by UNESCO and which treats the differences from traditional ways of teaching and of conducting research in universities, as well as other proposals in which other interests are prioritized that go beyond those of the academic community. Two models of universities are described there, entitled **Model 1** and **Model 2**: (Pogré Krichesky,2005).

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The curriculum and professional development of teachers

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CURRICULAR REFORM scenarios

During the last 20 years, the need to make significant changes in curricular content and the way they are presented in school systems has marked education reforms throughout the world. Delays in implementing such changes once they have begun create the need for new revisions. Thus, for example, in Chile we have been involved in the curricular change process since the beginning of the 1990s and we will continue to verify the need to make adjustments.

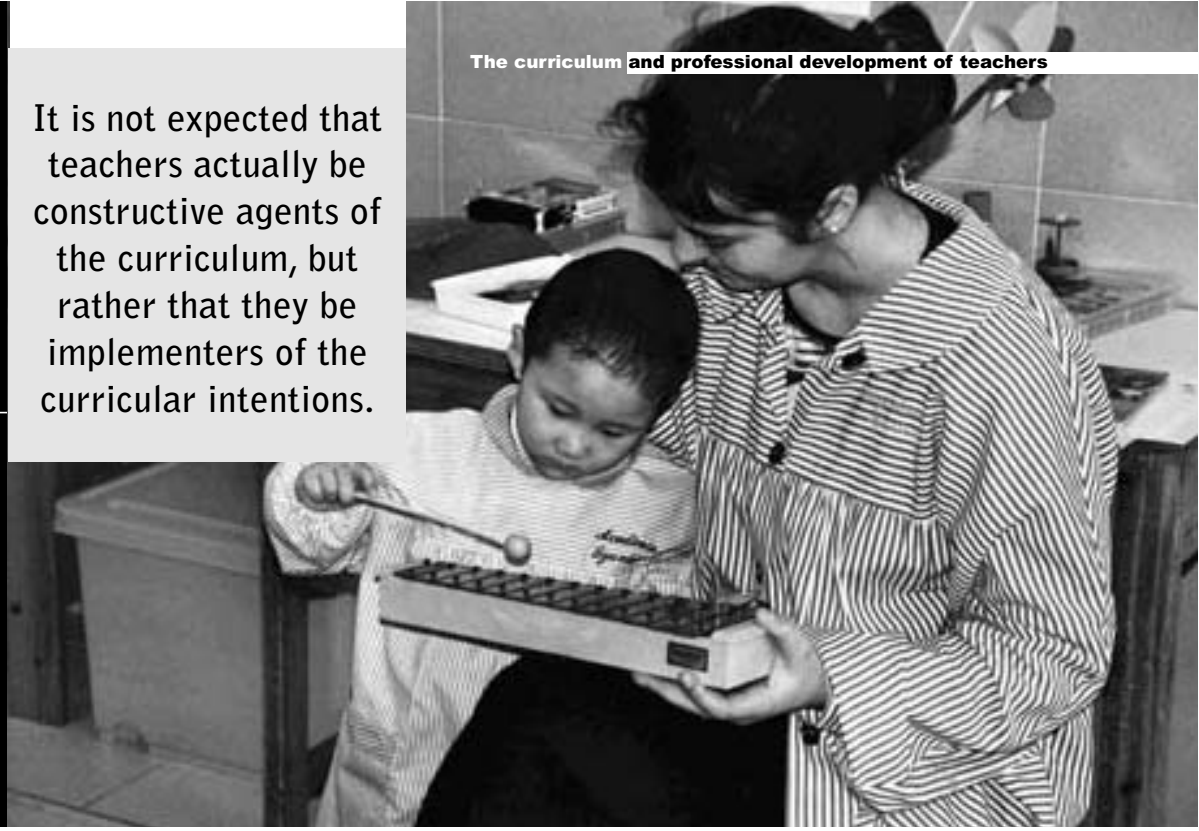
This means that curricular reform, far from being an often traumatic event that assumes that once changes have occurred there will be a period of stability; these changes have become an on-going and permanent element in the educational environment. This is not only the result of the production of new knowledge; changes also take place in how such knowledge is communicated and the way that people become informed in their regard. This means that a mode of curricular organization believed to be important at one given time will not be so at another, and that knowledge which was thought to require one specific treatment may in fact require another.

Thus the importance for ministries of education to have departments or units the role of which is not only to see to the implementation of the curriculum, but also to investigate the curricular needs and demands that appear both from the side of knowledge and its organization and communication, as well as from that of curricular implementation. On the other hand, from the perspective of teachers, whose role is to teach the curriculum whatever it may be, the needs that determine a change or its justification are often far from obvious.

In general, for teachers, changes in the functioning of the education system are processes that come to them pre-defined by the authorities. Teachers are thus left with the role of constructing the rationality of the changes according to the intentions of those by whom they were designed (even when this is frequently not sufficiently explained), of accepting them as valid, and of implementing the changes, also according to the designers' intentions. However, we all realize that this is not what in fact happens. Teachers, during their professional careers, establish their own opinions about what to teach and "how things should be done". To the extent that their beliefs and actions have provided results (according to what they see as reasonable) they take some things from reforms while discarding others. That is, when it comes to reforms (which usually appear through various projects and curricular changes), teachers tend to be either conservers or rebuilders of reforms, but not necessarily the executors of the designs in the way that their creators intended.

We have studies that verify this assertion: those carried out in Chile on the implementation of the language and mathematics curriculum in grades 1-8 of primary school (MINEDUC, 2004), those carried out in Bolivia by Tavares (1999), and the comparative case study of how specific reforms have been received in Argentina, Uruguay, and Chile

It is not expected that teachers actually be constructive agents of the curriculum, but rather that they be implementers of the curricular intentions.



(Jacinto and Freites Frey, 2006). In particular, the Jacinto and Freites Frey study in particular helps us to understand that there are at least three ways in which a reform may be received: passive acceptance (fulfilling the letter, but not the spirit); creative adaptation (the new and the old coming together in a relation appropriate to the school context); and resistance (when measures are seen as meaningless and one does something different that maintains that which has been validated by previous experience).

TENSIONS

The above leads us to specify, from the perspective of teachers, two kinds of tensions present in the process for putting into place a curricular proposal received by schools and coming from higher authorities (particularly from ministries of education). The first kind of tension is that between the roles commonly assigned to teachers in the pedagogical literature as agents for the implementation of the curriculum vs. their real professional expertise. The second group of tensions comes from the school context within which they are supposed to be agents, as well as other policies or messages received from the education system itself.

a. Teachers as curriculum implementers

The concept of the "professional" relevant to teachers asserts that, due to their preparation and the nature of their work, they are able to discern how they should organize curricular content in their teaching; that they are able to recognize the diverse needs of their students and introduce the modifications required in the classroom, and that they are able to investigate by themselves the impacts of the results of their work. The broad declarations of principles, such as the teacher profiles that underlie education systems rest on this assumption of teacher professionalism. Great force is assigned to this image of the teacher and to the tasks that they must fulfill, and it is expected that teachers will not fail in the faith that the system places on them.

In fact, however, what is really expected of teachers is that they be willing to carry out or implement that which the system determines, while giving them help as far as is possible. It is not expected that teachers actually be constructive agents of the curriculum, but rather that they be implementers of the curricular intentions of whoever has carried out the initial design. Even when it is thought, as in the Chilean case, that teachers can be co-constructors of the curriculum at the school level, there is not confidence that they can do so, given that they are not given tools that would serve them to design study plans and programs. That is, they are not taught to develop curricula. Therefore, teachers are caught between large roles assigned to them in theory, and the much more limited roles permitted by the reality of their preparation and experience. Thus, many teachers take on roles that are passive or resistant (conserving more than changing), or in the best of cases they make creative adaptations.

b. Tensions coming from the context in which teachers work

Curricular changes in our region and in many other less-developed countries arrive in the form of novelties provided in texts and teacher manuals, with often minimal training that would permit them to understand the logic of the changes and relate what is new with that which existed before or what they already know. Teachers are faced with the necessity of applying something new in circumstances in which they have little time to prepare, change their methods, check how students are receiving the new content, etc. In some contexts, curricular and other reforms are accompanied by expectations that outcomes will be quickly achieved. Therefore, teachers face the tension of trying something new, risking diminished learning by their students, and what has up to the present produced some results. In many systems that go through constant changes, curricular innovations may not be the only ones operating. And teachers are forced to choose to which they will give more attention. In education systems seeking to foresee the problems faced by teachers in curricular reforms, preparation for this change should include trainers or those who support *in situ* implementation. But even in this situation, the reform effort may face problems it does not take into account the limitations imposed by the context. One reform that included the concept of training supervision in order to implement its new curriculum was that of Bolivia. There, for a time a post was created called "pedagogical assistant", being a professional responsible for the professional development of teachers at the school level. The resistance of school principals and the presence of a better-paid employee with greater authority than the school principals were among the causes of leaving this initiative aside in spite of the fact that it could have been a good source of support for teachers (Contreras and Talavera, 2005).

The tensions faced by teachers within the school context and in the face of demands of the education system can be solved in various ways. Most teachers who first choose to resist end up adopting at least the language of reforms and accommodate themselves as best they can to what is demanded of them. Studies carried out in Chile on the implementation of curricular reform in mathematics and language during the first to fourth grades of primary school identify an interaction between what the curricular framework prescribes and what teachers actually teach, indicated by the emphasis on, or time dedicated to different curricular themes and tasks given to students as indicated by annotations in student work books and the versions of teachers themselves regarding what they emphasize in their classes. In general, the trend is to reduce it in the first years to routine and repetitive activities for learning language (reading and writing, with little emphasis on comprehension and the imaginative production of texts), and in mathematics reducing it to teaching numbers and a restricted decimal system. The authors of the study on implementation of the official mathematics curriculum arrive at disturbing conclusions that point toward the need to have a more pertinent view in regard to the professional development of teachers:

> *"Although the large blocks of curricular content contemplated in the OF-CMO are presented by teachers, various specific and important contents of the curriculum are barely taught. On the other hand, among those contents that indeed are taught, one notes limited use of the potential that these could have. This is manifest when we contrast the content implemented with those prescribed in the curricular framework current until the year 2001 (the year in which class books and notebooks were examined). However, this distance is more obvious when we contrast it with the currently applied framework"* (MINEDUC, 2004, p. 61).

Various specific and important contents of the curriculum are barely taught.

The implementation of curricular reform in Bolivia also demonstrates the distance between what documents, materials, texts, and teacher guides suggest and what teachers in fact do or are willing to do themselves. There were many problems coming from that way that the "pedagogical assistants", for example, faced the need to convince teachers that the new proposal was valid and that it would foster improvements in education. But the way to understand the difficulties, in the opinion of Contreras and Talavera (2005) is that the curricular proposal in some way violated the existing school culture:

> *"The assistants fostered change in a very traditional environment adverse to risk, in which the norm was traditional pedagogy based on the teacher as transmitter of knowledge. In their work the assistants noted that teachers tended to work in an isolated manner and showed themselves to be fearful and distrustful ... The reform sought activity-based, student-centered learning, with the geographical and social context being the point of departure for constructing knowledge. It was therefore necessary to reflect critically about practices and learn and share within a group"* (Contreras and Talavera, 2005, p. 75).

Moreover, curriculum reform in Bolivia arrived piecemeal at schools, which did little to help teachers fully understand its meaning. However, in the midst of all of these difficulties, the missions of international organizations that observed the reform noted progress in changing the classroom culture toward one more participatory and active. This suggests the importance of the passage of time as a necessary factor for judging the impact of reforms.

TEACHER professional development

Practically everything noted above regarding the delay by teachers in taking ownership not only of the content but also the pedagogical meaning of curricular reforms leads us to themes that have to do with opportunities for them to grow professionally within the education systems in which they work.

Upon noting the partial implementation or non-implementation of a curricular reform in the public education systems of our countries, the first thing that comes to mind as a cause is the inadequate knowledge base of teachers. This is due in part to their initial training and in a more real sense to the lack of regular opportunities for upgrading their knowledge. Although this is the case, it is also so that teachers use a knowledge base that has given them results in the past, and that this is related to their view of what their students can learn. This knowledge is often a version of what at one time they learned during their training and which through time they have reduced to what they use. But for them and for their practice it represents a secure basis.

Be that as it may, this knowledge base is not always taken as a point of departure for on-going in-service training and professional development that seeks to change it. What teachers need, for those who seek to introduce a new curriculum is, based on what they know to develop with them a training regime accompanied by stimuli made up of materials, opportunities for exchange and discussion, and monitored practice that shows them how they can make progress with their students. In order for such curricular implementation "monitored practice" to function, teachers need facilitating contexts. These are established by education policy and through what we may call "efficacious opportunities" to learn and to implement something new.

EDUCATION policy

I here note three important elements of policy that need to be considered when curricular structures are changed.

Time for change

The first of these is the obvious recognition that the process of communicating and implementing reforms is gradual. Its impact is not dramatic within the system; after a sufficient amount of time during which it will have been necessary to monitor the action of what I call "distracting factors". Among these, one is the time available to teachers for studying, trying, and assessing their work as the result of the implementation of a new curriculum. A key working area in curriculum implementation is the "*Lesson Study*" created by the Japanese. This practice gives time to teachers in schools or groups of schools they can plan together (that is, think in a collaborative fashion about the curriculum), give classes according to this planning while monitoring the reception by their students, observe and correct one another while seeking additional information if necessary, and thus move forward in their professional growth. Clearly, this practice is not possible if one does not grant teachers, within the context of their teaching responsibilities, sufficient time to carry it out.

The coherence of policies

The second element is what I call the coordination or coherence between the various messages delivered by diverse reform or education policy activities. I have already referred to the effect caused in schools by the arrival of many projects seeking to carry out change, all of which are to be assumed by the same group of people. Much has been written about this problem. But nevertheless, the tendency of education systems to always promote some new project with the laudable purpose of stimulating the attainment of hoped for changes produces not only uneasiness and fatigue in those who must take on these projects, but results as well in the physical impossibility to carry them out. Moreover, this situation doesn't guarantee the continuity of in-place projects that are having a positive effect.

In Chile, we have sinned greatly in this sense. One interesting project that began to create the ability to carry out more curricular analysis and to apply relevant teaching strategies was that of the Secondary Education Professional Working Groups. This project, carried out within the framework of secondary education reform, fostered the efforts of groups of teachers within the same school and focusing on curricular development by carrying out analysis, experiments, and collective feedback. In time, the experience led to the organization of networks of teachers from the same specialty as well as publications about their experiences. However, the initiative did not gain sufficient recognition or sustained support from ministerial authorities. Nor did it become part of teacher professional development policy. Today, some schools continue to support the existence of these groups based pm the force of their initial impetus.

The tendency of education systems to always promote some new project produces not only uneasiness and fatigue in those who must take on these projects, but results as well in the physical impossibility to carry them out.

Tatto's analysis (2004, p. 175) of the experience of PARE (a program for reducing the numbers of students behind in grade) in Mexico helps us to think about the importance of coherence among policies contained within education reforms.

> *"PARE moved away from its constructivist objectives due to its inability to instruct teachers about how they were expected to teach their students, and due to allowing the concern for efficacy and responsibility to create roadblocks to putting into practice a broader-based training program for teachers and school inspectors. The employment of short-term courses hindered greater comprehension of the subject, and the use of a cascading technique diluted the constructivist message. The lack of follow-up in the classroom resulted in reversion to traditional teaching methods, while a limited program of studies prevented the development of other courses that would have been pertinent in the context. The vertical authority structure of the Mexican education system was reinforced through the utilization of school inspectors and principals as the primary conduits of teacher instruction, rather than allowing the teachers –and schools as a whole– become vehicles for their own continuous change process."* (Tatto, 2004, p. 175).

An important factor in what I call "policy coordination" is also the co-existence of messages that to a certain point are contradictory. For example, in the face of efforts to implement a new curriculum, it is dangerous to also have a forceful policy of teacher assessment by student learning outcomes. If I as a teacher feel that I will be judged by the achievement of my students, the last thing I want to do is to place this achievement in check by abandoning strategies that have produced results in the past. Faced with a simultaneous demand to teach content that is new to me and which I don't understand very well and knowing that I will be held responsible for the results, I will elect those procedures that at least will guarantee me that my students will learn something.

Taking into account this dilemma faced by teachers can help us understand why Chilean teachers reduce the teaching of language and mathematics to the achievement of basic skills while ignoring the achievement of higher skills (MINEDUC, 2004). The way that one transmits messages that point in apparently opposite directions is therefore important. If the primary intention is to up-date the content of teaching, let us place all of our attention on helping (through professional development) teachers to be able to do so while postponing the emphasis on publicly calling them to account for the achievement of their students. It would be preferable to use information on results during professional development meetings in or near schools so that teachers can question their knowledge and practices and experiment with changes in them as a result of reflecting on the learning difficulties of their students.

Research of implementation processes

Thirdly, education policies need to have a constantly questioning outlook in regard to the application of reforms. This means that in part of the system or in the ministry of education research should be carried out or required. I do not refer to reform assessment (in the sense of verifying whether reforms have or have not achieved their proposed objectives), but rather to research on the complexity of reform processes and implementation –especially in regard to how they are accepted by teachers. The value of a book such as that of Contreras and Talavera (2005) which provides a partial examination of the Bolivian education reform is that it summarizes various studies carried out on reform implementation and which indicate, for example, in what areas in-service teacher training needs to be strengthened in order to improve the learning of teachers and their teaching strategies. The study of Tatto (2004) also does so in regard to how the PARE program in Mexico operated and was received, and showing both its good points and its problems of implementation. Future attempts to improve implementation processes need to be answers to observed problems rather than mere adaptations of actions already implemented and which perhaps produced positive results in their original contexts.

ON-GOING TRAINING or teacher professional development

In general, curricular reforms are accompanied by activities that are designated as "training". This word is appropriate in order to characterize what tends to occur during these activities: provision of information, rote learning, a bit of practice, little feed-back, and very little consideration of the situation of teachers coming into "training". But, according to what experience and research show about teacher changes, these kinds of activities do not produce good results. Far from being appropriate for causing profound conceptual change and for developing better teaching strategies, training, as indicated in the above citation of Tatto about the PARE case in Mexico, can produce effects that are the opposite of the program's intentions.

Ideally, given that many Latin American countries have long been involved in some kind of curricular reform, a key step is the installation of on-going teacher training systems that include programmatic responses to the different needs of their professional development. I have some experience regarding what authorities in Paraguay and Peru intend to do in this sense, and believe that they are on the right path. The most important thing, however, is that those who develop these systems (or who formulate relevant policies) share an appropriate conception of teacher development and of the factors that influence its quality. In a previous work carried out for UNESCO (Ávalos, 2001), I used a version of the following table in order to point out that teacher training activities need to be accompanied by objective proposals, given that a strategy for producing conceptual change is not useful for helping teachers to review and improve their instructional and assessment strategies.

TABLE 1: Elements of a systematic professional development policy for teachers

What for? Conceptualization and proposals	How? Activities for fostering change	Under what conditions?	How may we assure quality?	Using what stimuli?
1. Personal, social, and professional development of in-service teachers.	▪ Collaborative, in-school work of teachers: appropriate preparation of facilitators, and the development of content and materials for collaborative efforts.	▪ Time allocated during the school day. ▪ Appreciation of teacher development activities within the context of the education system.	▪ Performance standards within the context of the teaching career. ▪ Training-focused performance assessment systems as part of a national quality assurance system.	▪ Financial and non-financial incentives. ▪ Teaching career path that encourages efforts to learn and to improve performance. ▪ Funds for carrying out quality improvement projects in schools. ▪ Exchange and learning about experiences and innovations.
2. Up-dating and/or enhancement of knowledge (conceptual change).	▪ Courses, seminars, workshops. ▪ Trained facilitators. ▪ Relevant materials.	▪ Quality of content presented and teaching strategies. Classroom follow-up and support.	▪ Course certification. ▪ In-school support and follow-up.	
3. Information about changes in the system and other educational processes.	▪ Short courses, publications, on-line networks.	▪ Dissemination. ▪ Access to computers.	▪ Financing.	

I also show in the above table that teacher training activities should pay attention to the contextual conditions necessary for them to be able to function, to how one may define their quality, and the stimuli required for engaging teachers in the experience. A key part of the understanding of and putting into place a teacher training system is being able to place "training" into its proper place, adopting a way of describing the continuous enhancement of teaching skills that is in accordance with their condition as professionals. This includes understanding that the in-depth conceptual learning that is required in order to implement a new curriculum demands complex processes that involve respecting what teachers already know, and using it as a base for constructing new knowledge, as well as the use of strategies that include (if necessary) providing models of how they can teach certain complex areas of the new curriculum, mutual feed-back processes of participating teachers, and suitable preparation for those carrying out this work. None of these elements may be improvised.

Reforms are not isolated and traumatic events.

Therefore, the sooner that countries establish on-going training systems that combine the above-cited conditions readily accessible to teachers, the further we will have gone toward understanding that reforms are not isolated and traumatic events, that educational tasks should always be in a process of revision, and that teacher training is a continuous career-long process that teachers increasingly view as being independent of the education system and its offerings and as a responsibility for personal growth.

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The curriculum and addressing the needs of diversity

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In this text I will approach the subject of addressing the needs of diversity from the most general perspective – by referring to students as a whole; that is, by placing the emphasis on the fact that each student has a particular way of learning to which teaching must adjust. I am not, therefore, thinking exclusively about those students who may have more specific personal or cultural needs; although the concepts to which I will refer apply to them as well. The basic objective of my presentation here is to highlight the measures which from the perspective of the curriculum can contribute to this intervention. But before treating them, I would like to make some preliminary points.

INITIAL considerations

The first of these is that serving diversity continues to be, in my judgement, the key to quality teaching. This is because the only way to offer quality teaching is to be able to adjust one's pedagogical approach. Therefore, as teachers, we must offer assistance that takes into account the specific cognitive and emotional characteristics of the person with whom we are working. If we analyze what happens in other educational contexts such as the family, we will see that the success of intervention resides to a large extent in adjusting to the contigencies of the learner's behavior. When a mother, a father, a sibling, or any other adult is educating –that is, interacting with– a child and through this interaction is able to provoke development, it is precisely because they know how to do that which for this person is a help, and which might not necessarily be so for another. When, for example, a father helps his daughter do a puzzle, he knows if the child already distinguishes colors and can, therefore, propose a strategy of the type, "what color is the piece that is missing". Or, when a mother wants to help her son with schoolwork, she knows if what is needed is to be very demanding because the child is very secure, or whether to reinforce the child's self-esteem before concentrating on specific content. Is it as simple for teachers to possess this individualized information about their students? To the extent that they have this information, can they better adjust their teaching? In our opinon, this is clearly the case. It is not easy; but it is the key to quality.

Serving diversity continues to be the key to quality teaching.

The second idea refers to the fact that although most people say that everyone is different, the way that the social function schools is conceived in the face of this diversity differs notably, both between individuals as well as between education systems. The *ideological conception* maintained influences the positions adopted in this regard.

When on the basis of neoliberal ideologies one hears arguments about the tension between quality and equity, what is formulated, in very simple terms, is that if we wish to achieve a high level of quality of education, we cannot try to do so with everyone because this would lead to lowering the level and run the risk of offering a worse education to all. From this perspective, quality and equity –or to be more precise, excellence and equity– are not compatible. This ideological conception emphasizes excellence even though this may lead to a lower level of equity. For their part, idealogies with a greater social committment would argue that not only are quality and equity not incompatible, but that an education system, a school, or a classroom will only possess quality to the extent that they assure equity. Equity becomes, from this perspective, both the major goal and the essential indicator of quality. This is a radicallty different way of viewing the relation between quality and equity.

However, in order to better explain these positions it is necessary to consider in more depth just what we mean by equity. Considering the the way that the term has evolved, which I believe has been correct, profound, and interesting, we see that the conception of equity only as *equal access* has been overcome. Obviously, if a person does not have access to school, very little equity can exist. But this criterion, although vital, is not sufficient. A more complex way of thinking about equity is to link it to *equality of offerings*; that is, of comprehensive models in which students receive the same kind of curriculum, and the same type of educational intentions. This is what in the lecture we have presented with César Coll, and I present as that which is basic in the curriculum.

Se trata de un esfuerzo que merece la pena y para ello es imprescindible creer que todas las personas pueden aprender.

This idea of equality of offerings is much more demanding for education systems; but in its turn is finds itself superceded from the moment in which one begins to speak of *equality of outcomes*, which is even more demanding.

Those of us who defend comprehensiveness, as in my case, and as we have proposed in the Law for the General Organization of the Education System (LOGSE) approved in Spain in 1990, must recognize, however, that the fact of offering the same to people who have different needs, without serving diversity, can in fact result in increasing inequalities between groups. That is, the fact that there is equality in offerings does not guarantee equality of outcomes if one does not guarantee adequate measures for treating diversity. One must offer different kinds of help to those who have different needs so that they can achieve the same levels of basic and vital learning. From the professional point of view this is extremely difficult. That it is a social advance is, in my opinion, undoubtable; but professionally speaking it presents enormous difficulties. The more that we advance socially, the more challenges we present to teachers.

The third point that I wish to mention has to do with the idea that it is vital that those who must design and apply measure to address diversity (which, as we have noted, are expensive) must give meaning to this task, and be convinced that it is an effort that is worth while. Therefore, it is absolutely necessary to believe that all people can learn. What I wish to emphasize by this point is the importance of the conceptions held by teachers and by society in general regarding individual differences –which condition the way that we operate in classrooms and the kinds of education policy decisions that we make.

These are conceptions that, moreover, often are not even explict ideas. Rather, they are beliefs that have been fashioned by the influence of the social environment and that often are accepted as correct without really being submitted to review. They are very deep-rooted implicit ideas that explain to a great extent our actions. In the case of individual differences, it is much more frequent than one imagines to conceive them with innate biases. An example of this popular "wisdom" is reflected in the well-known aphorism that says, "that which nature does not give, Salamanca cannot provide"[1].

Without going any farther afield, when the former government defended the General Quality of Education Law (LOCE), it argued for its necessity by alluding to the "natural order"; a concept derived from innatism and that leads one to think that there are those who simply are able and others who are not. From this perspective, it would seem justified to not invest too much public money in trying to teach certain things to people who are not capable of understanding.

In other cases, it may be that such positions are not so clearly derived from innatism. But nevertheless it is indeed argued that particular characteristics of individuals at certain ages are no longer capable of being changed. This conception would correspond to what in psychology some focuses have called "critical periods"; that is, that there are certain moments during development that some things must be learned. And, if it is not accomplished during this period, one cannot learn them. There are many teachers, above all those in secondary education, who appear to hold this view. Thus, when they are confronted with the eloquent flexibility and diversity of forms of learning of young children, they may say the following: "well, very young children can; but by the time they arrive at secondary school, they are 'crystalized' and nothing can be done".

In the final analysis, in terms of school practice, whether the explanation is based on a more clearly innatist concept, or one more related to critical periods, in both cases educational intervention loses much of its meaning. The time has long passed since in psychology the idea of critical periods has been replaced by that of sensitive periods –according to which there are, undoubtedly, times at which one learns more easily than at others. But this does not mean that one can only learn during a particular time. Certainly, it may be more difficult to teach, and may demand more human and didactic resources. But it is not impossible to do so.

The key importance of these concepts lies then in the fact that, however well-prepared teachers may be, if they really believe that it has no meaning, they will not make the effort. When it used to be thought that children with Down's syndrome were not able to learn to read and write, the effort was not made to teach them; not because of bad intentions, but because it was thought in good faith that it couldn't be done and that there was not reason to be faced with the resultant tension and frustration.

[1] Translator's note: Universities began to appear in Spain in the XIII century. Among the oldest is the University of Salamanca. Its fame has resulted in statements such as the one here cited: "*lo que natura non da Salamanca non presta*", which means that even such a powerful and recognized institution cannot teach someone to be intelligent, since this is a personal attribute.

My concluding initial consideration is that, besides students being diverse among themselves, they are also different, and perhaps even more so, in regard to the adults who teach them. At times we unquestioningly and without basis hold on to the nostalgic notion that "any time in the past was better". Doubtless that some thing were, and others were not. But above all one must emphasize the fact that whether better or worse, they were different from our own. The students who we receive are learners in all of the psychological dimensions that this implies, *qualitatively different from us* because they constructed themselves in a different manner. The educational environments within which they have developed, as well as the school –in the family, in interaction with communication media, in leisure and free time with their peers– have produced important changes that have led to distinct ways of processing knowledge and of learning. They are, for example, people who, in order to maintain their attention usually require a much stronger stimulus from us because it is thus that they are accustomed. They have another concept of authority because the family structure is now different … I will not dwell on this, but I imagine that we share the idea that one cannot teach a psychologically distinct subject –from the point of view of cognitive and emotional characteristics– in the same way that one taught psychological subjects which we constructed at another time. This element of diversity appears to me to be as important as the diversity between students because it explains a good part of the problems that we face when providing an adjusted response in the classroom.

CURRICULAR MEASURES in response to diversity

Having presented these commenbts, we now go on consider what can be done in terms of curricula to help provide a proper response to diversity. Personally, I am convinced that from the standpoint of the curriculum one can take many measures in this sense, both in the phase of curriculum design as well as its development. During these meetings, we have discussed whether it makes sense to pay attention to the design phase, or if it is important to concentrate on development. I share the opinion of César Coll that, development being undoubtedly essential, design decisions are not less so since it is at that point that educational intentions are established.

It is quite possible that the measures presented here may seem to be old ideas, since they have been around for almost 20 years. But in my judgement they continue to be valid. Some may argue that the high degree of school failure that we have in Spain in obligatory secondary education (ESO) –approximately 30%– does not exactly say that procedures have been successful. I do not share this view. Is an idea wrong, or might it be that measures have not been taken to put it into practice? Does the fact that we have been unable to meet the demands of diversity to the extent that we wish mean that it is an objective that we should renounce?

The different measures to serve the needs of diversity are not all equally adequate or legitimate. We can classify them according to two essential dimensions for inclusion. On the one hand, there are some that are more standard making and less segregating. On the other, some are more preventive, while others are intended for when problems appear. Therefore, when using them all one must take care and be parsimonious. Undoubtedly, it is much easier to expell a student. But it is much better to provide, if possible, support inside the classroom than to do so outside, since this is more inclusive and more preventive. It is more difficult; but if we share the dimensions of analysis, it is better. As César Coll has always argued, one must use all measures; all of them before they escape us. But not in any which way, nor with equal legitimacy, because some are of a common character and therefore more inclusive and more preventive. Others are more specific or of an extraordinary character, and therefore more segregative. We therefore must be aware that, if we use the latter, it is because we have been unable to solve an issue with common measures and have exhausted all options before students abandon schooling.

The first of these has had much less impact than expected. Perhaps it has not been understood, or we have been unable to make it understood. Perhaps it is incorrect; although this is not for me the opinion that it deserves. It has to do with the idea that *levels of curricular application* are levels of attention to diversity. When an autonomous community, a municipality, or a school adapts a curriculum, this should be based on what the characteristics of the environment and of students suggest in terms of education needs. This is not the case merely of carrying out good sociological analyses; but rather to know how to infer from them the specific needs of specific students; to be able to interpret social characteristics in terms of education demands. This is the function of curricular projects: to adjust the center line of these demands and to foster coherance among the entire teaching staff. Often, these projects become mere bureaucratic documents, thus losing their potential as a resource to serving the needs of diversity.

In this sense, in my judgemetn, the fundamental level is the school. Regional, state, or provincial descentralization is important for other reasons. But from the pedagogical perspective, the conceptual change lies in accepting the fact that schools are the focus of intervention and quality. It is vital to emphasize that, from this focus, the quality of teaching does not depend on the teacher per se, but rather on the coherence of teacher teams. Good schools are not those that have groups of brilliant teachers; rather they are those that foster a common project that allows families, when we bring them our children, to in a certain sense be less concerned which teacher our children are going to have. I emphasize the word "less" because teachers are always important. But more important is to be assured that there are lines of coherence that guarantee that all teachers will do what is essential. For me, this is a quality school. And I speak of coherence and not of homogeneity. Heterogeneity is a important, but incoherence is something that hinders development. For this reason, curricular projects are key because it is here that is made concrete the reflection on what content should be incorporated, what the basic methodological options are –the basic organizational options that we share for all students.

From this perspective, we have insisted that the *correct definition and selection of basic learning content* is essential for meeting the demands of diversity. Overloaded curricula, those that are not adapted to real needs, are an obstacle to serving diversity. In international documents on the future of education we find clearly reflected a learning option based on competencies or on capacities –in this seminar attention has been given to the peculiarities of each of these concepts, but I will use them indiscriminantly. Abilities that treat all of development and are not limited, therefore to soley the intellectual component; content that includes, together with concepts, procedures and values. Theoretical discussion has included these principles. What is now required is that they also reach everyday classroom practice. This involves us teachers being equally intentional with these kinds of learning; that we are able to justify what concrete teaching and learning activities we need to employ in order that students, for example, be able to put themselves in the place of others more easily; to work in teams, or so that they may be persons who feel satisfied with themselves. In the last analysis, recognizing different types of abilities in the classroom and not merely in theory.

At another time during this meeting it was mentioned that achievement assessments need to begin to incorporate different kinds of abilities and content, and not only the most traditional. As one wise teacher said, "there are no students who have nothing that is worthy". I share this statement. But, in order to meet the needs of diversity all of this needs to "shine" equally in schools, and up to now, this has not been the case. Intellectual abilities continue to shine, while other abilities do not. We will not be able to identify students who are very good in other fields and attract them if we only concentrate on intellectual abilities.

We continue to carry the weight of a terrible dualism between cognition and emotion when we claim that students do not learn because they lack motivation. Might it be the reverse? Could it be that they are not motivated because they don't learn? Might it be that, for example, that when a student begins to have some normal reading problems –he or she is simply delaying slightly more in learning to read and to write– and the teacher, with the best of intentions, makes the student read aloud in class every day. Might this child then construct a representation of a lack of competence and self-esteem? Perhaps we need to be more clearly aware that one cannot learn when one does not feel competent to do so.

The inclusion within educational intentions of all types of abilities is an essential condition for addressing the needs of diversity.

Therefore, emotional and personal relation abilities are essential. However, there are people who don't agree with the idea that schools should be concerned with the entire range of student abilities. Perhaps they should reflect on the fact that their eagerness to teach particular disciplinary content or particular cognitive abilities is impossible without paying attention to other aspects of development. If they are able for students to feel able to learn, for example, basic mathematical knowledge, they will not do so, and it is quite probable that teachers themselves cannot teach them because one cannot teach individuals who do not possess a minimum of emotional well-being in school. Therefore, *the inclusion within educational intentions of all types* of abilities is an essential condition for addressing the needs of diversity.

The rest of the measures that I will mention can be summarized in the maxim that to address the needs of diversity is to teach well, and that to teach well is difficult. That is, it is difficult *to teach through diversified teaching and learning activities*. When teacher training courses instruct future teachers that programing involves planning diversified activities from the beginning in order to meet the needs of different learning paces that make possible reinforcement and more in-depth learning, we have made a qualitative leap. Moreover, serving diversity involves starting from *the different previous learning of the students* in the class; fostering student interaction, based on the fact that they do not learn from us alone; utilizing assessments that provoke learning, which means that they allow students themselves to be aware of the degree to which they have learned and why, so they may continue to self-regulate their own learning processes.

On the other hand, in terms of *the academic organization* of the curriculum, many measures to address the needs of diversity can be initiated. For example, the possibility of organizing the curriculum not by subject matter, but rather in a more interdisciplinary manner. Many students who have learning difficulties have them precisely because it is difficult to relate, tranfer, and generalize knowledge when it is presented in such a fragmented manner. Of course, there are students who are able to do so without difficulty. But schools exist to aid in these processes because those who can do so without our help do not need us. Establishing relations is not simple, and tranference is not a spontaneous process. Presenting reality organized in an integrated way around a powerful central core helps in preventing learning difficulties. Moreover, the fewer the areas, *the fewer teachers neeed to give classes to the same group*, which may facilitate coherence and help in better knowing students.

In Spain, using LOGSE[2], diversified programs were put in place as extraordinary measures for students who presented large learning gaps so that it was impossible for them to finalize their obligatory secondary education (ESO) by taking all of the subjects in their reference group or course. Fifteen years afterward, we can say that this has been successful. More than 75% of students participating in these programs have earned the obligatory education certificate, and of this percentage, a very high number continue to study, most in employment training, but also a small proportion in college preparatory programs. How does one explain this success? First, decreasing the student-teacher ratio because there are only 15 students per group.

[2] Ley Orgánica de Ordenación General del Sistema Educativo (1990)

But, although this factor is important, the explanation does not stop there. There are many classes in Spain today in neighborhoods of certain urban centers that have this number of students, and nevertheless teachers give the classes as if there were 40 students. Let us not grant to the student-teacher ratio more magic than it merits, which is substantial in itself. Besides having fewer students, it so happens that rather than facing 10 subjects as with the rest of their classmates, these students have three areas: socio-linguistic, science and technology, and practice. Thus, knowledge is presented in an inter-related manner. Moreover, one teacher is in charge of the entire range and therefore spends much time with the students and knows them well. Thus, interventions are easier apply.

Along these same lines, it may be a good idea to organize the curriculum in cycles rather than courses. The more time that one spends with students, the better one knows them, and the more margin one has to attain the educational goals sought for the end of the cycle. Moreover, striking a *balance between what is obligatory and optional* in the curriculum is a resource for addressing the needs of diversity. Often, that which a student does not learn in the obligatory subject of language may be learned in a radio workshop; or mathematics in an astronomy class. Course options are venues that make it possible to move with greater fluidity among students, aiming however, at the same capacities. One can better adjust to their interests and motivations, and with less academistic pressure. Often, there is a smaller number of students. These are all factors that provide possibilities of better adjusting to individual student needs.

Finally, school organization measures are also an important resource for meeting the demands of diversity. The decision on the criterion for grouping students is one of the most essential. Homogeneous or heterogeneous groups? It appears that all research indicates that the key lies in the level of *moderately discrepant homogeneity*. On the other hand, all decisions related to the different kinds of reinforcement: to have foreseen beforehand everything that has to do with support within and outside the classroom. Utilizing *flexible groupings*. In all cases, these are measures that make organization more complex, and that demand more resources because they are more costly. But without them, it does not appear possible to adequately address the needs of diversity.

Some education policies do adopt this focus. This does not mean that they are without problems in the classroom. But these are more integrating and inclusive venues which in our judgement favor greater social cohesion. The new General Education Law recently approved in Spain maintains this focus and introduces some new measures such as *diagnostic assessment* at the middle of the primary education and obligatory education cycles in order to avoid learning difficulties as early as possible.

CURRICULAR development measures

As we have argued, putting all of these measures in place is essential for addressing the needs of diversity and assuring that little by little, all students absorb the basic curriculum. However, and without falling into contradictions, curricular measures are not enought. It is necessary to also put into place measures that help the potential of the curriculum to become a reality.

The curriculum should be the element of reforms that provides the structure for education decisions as a whole. That is, we should organize the kind of *teacher training* that is coherent with the curricular model, and no other. Teaching materials should be designed to be at the service of the theoretical options of the curriculum. Assessment should respect curricular goals. It is from this theoretical perspective that educational intentions –the why and what to teach– that should guide decisions regarding the rest of the elements to be put in place to make this possible. Therefore, not all possibilities are open, but rather those that are coherent with educational intentions. This is the meaning of the curricular development measures that can and should contribute to making possible addressing the needs of diversity that is proposed in the curriculum.

The first of these measures, hierarchially subordinated to educational intentions, is that which has to do with teacher training. When one defends an open curriculum, this is not only due to its ability to address the needs of diversity through levels of concrete application. Rather, it is also because this fosters the profile of a reflective teacher. The fact of having to make curricular decisions that are open and to do so within a group involves reviewing one's own practice, and contrasting it with that of others. This in itself is a factor that fosters professional development.

Organize the kind of teacher training that is coherent with the curricular model, and no other.

If one seeks, therefore, a reflective professional who is not a mere executor of the decisions taken by others, but rather an individual who adapts his or her teaching in a permanent dynamic interaction with the differences of students, the teacher training model must be coherent. It would seem, therefore, that traditional training courses are not the best way to achieve this goal. In-school training must be encouraged. In this modality, training is directed at groups of teachers who share their practice, with intervention focused on aiding them in reflecting upon it.

But in spite of how well we do things, we teachers cannot succeed alone. It is apparent that this is a systemic problem, and that we cannot think strictly in terms of teachers. It is therefore extremely useful to provide schools with psycho-pedagogical services. We teachers need persons who are specialists in individual differences and in how to meet them; people who can help us to know how to face individual differences more competently and who not only work directly with these students, who are our responsibility. These psycho-pedagogical resources need to begin to be in schools, or should be increased where they already exist. But in our opinion, although they are necessary, they will be insufficient.

Unfortunately, schools increasingly receive more people, and these people are increasingly more diverse. As an example, in Spain at this time an important problem is that of students with particular kinds of mental health problems that are difficult for schools to serve. It is necessary to speak with psychiatrists; to contact health centers. On the other hand, such students who are in-patients with the adminstration having taken charge of their welfare, require coordination with educators and very special attention. The only way to carry out such coordination is through *sectoral territorally-based plans*. This involves joint planning with other figures responsible in the different contexts of the education of children and young people. This means that schools must incorporate certain individuals. New demands require new figures. What must be decided is where to place these figures, and not to doubt the need for them.

This latter measure refers to the need to carry out comprehensive assessment; that is, assessment that is coherent with the curriculum and its option to address the needs of diversity. If one considers all kinds, and not only cognitive capacities important, it is necessary that assessment be able to value them. Not only through international studies –such as the CIVED Project of the IEA, but above all through the daily assessment of schools.

These developmental measures are essential in order to support the potential of a curriculum that is committed to diversity. Even so, we will lose some students, and it will be necessary to make provisions for so-called parallel "paths of second opportunity" for people who must have available the possibility of returning to the system. These opportunities cannot remain in the hands of individual initiative committed to the social functions of schools. They must be offers that follow established processes and for which the administration takes special care. In the attention given to these paths of educational and social re-insertion we are presented with one of the most important indicators of a true concern for the choice to address the needs of diversity.

Interculturality in Basic Education[1]

Sylvia Schmelkes
Sociologist, Mexico.

INTRODUCTION

Mexico is a pluri-cultural country as defined by the national constitution of 1992, which declares:

The nation is pluri-cultural, based originally on its native peoples who are those descended from the populations that inhabited the current territory of the country at the beginning of colonization and who preserve wholly or in part their own social, economic, cultural, and political institutions. awareness of their native identity should be a basic criterion in order to determine to whom should be applied articles referring to native peoples.

This definition of Mexico as a diverse country represents a paradigmatic historic break. The nearly five centuries after the Spanish conquest had been marked by fear of diversity and by the belief that national unity, and therefore the ability to assure out sovereignty, depended on the cultural unity of the Mexican population.

[1] Participation in the panel on The Curriculum and Attention to Diversity at the II Meeting of the Intergovernmental Committee of the Regional Education Project for Latin America and the Caribbean, PRELAC, organized by the UNESCO Regional Bureau of Education for Latin America and the Caribbean held in Santiago, Chile, May 11-13, 2006.

Granting basic education students the right to receive be educated in their own language.

The implications of this transformation are profound in all areas of national life, and especially so in education. Article Nº2 of the Constitution recognizes this upon declaring that federal, state, and municipal authorities are obliged, among other things, to:

"Guarantee and increase levels of education, favoring bilingual and bicultural education, literacy, completion of basic education, vocational training, and mid-superior and superior education. establish a system of grants for indigenous students at all levels. Define and develop regional level educational programs that recognize the cultural heritage of their peoples, in accordance with the laws to this respect and in consultation with indigenous communities. Stimulate respect for and knowledge of the diverse cultures that exist in the nation." (article II, section b).

As educators we all have the obligation to strengthen the languages and the cultures that define us as a pluri-cultural country.

The Language Rights Act was passed in 2003, granting basic education students the right to receive be educated in their own language, irregardless of the schools in which they study.

"federal education authorities and those of the states shall guarantee that the indigenous population has access to compulsory bi-lingual and inter-cultural education and shall adopt the necessary measures in order to assure that the education system guarantees respect for the dignity and identity of people, irrespective of their language. Moreover, in secondary and higher education interculturality, multi-lingualism, and respect for diversity and language rights shall be fostered." (Article 11).

Passage of the Language Rights Act led to subsequent changes in the General Education Law, which added the following to the purposes of education:

"Foster through teaching knowledge of the linguistic plurality of the nation and respect for the language rights of its native peoples. (...) Speakers of indigenous languages shall have access to compulsory education in their own languages and in spanish." (Article 7, Paragraph IV).

INTERCULTURALITY

In spite of the above, multi-culturality is not sufficient. For it is a descriptive concept, telling us that in a particular territory there co-exist groups with different cultures. But it does not touch upon the relations between cultures. It does not refine this relationship, and in not so doing opens up possibilities for exploitation, discrimination, and racism. One can be multi-cultural and racist.

The contact with another who is different is enriching.

For this reason we use the term "interculturality", which is not a description, but rather an aspiration. It refers specifically to the relations between cultures and defines this relationship. Interculturality assumes that between cultural groups there are relations based upon respect and equality. Interculturality rejects asymmetries; that is, inequalities between cultures measured by power that benefit one cultural group above another or others. As an aspiration, interculturality is part of national policy.

THE BASES of interculturality

The bases of interculturality are diverse. I shall mention two:

I. The philosophy of otherness

The philosophical bases of interculturality refer to how one approaches others:

- From a philosophical stance that recognizes that there are superior cultures, and for this reason it is necessary for the other to erase his or her difference in order to establish a relationship based on equality moves clearly to the other pole: the posture which says that the other can and should grow based on what he or she is, on his or her own identity.
- From a philosophical stance of conceiving the other as a threat to the other pole of believing that contact *with another who is different* is enriching.
- From a view of “culture” in the singular –including the conviction that the entryway to this culture is the school– to one of "cultures" in the plural and whose multiple presence aids living. This stance also defends the impossibility of judging the superiority of a culture over another at a particular time in history. Historically, and from specific ethical stances it is possible to make these value judgments.
- From a view that cultures are static and identities fixed to a conception of cultures as living, dynamic, adaptable, and fostering change. One of the major sources of dynamism of a culture is in fact contact with other cultures, especially if such contact is based on respect.

II. Democracy

It should be noted here that it is evident that a multicultural country that aspires to democracy cannot fully achieve democracy if it is not based on multiculturality and interculturality. This is so because democracy assumes pluralism. It is a decision-making methodology for situations that are complex and in which there exist diverse opinions and thinking.

- Democracy also involves familiarity with and respect for other points of view. Democracy demands knowing other viewpoints in order to arrive at one's own judgment. If not, one's own judgment is limited and egocentric, and is a limitation to a State built within a democratic framework..
- At the least, democracy assumes tolerance, a factor that is contrary to racism. Other democratic attitudes include respect and valuing others who are different. In a democracy, one must listen to minorities in order that it not become a dictatorship of majorities. It involves, for this reason, interculturality.
- Democracy is a mechanism for seeking both retributive and distributive justice, which are, in turn, fostered by interculturality.
- Finally, true democracy, when it is profound and mature –a requirement for interculturality– is indispensable for the governability of complex, diverse, and heterogeneous societies.

EDUCATION for interculturality

Given that interculturality is an aspiration rather than a reality, we prefer to speak of "education for interculturality" rather than "intercultural education". Education can contribute to and be a prime mover for building a truly intercultural nation.

We said that interculturality, as a concept, rejects asymmetries. Asymmetries are many: economic, political, and social. All should be combated. But as educators it is our duty to directly combat asymmetries in education where they exist.

There are two kinds of asymmetries in education that must be resisted. The first is *school asymmetry,* which leads to indigenous populations having the least access to school, having with more difficulties while enrolled, dropping out of school more, and falling behind in grade more than other groups. Even more serious, school asymmetry is what explains why indigenous students learn less in school and why that which they learn is less useful to them in their present and future lives.

School asymmetry leads to indigenous populations having the least access to school.

This *school asymmetry* can be easily shown by analyzing education development indicators. According to data from the latest National Population and Housing Census (2000), illiteracy among the non indigenous language speaking population 15 years of age and over was 7.54%. At the same time, among the indigenous population this proportion is more than four times higher – 33.7%. Nationally, the non-indigenous adult population without schooling is 8.31% of the total non-indigenous adult population, while among indigenous adults illiterates are 31.35% of that population. At the other extreme, 11.58% of the adult population not speakers of a native language has some higher education, while this is the case for only 2.6% of the indigenous language speakers.

For every non-indigenous school-age child (6-14 years of age) not attending school there are two indigenous children. School drop-out and grade failure in primary school are greater in indigenous schools than in non-indigenous schools, although this gap is closing. But only 2.54% of sixth grade students in indigenous primary schools achieve maximum performance levels in national tests in Spanish, and only 0.67% in mathematics. The corresponding percentages for rural non-indigenous schools are 6.34% and 1.39%, respectively. Those for urban schools are 14.09% and 3.12%.

The values-based asymmetry with the mestizo population should be countered by facing racism.

School asymmetry can be corrected by offering quality education. Based on a paradigm of diversity, quality should be achieved through the most adequate means, which will differ according to the cultural groups and population contexts involved. For Mexico this in one of its major challenges in education.

The second asymmetry in education is *value-based*. This a asymmetry is what helps us explain why there is a majority-based cultural group that sees itself as superior to others. When this is blended with racism it also explains why minority groups at times, and above all in regard to their relations with mestizos, consider themselves to be inferior. This asymmetry prevents different cultural groups from relating on equal terms.

Values asymmetry should be countered by indigenous groups seeking and obtaining, as a result of basic education, the pride of their own identities. But it is evident that the origin of this asymmetry, of the discrimination and racism that it involves, is found in the mestizo population. For this reason, intercultural education has to be for all of the population. If it is not for everyone, then it isn't intercultural. In Mexico we commit the error of calling the bilingual modality aimed at indigenous populations "intercultural bilingual". We thus identify in the popular imagination intercultural education with that which is aimed at indigenous peoples. It is important that this mistaken perception be changed.

The *values-based asymmetry* with the mestizo population should be countered by facing racism. This cannot be done in a direct manner, for Mexicans do not recognize themselves as racists. Rather, we must see to it that all Mexicans are aware of the cultural wealth of their diverse country through the curriculum at all levels of education, and especially in primary education. It is necessary to foster respect for those who are different through values training that allow us to approach the ways of thinking of those who belong to different cultural groups. And hopefully it will be possible for people to appreciate that which is different in others, achieved by experiencing the personal enrichment obtained through contact with them. Racism has three enemies: tolerance, respect, and valuing. This third element is the most profound, one from which there is no return. It is that which we should pursue in our education activities with all of the population, including especially the mestizos.

EDUCATION THAT IS LINGUISTICALLY and culturally pertinent for indigenous people at all levels of education.

This is an idea of the National Education Program 2001-2006 now appearing for the first time in education policy. Heretofore, education that took into account the condition of students as native people ended at the primary level.

In order to carry out this aim, we have attempted to create conditions to counter school and value-based asymmetry in regard to the indigenous population. For secondary education we have designed subject matter in language and culture so that any secondary school located in areas with at least 30% speakers of indigenous languages be obligatory for all students, both indigenous and non-indigenous. The three-hours per week subject matter is designed to be offered during the three years of secondary school. In this subject, language is studied through culture. The program was designed by indigenous teachers who master their language and know their culture well. Culture for culture –in Mexico there are 62 different cultural groups and we have been able to work with eight of them and move forward with eight others– each group has identified "key points" of their cultures, and the program is developed around these. Key points are translated into a phrase that summarize the most important aspects of each culture.

For example, for the Tseltal culture the phrase is "our journey on the land and in the world". "Our" refers to the idea of community, to how decisions are made, to how democracy (understood as consensus) is practiced, to the conception of justice as restitution of the balance of the community. It refers to the power structures of the community and to the wisdom of the elderly. It has to do with different positions and obligations toward the community. "Journey" refers to native myths and their vision of regional and national history, to the cyclic concept of the passing of time, to their views of the future. "On the land" has to do with their relationship to nature, to the way they view it (with each element inter-related with all others and each with its own life), the need to ask permission of the earth to cultivate it. It includes productive activities, above all in agriculture and all that is related to these activities such as the family, nutrition, the diversification of economic activities. "In the world" refers to their vision of the cosmos, their spirituality, religious organization in the community, festivals and their meaning, the relation between the natural and the supernatural ... and all of this includes the study of multiple cultural expressions (music, dance, painting, art, literature) that have to do with the former. The content is a rich one and does not fit within a curriculum of three hours per week for three years. Nevertheless, it is a guide for teachers.

Students are taught to investigate each of these elements in their communities. In doing so they are to use their language. They then present the results of their research both orally and written in the indigenous language. During this process, teachers correct both oral and written expression. This results in metalinguistic activities, in reflecting on language, and in knowledge of the phonetics, morphology, and syntax of the language involved. Those who do not speak the language participate to the extent of their possibilities, beginning with attempts aided by those who do speak it to understand, and progressing toward expression. During the three years the language begins to be used for personal and collective expression within the community. In this venue, at least, it is made public.

Something similar is being done in recent upper secondary school intercultural programs[2].

[2] It should be noted that of the 10 such institutions from which students have graduated and that have been evaluated using national instruments, one scored above the national average for private schools, two above the national average for all schools, and, with the exception of one of them, all are very near the national average. Note that 70% of the students in these institutions have no electricity in their residences, to mention just one social-economic indicator. Does considering them as indigenous raise the quality of education?

For their part, indigenous teachers are for the first time having the opportunity to be training from the beginning as such, and not in indigenous normal schools, because our focus is intercultural. The regular normal schools, where all future teachers are trained, also train indigenous teachers. But they study six additional hours per week during the six semesters of normal school training because they have to learn their language well and know their cultures in depth. They need to be able to teach both in order for their students to be proud of their own identities. Moreover, indigenous teachers must learn and be able to successfully teach Spanish as a second language.

Finally, intercultural universities –four in operation and five now being created– seek to train intellectuals and professionals committed to the economic, social, cultural, and educational progress of their peoples and regions based on the needs and potentials of the region in question.

In all of these efforts aimed primarily but not exclusively at native peoples, care is taken to safeguard the quality of that which is offered, of the processes and educational outcomes, striving for knowledge of one's own culture and pride of identity. These are efforts aimed at combating school and value-based asymmetries.

INTERCULTURAL education for all

This other objective of education policy has appeared for the first time under the current federal administration. It responds to the view of an intercultural country, arguing that intercultural education can only be understood when it is for everyone.

We have already explained our understanding of intercultural education with native peoples as well as the kinds of education policy activities that result from this conception.

In the case of the mestizo population the procedure is a bit different. We believe that the firs step to be taken in this new proposal to education the entire population in interculturality is to gain knowledge of diversity. We feel that it is not possible to ask anyone to respect that with which they are not familiar. Since the basis of interculturality is respect, one must move toward knowledge of that which is to be respected.

Our educational system has not led to knowledge of the cultural diversity of our pluricultural country. Students leaving their first level of education do not know how many indigenous groups there are or where they are. Even less do they recognize the contributions that these groups make to national life. It is therefore necessary that knowledge, values, and the artistic production of native people be a regular part of what students learn in schools at all levels.

But it was not possible that these beliefs, practices, knowledge, values, and artistic production of indigenous peoples be defined by sitting behind a desk. And although we emphasize the rich ethnographic literature that exists on the peoples of Mexico, the most important contribution has come from the native peoples themselves. We consulted, in ten forums of two days duration each, 51 indigenous peoples. The major question of the meetings was: what from your culture to you want all Mexicans to learn? In the beginning, it was difficult to invoke a response. With the aid of motivational dynamics and examples, discussions began and were eventually specialized by groups in specific themes (relation to nature, festivals, view of history, community organization and government, education...). The material thus obtained was enormously rich, making it possible to *intellectualize* –introduce the theme of indigenous peoples in a cross-cutting manner in all subject matter of all grades– initially at the secondary level which was in the process of reform.

Recently, using the same basis, we presented a proposal for the interculturalization of primary education. That proposal is now in being analyzed by primary education authorities. This interculturalization is to be carried out in a different way (through incorporation of a basic pedagogical principle cutting across all identified skills in six fields of training in regard to diversity).

There are two additional steps in intercultural education for all that need to be explicitly pursued. One is that of respect. Once diversity is recognized one must seek to respect it. It seems to us that there is no better way to do this than through values training that respects the right of each person to decide upon his or her own values scheme, but that recognizes the obligation of schools to present the basic values of living together and those upon which human rights are based. This has led us to work very closely with those who have designed civic and ethical training curricula in both primary and secondary schools. We are quite satisfied with the results. The final step, which from our point of view can be achieved as a consequence of primary and lower secondary school training and which guarantees if achieved the eradication of racism, is valuing. Valuing is achieved when we work in trying to learn and enrich ourselves from others who are different. When we have this diversity in the classroom and we can make use of it, as in multicultural contexts, this can be done directly. When this is not the case we can work on valuing –assuming respect, i.e., the interest in listening to others– through vicarious forms of intercultural dialogue.

We facilitate the above through providing support to teachers. One example, called "Exploring Our Materials", seeks to show teachers how, it they know where to look, they can find in classroom and school libraries, in textbooks and in other available materials multiple portals to working with intercultural education.

Another material is a series of videos called "Window to My Community". In this series, indigenous boys and girls from different groups (we now have 25) other children not from their community what the community is like. In separately workable segments we learn about the surroundings, food, games, housing, language, agricultural production, crafts, festivals, clothing ... These videos are accompanied by printed materials. One of these, entitled "cultural notebook" in order to know more about the group in question –the videos are intended to awaken interest and curiosity in students to know more– and another contains entertaining group exercises for reflecting upon one's own culture and on others and on the value of interculturality. The materials have been proven to generate in an ascending spiral the three steps mentioned above: knowledge, respect, and valuing.

Believing that it is also necessary to heighten awareness of these subjects among the general population, we have developed radio programs and more traditional documentaries on 48 indigenous groups. These are being transmitted nation-wide by the cultural television channel. They are not monographic documentaries, but rather present native people with great dignity and as an important contribution to national life.

It is not enough to pursue intercultural education for all at the primary and lower secondary levels only. We are aware of the need to create venues in secondary and higher education in this same sense. However, it must be admitted that here we have made much less progress.

Learning to live together is increasingly more of an imperative in our world, be it traditional or modern.

CONCLUSION

Many Latin American countries with indigenous populations are quite advanced in the ability to offer culturally and linguistically pertinent education. Most of them embrace the principles of intercultural bilingual education. This needs to continue, for much still needs to be done in terms of coverage and even more in terms of the quality of teacher initial and in-service training.

But taking this into consideration, we believe that there is a basis for proposing at the level of Latin America, *Intercultural Education for All.* None of our countries can be considered monocultural. Contact with cultural diversity, either directly or through the media, is already a reality in all corners of our continent. Learning to live together is increasingly more of an imperative in our world, be it traditional or modern. In order to deepen our democracy, gain governability, and above all to take advantage of the wealth of views and solutions offered by our diversity, possible only when living together is based upon respect and when one achieves valuing and self-valuing of those who engage in dialogue are, we believe, clear long-term requirements for current education systems. This is our belief.

Curriculum diversity and special educational needs

Seamus Hegarty
Chairman of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, Great Britain.

I want to start by asking you to imagine for yourselves a young child with a rucksack on the way to school. Various questions come to mind. What sort of experiences will s/he have in school today? If the child has particular difficulties, how well will these be met in the school? Is that rucksack a burden that weighs the child down, or is it the key that will open up the future? Very soon, we get all the big questions of education here –the nature and purposes of schooling, what schooling in the future will look like, equity in educational provision, meeting individual needs, responding to difference and so on.

SOME INTRODUCTORY points

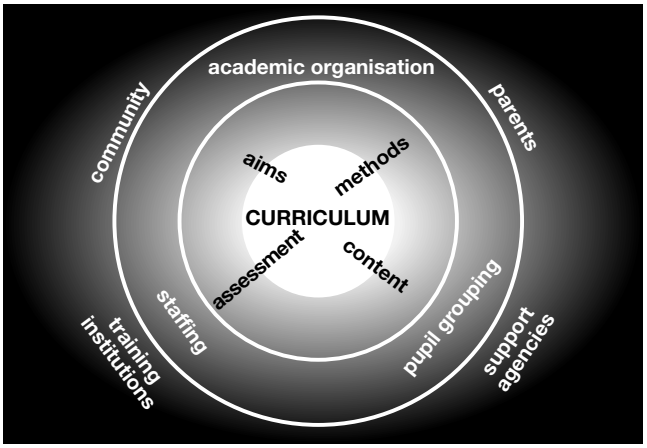
Before turning to my main topic of curriculum diversity, I need to make four general points very briefly, even at the risk of repeating what others have said. This is because in the past pupils with special educational needs have been placed in a ghetto. We talked about handicapped children as being quite different from other children, and educational provision made for them (when there was any) was separate and different. As long as these attitudes persist, and schooling for children who have difficulties of whatever kind is not seen as an integral part of the mainstream, we will make limited progress only. We must understand that there is need of a common conceptual framework and a common way of looking at the education of these young people.

These four points have to do, respectively, with: what we mean by curriculum; the complexity of curriculum; why we should have a common curriculum framework that applies to all children, and an alternative perspective on equity and individual differences that may be more persuasive than the ways we customarily think about these issues.

My first point has to do with *defining the curriculum*. Figure 1 attempts to set out the multiple components of curriculum and how they are related. The curriculum is not just about content, whether you see that in terms of traditional subject areas or competences or in some other way. What goes on in school is located within a context of aims, teaching approaches, assessment styles and so on, and all of these take place within a set of contexts at school and broader societal levels. Where pupils who have difficulties in learning are concerned, a curriculum conceived narrowly in terms of acquiring knowledge in disciplinary subject areas is almost inevitably exclusionary: they will always be different and there is little possibility of encompassing them within a common curriculum framework. But if we adopt a view of curriculum as *a process whereby pupils are assisted toward desired learning*, we can begin to see that a common curriculum framework that encompasses all pupils is possible.

We talked about handicapped children as being quite different from other children, and educational provision made for them (when there was any) was separate and different.

FIGURE 1: A MODEL OF CURRICULUM



A second set of considerations has to do with where the curriculum comes from in practical terms. Briefly, curriculum development is a complex, four-stage process encompassing: analysis of needs and contexts; curriculum design responding to this analysis; implementation; and evaluation (This cycle is of course likely to be repeated from time to time).

Curriculum design takes many forms, partly in response to the motive forces behind it. We can distinguish between macro (political, bureaucratic and marketing) and operational or empirical (comparative, instructional design, knowledge-structure, and pilot/experimental) approaches. I want to pause briefly on the comparative approach, in order to draw your attention to two useful sources of information.

The first is INCA, the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Internet Archive. This is hosted by the National Foundation for Educational Research in England and Wales at www.inca.org.uk. It is a means of describing the curriculum and the assessment framework (and initial teacher education) in a number of countries in a structured, systematic way. Currently covering 20 education systems, many of them not English-speaking, it is a resource that people engaged in curriculum development around the world find extremely useful. This is a highly cost-effective tool, and it is likely that a similar mechanism for exchanging curriculum information across Latin America would be beneficial.

A second source of comparative information comes from the body for which I am now responsible – the IEA, the International Association for the Evaluation of Education Achievement. We carry out major international studies of student achievement. Our flagship studies are TIMSS (Trends in Math and Science Study) and PIRLS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study). Our other studies currently cover information and communication technology in schools, civics and citizenship education, and teacher education.

While the immediate media interest in these studies is in the 'league tables' they produce, such one-dimensional analyses are not their primary purpose. They provide countries with detailed comparative information that enables them benchmark their curriculum against other countries' curricula and how well schools in the country are performing in respect of that curriculum. There are numerous examples where countries have used the data and curriculum information from these studies to stimulate and inform significant curriculum reform. One small example, from TIMSS 2003, comes from Malaysia.

The findings highlighted that science performance in rural schools, especially in practical work, was relatively weak. This provided the rationale for greater investment in laboratories and science teaching in rural Malaysia, and in the event significant investment was made. This would have been unlikely to happen had the TIMSS data not been available. Numerous such examples can be cited, and information on some of these is available on the IEA website – www.iea.nl

My third point has to do with the rationale for a *common curriculum framework* that applies to all children. For many years the rhetoric has been that children with special educational needs should be provided for within the same framework as other children. As long ago as 1988, UNESCO's first review of the situation of special education, covering more than 60 countries, found that all countries declared that their aims for the education of pupils with special needs were to develop the individual pupils' capacities and prepare them for adult life. In other words, they had exactly the same aims as one would expect for other children, though in many countries this commitment did not translate into practical reality. An indicative statement is provided by a British document, where the aims of education were declared to be: "*To enlarge a child's knowledge, experience and imaginative understanding, and thus his awareness of moral values and capacity for enjoyment; and secondly, to enable him to enter the world after formal education is over as an active participant in society and a responsible contributor to it, capable of achieving as much independence as possible".*

This statement, from the Warnock Report (DES, 1978), was drawn up with children with special needs in mind but, in fact, it could be taken perfectly well as a statement of educational aspiration for any child.

My final preliminary point relates to equity and individual rights. To focus on this, I want to invite you to engage in a thought experiment. We have had high-level statements on rights inn education for many years. It is nearly 60 years since the UN Declaration of Human Rights, affirming that every child is entitled to education; we had the Salamanca Declaration in 1994, and many other fine documents before and since. There has of course been much improvement, but we are so far short of securing the entitlements promised by these various statements that their persuasive capacity has to be questioned.

It is common knowledge that we shall not hit the EFA targets for 2015: many children will in 2015 still not be receiving the education declared to be a universal right in 1948.

It is common knowledge that we shall not hit the EFA targets for 2015: many children will in 2015 still not be receiving the education declared to be a universal right in 1948. And the group that will have least access to education is the very group we are concerned with here, pupils who have difficulties in learning and behaviour at school. In a cruel irony, those who have the greatest need of education are the furthest back on the EFA measures and have benefited least from the many statements of entitlement.

So, I want to suggest another approach which I find more persuasive than the human rights arguments, important though those are. Imagine you are given the task of creating a new society, and that you will act in your own rational self-interest in doing so. Let us imagine further, however, that you will live in this world which you have designed *but* you do not know beforehand what your situation or capacities will be in it. You do not know whether you will be rich or poor, male or female, from the majority or a minority culture, whether you will have a significant disability or not. The strong likelihood is that the society you would create would be very different from what we have now. If I as the architect of society must allow for the possibility that I may be a person with significant disabilities, then the society I will create is more likely to embody *effective* rights for people with disabilities.

This way of thinking has actually been a powerful driver of policy initiatives relating to social disadvantage. It has not as yet been applied very much in education, and certainly not in disability. It draws, as some of you will recognize, on the theory of John Rawls, as set out in his seminal book, *The Theory of Justice*. I believe it gives an alternative perspective on the rationale for making the investment necessary to secure high-quality education for all, including those with disabilities and learning difficulties, and a perspective that may well be more persuasive than the traditional human rights arguments.

WHAT to do

Action is needed on four levels: national or state as appropriate, local, school and classroom.

NATIONAL level

There are six areas for action here:

1. ***Policy/legislation.*** It is necessary to have a clear statement of policy, ideally backed by legislation, that sets out a coherent framework for provision and is backed with the necessary resources. While the particular needs and situations of individual pupils must be borne in mind, these policies and any legislation should be incorporated into mainstream policies and legislation.

2. ***Curriculum framework.*** There should be a common curriculum framework for all learners. Individual needs must be met but there is ample evidence to show that this can be done without devising separate curricula. If segregated special schools are deemed to be still necessary, they should none the less ensure that their pupils' learning is located within the curriculum framework in use for other pupils.

3. ***Teacher education.*** The quality of teaching is one of the major determinants of pupil learning, and it is vitally important to ensure a good supply of well trained teachers. This is important for all pupils but particularly so for those who have difficulty in learning. If we are serious about educating most if not all children in mainstream schools, then every teacher must have the relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes. This means having solid inputs on special educational needs in initial teacher education that will be absorbed by every trainee teacher, i.e. not just options which are taken on a voluntary basis.

There will be need of specialists as well, and more advanced training must be provided for those. And of course there will be an expectation that teachers will engage in professional development throughout their teaching careers, and this will include enhancing their capacities in respect of teaching pupils with special educational needs.

4. ***Quality assurance.*** Quality assurance tends to receive a poor press in education, with routine objections to the stress caused by external inspection or the loss of time and focus that results from testing. There should be no mistaking the importance of rigorous quality assurance, however. If education is important for children and young people, we must be sure that we are getting it right, and that means some system of monitoring quality, whether it be inspection, testing, structured self-evaluation or something else. Such monitoring is even more important where the education of pupils who have special needs is concerned.

5. ***Research and evaluation.*** Education lags behind medicine and some other areas in its utilisation of research to improve practice. This needs to be remedied. Research is not the only input required to secure better practice but it is an essential one. National authorities must give a lead both in conducting and providing resources for others to conduct research and evaluation and in promoting a culture that takes research evidence seriously in policy formulation.

6. ***Identifying and disseminating good practice.*** There is a great deal of good practice to be found in schools already. Indeed, it is a commonplace of educational reform that, if all schools matched the performance of the best schools, no reform efforts would be necessary. This points to the need for a systematic means of locating good practice, identifying which features of it are particular to the local situation and which can be applied elsewhere, and disseminating this information in an effective way. A striking example of such an information exchange is given by the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education (www.european-agency.org). This is an organisation established by European countries as their vehicle for sharing information and for collaboration in the field of special needs education. There are currently 26 countries participating and by common consent they find it an efficient way of identifying and sharing good practice.

Research is not the only input required to secure better practice but it is an essential one.

LOCAL level

Local authorities in most administrations act as a bridge between central government and schools. There are five broad areas for consideration: policy mediation, whereby they translate central requirements into local contexts which may vary substantially across large countries; resource allocation, which has to be informed by detailed local knowledge; pupils admissions; support services to schools, which again have to be determined and provided locally; and continuing professional development, where the local authority will have a role in facilitating provision when not actually providing training itself.

SCHOOL level

Improving provision for pupils with special educational needs at school level can be seen in terms of action in five areas: school organization which minimises barriers between pupils with special needs and their peers and, indeed, which actively promotes their participation in all school activities; staff deployment, to ensure that pupils with special needs have appropriate extra assistance as required; materials and resources; continuing professional development, as a normal requirement of good practice for all teachers but particularly where the challenges of special needs are concerned; and parental involvement, to ensure that parents understand and support what the school is doing, to enable them make input as appropriate in the classroom, and to facilitate them in stimulating their child's learning at home.

CLASSROOM level

This is the key arena for action and there is an enormous literature to draw on. (Two books in particular can be noted: Florian, 2006 and UNESCO, 2006.) What I have done here is set out a structure to analyse the topic and indicate in schematic form how each area for action can be broken down.

1. Identifying difficulties

- Observation
- Information from parents
- Screening procedures
- Formal assessment

2. Teaching

- Good teaching as the foundation
- Blend of individual, small group and whole class work
- Individualised instruction
- Individualised Educational Programmes
- Specialist techniques
- Peer tutoring
- Computer-assisted instruction
- Assessment strategies
- Team working

3. Recording progress

- Feedback on teaching
- Measures of progress
- Exchange of information

4. Managing behaviour

5. Team working

- Classroom assistants/parents
- In-school experts
- External experts
- Team teaching

6. Professional development

- Never finished!
- On-the-job learning
- In-school professional development
- External provision

If we take these steps –at national, local, school and classroom levels– in a thoughtful way, we can look forward to schools of tomorrow which will be better than the schools of today, to schools where all children regardless of their diverse conditions will flourish and, above all, to schools which are beacons of learning and hope for every single child.

I would like to finish with an inspirational quote from the great Chilean writer and educator, Gabriela Mistral.

"We are guilty of many things, but our worse crime is to have abandoned the children, to have been negligent with the source of life. Much of what we need can wait; children cannot. The time is now... We cannot tell them *tomorrow*... Their name is *today.*"

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The curriculum is influenced by the humanities, by art, and by social theory. It is an interdisciplinary hybrid area in terms of theory, research, and school practice.

The social meaning of the curriculum
A RE-READING OF THE THEME

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INTRODUCTION

The XXI century began with a conviction held by a large number of specialists that in order for development to move forward, a revolution *through* education is necessary. In late-developing countries however, a revolution must first take place *in* education. It is due to this discussion that the curriculum has become of increasing interest.

More than any other theme in education, that of the curriculum is influenced by the humanities, by art, and by social theory. It is an interdisciplinary hybrid area in terms of theory, research, and school practice. Because of the multiplicity of bases upon which the subject rests, setting its boundaries and (especially reaching consensus among specialists) is difficult. Until the 1970s, psychological references to the curriculum associated it with the development of students, while Marxist sociology, important during the 1980s, saw the curriculum as a reproducer of inequalities present in the social structure. These references were gradually replaced by a greater variety of analytic perspectives, particularly those of cultural anthropology, economics, and politics.

Within this context, of note are the transformations through which current societies are passing, in which economic and cultural globalization and the reduction of distances of time and space occur along with the substitution of ideas of the nation-state by more pluralistic identities (Lopes and Macedo, 2005: 10). Added to all of this is the accelerated development of information, making human beings from different parts of the planet participants in distant events at the very moment they occur.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the field of the curriculum was under the influence of these various factors. As a result, as noted by Pinar et. al. (1995), discussion of the administrative-scientific aspects of the curriculum was overshadowed by scientific production that was imminently political. Since then, most studies have sought to understand the curriculum as a venue for power relations, arguing that it can only be understood when placed in its political, economic, and social context. Authors who are identified with the curriculum, such as Apple, Young, and Giroux, came to be remembered next to sociologists and philosophers such as Marx, Gramsci, Lefebre, Bourdieu, as well as the Brazilian author Paulo Freyre.

At the end of the 1990s, under the influence of the post-industrial society as a producer of symbolic goods, theoretical considerations of the curriculum began to incorporate approaches that included the though of Foucault, Deleuze, and Guatari. Thus, both globalization-focused and critical Marxist theorizing are in contrast to the multiplicity characteristic of today's world, resulting in different tendencies and theoretical-methodological orientations and producing the hybridization that marks scientific production at the beginning of the XXI century.

Currently, education specialists have focused their discussions on questions concerning the relation between scientific knowledge and school-based learning: the selection of curricular content; the relation between in-school teaching and emancipatory activities; the need to overcome the dichotomies between content; and overcoming the questions faced by schools wishing to instill a view of the curriculum as the social construction of knowledge.

While the hybrid nature of such trends assures greater vitality in the field, it becomes more difficult to trace the boundaries of what the curriculum really entails. For this reason, the arguments presented here will emphasize the relations between the curriculum, the teaching of school subjects, the meaning that the curriculum can have for school-based education in developing countries, and the importance of public policies.

There needs to be a selection of knowledge to be included in the curriculum, and this obeys well-defined criteria that reflect the values of a society at a given time.

WHAT HAS BEEN LABELED as the curriculum

Although the importance of the curriculum is increasingly recognized, there is no consensus among writers regarding what is included in this field. Among the many attempts at conceptualization, we note the following:

- **The curriculum as school-based knowledge and learning experience.** In this first sense, the curriculum is interpreted as knowledge treated pedagogically and didactically by the school. It includes the content that is to be learned and applied by students. Here, attention is on what the curriculum should contain and how its content should be organized.

- **The curriculum as a set of student experiences under the orientation of the school.** This conception is based on a view of education beginning in the XVIII century, related to economic, social, political, and cultural changes occurring at that time. In this case, the emphasis is on individual differences, and a concern for student activity leads to an emphasis of form over content. (Moreira, 2005 : 12).

- **The curriculum as a structured series of desired learning outcomes.** The curriculum prescribes (or at least anticipates) teaching outcomes. It is not concerned with the means, that is activities or materials, or the content of teaching, that should be used to obtain outcomes (Johnson, 1980:18). In this conceptualization, the influence of American behavioral psychology is evident, and attention is focused on the rules for formulating objectives, examination of the relation between objectives of the curriculum and broader curricular objectives, and on questions of selection, and prioritization of curricular content.

- **The formal curriculum and the real curriculum.** There is a distinction between what is conventionally called the *formal curriculum*, that which one proposes to teach, and the *real curriculum or curriculum in action* –that which actually occurs in schools. Moreover, there are non-explicit rules and norms established in the classroom and which comprise the *hidden curriculum*.

This conception, appearing beginning in 1970, is adopted by writers such as Young (1971), Bernstein (1971), Giroux (1981), Apple (1982) and focuses attention on the relations between stratification of knowledge and social stratification, considering that organization of the curriculum and teaching reproduce the dominant power relations and social controls present in society. Here we find questions such as: what are the meanings of declared and hidden curricula in schools? What is the position of curricula in terms of individual and collective emancipation? Giroux (1993), one of the defenders of this view, says that modernism points toward a change toward a set of social conditions that are re-drawing the social, cultural, and geographic maps of the world, while at the same time producing new forms of cultural criticism. Thus, the curriculum comes to be viewed and interpreted as all-meaning –as a primary instrument for constructing identities and subjectivities.

In this novel view, the curriculum is conceived as an instrument used in school-based education, the objective of which is to influence obtaining a behavior regulated by rules that is, controlled and directed behavior. Thus, it directs the behavior of the teacher regarding what may be taught, and *controls* student learning, defining that which he or she has a right to learn. In this sense, we are defending the point of view according to which the curriculum has a political content. It is administered within a society and contains the values adopted by that society, as with all socially-produced knowledge. Within this perspective, the socio-political-ideological character of the curriculum is emphasized, as well as the influence of the national and international contexts on the school curriculum. Also of note is the importance of the curriculum as an instrument of social justice in societies marked by differences, as is the case in a large number of developing countries.

THE SOCIO-POLITICAL-IDEOLOGICAL CHARACTER of the curriculum

The source of the curriculum is culture, but not all available knowledge of a particular culture should be included in the curriculum. There needs to be a selection of knowledge to be included in the curriculum, and this obeys well-defined criteria that reflect the values of a society at a given time. This selective character of the curriculum leads us to questions related to the socio-political, ideological nature of any curricular proposal.

"Knowledge is socially-defined and created within social institutions by particular groups of persons, and is distributed through socially-created channels adopted and utilized in particular social contexts" (Silva and Azevedo, 1995:14-15). This social construction character of knowledge treated by sociology and psychology helps to explain the social differences, similarities of behavior, feelings, and attitudes of groups of human beings, including why we do not perceive the influence of ideology on this construction.

The production of knowledge is a complex, socially-constructed process that is shaped by broad structures. Research bodies, universities, and science communication networks make up the social backbone necessary for the production of knowledge and act under the influence of these structures, even when this is not visible at first glance. Thus, the emergence of modern physics and astronomy is associated with the appearance of modern capitalism and its interest in long-range navigation. The development of chemistry, for its part, is linked to techniques of the industrial revolution as well a with new fuels, arms, and drugs. In the same line of reasoning, we can see that incentives for research on the atom are linked to the interest to create nuclear weapons at the time of World War II even when one notes that researchers were surprised and even disappointed with this relation.

Once produced, knowledge must circulate. This social process involves a selection. The school curriculum is a part of this selection and circulation process. Veritable ideological battles take place in order to include one foreign language in the curriculum and to remove another, or to include or exclude one or another literary theme in order to value or not historical aspects that involve negros or native peoples. One may thus state that the curriculum always themes related to gender, ethnicity, and other ideological issues.

Ideas that seem "natural" in terms of the inclusion of so-called "basic content" are in truth the result of a complex policy that is shaped by the broad distribution of social power. One thus concludes that the curriculum is an important social resource that aids in shaping social interests and deciding upon them. Thus, as with any social product, the curriculum has a political character, and it is undeniably marked by ideology. This is not a bad thing in itself; for we are wrapped in ideology as with the very air we breath. The problem resides in ignoring this fact and in considering any curricular proposal to be ideologically neutral.

In pointing out this political-ideological attribute of the curriculum, Moreira (1995), notes that it does not make sense to attribute to schools the task of resolving social inequalities; nor to ideologically "train" students. But he emphasizes that "a good primary schooling is the best of all schools of citizenship, and perhaps the only road to social ascension for the poor".

It should be noted that neo-liberalism today constitutes a hegemonic political model in most of the world. According to Frigotto (1964), neo-liberalism on the economic and socio-political levels seeks to activate the processes of re-composition of the crisis of capital and its contradictions in favor of the re-composition of rates of profit. On the ethical level, its seeks to let the laws of the market freely and justly regulate social relations. The neo-liberal ideology fosters the belief that the public sector is responsible for the crisis and inefficiency of the current system and that, on the other hand, the private sector guarantees efficiency, quality, productivity, and equity. Thus, it defends a minimalist State that interferes only when necessary in order to assure the capital reproduction process. Within this framework, control is indispensable and, returning to the expression of the former minister, finds the justification for requiring a national curriculum that is accompanied by a rigorous assessment process.

The analysis of the experience of some countries can be revealing. According to Apple (1994), in the United States, neo-liberalism sees a national curriculum and assessment as the best instruments for modernizing education and for preparing human resources –thus making it possible to preserve the "American dream". Since a strong State is necessary for preserving moral standards, the intervention of government is seen as justified in defining the curriculum and in maintaining a unified assessment system. Apple warns, however, that due to social inequalities, the national curriculum and centralized assessment will not lead to social cohesion. Rather, they will emphasize the social class, gender, and racial differences existing in a heterogeneous society. For this writer, what is being done is the invention of a common culture which in fact emphasizes the interests of dominant groups without taking into consideration the culture and interests of minority groups.

In Great Britain, according to Goodson (1994), the national curriculum has been seen as a resource for economic regeneration and the structuring of national identity. For this writer, there are two other non-revealed underlying interests: the reconstitution of traditional disciplines that derive their weight from class interests and the control of students and teachers by the State. Analyzing the mentioned curriculum in detail, Goodson says that in a nation characterized by social, racial, gender, regional, and nationality differences, there are probably privileges of a particular "nation" or of some groups in the selection of curricular content.

The curriculum indicates what should be learned and not how it should be learned.

These considerations regarding the political and ideological character of the curricula of different countries, including the curricular guidelines of education in Brazil, have the objective of calling attention of civil society in general and of parents and education professionals in particular to the importance of accompanying this selective curricular organization and implementation process. It is important to emphasize the vital nature of effective participation of various actors in education in order to guarantee autonomy and strengthening the power of different segments of the school and community in the process of curriculum generation and implementation.

THE CURRICULUM, teaching, and content

In attempting to define the curriculum, Johnson (1967) says that although the concept used by laymen is more understandable than that used by specialists, he seeks to establish a distinction between the curriculum and teaching which for the author is essential for substantially reducing conceptual confusion. He defines the curriculum as a structured series of hoped-for learning outcomes, i.e. the curriculum pre-establishes to ends to be attained in terms of attainable results; it does not, however, establish the means, or the activities, materials, and teaching content that should be used to achieve the results. In other words, the curriculum indicates *what should be learned* and not *how it should be learned*. Teaching, for its part, in the opinion of this author, is a set of experiences for attaining the desired results.

The curriculum plays an important role in providing direction to teaching, and has an *anticipatory* character; something that precedes that which should happen in the interaction of the learner with the environment. Curriculum involves *intention*, while teaching is the fruit of the interaction of the student with the teacher or with resources in the environment that foster learning. A broad concept of the curriculum should leave room for creativity and to individual teaching style. The choice of learning experiences able to foster the achievement of desired objectives is related to the planning of teaching and not to the development of the curriculum. Therefore, although the curriculum can limit the range of possible experiences, it cannot specify them.

Within this line of reasoning, teaching content includes more than that which is specified in the curriculum. Teaching includes a body of instrumental content selected by the teacher in order to facilitate the desired learning. Thus, concepts and generalizations, for example, are learned indirectly; above all through contacts that make possible specific demonstrations. The selection of these contacts depends on teaching and not on the curriculum.

The order of learning experiences is also influenced by the curriculum. However, the curriculum is not composed of a random list of items, but rather by a structured ordering of items hierarchically arranged in a sequence through time. It is expected that the items of the curriculum assume importance and meaning, considering their relation to one another and the type of research from which they are derived. One can say, therefore, that the curriculum is a structured series of expected learning outcomes.

Coll (1990) presents two conceptualizations regarding the relation between the curriculum and teaching. The first of these, a traditional conception, is historically associated with an interpretation of teaching and learning in terms of transmission and reception. Through it, curricular proposals seek to transmit knowledge, emphasizing teaching content and learning while attributing to students an essentially receptive role with the teacher responsible for transmitting such knowledge. In contrast, Coll presents a concept based on the genetic theory of Piaget and the Geneva School according to which ideal school-based education is not that which transmits socially legitimated knowledge; rather it is that which provides conditions that assure that students develop their cognitive, affective, social, and learning skills and potential. This alternative view of school-based education has been associated with a constructivist interpretation of teaching and learning that lends decisive importance to the activities of students.

Curricular proposals based on this conception tend to emphasize the importance of creativity and discovery in school-based learning by attributing to students a decisive role in their learning and minimizing placing in relative terms the importance of contents while seeing teachers much more as learning guides and facilitators than as transmitters of constituted knowledge.

Coll (1992), however, sees both conceptions as monolithic. He presents a third proposal that guided the education reform of Spain in the 1990s. This conception defends a radically constructivist interpretation of teaching and learning, while at the same time arguing that content plays a decisive role in school-based education. While emphasizing the constructivist activity of students, the curricular proposals based on this concept grant considerable importance to the learning of certain specific content and highlight the influence of teachers as the determining factor for the constructive activity of students. According to this writer, *contents designate the set of knowledge or cultural forms the appropriation or assimilation of which by students is considered essential for their development and socialization* (Coll, 1992). For Coll, personal development should be understood as a process through which they make their own the knowledge and cultural forms of the social group to which they belong. This assimilation is not a passive incorporation of historically-constituted and culturally-organized knowledge. Rather, it is a re-construction and re-elaboration of the same. In this process, each of the members of the social group, at the same time he or she is socialized, becomes a unique individual. Thus, while being socialized, human beings attain their individuality.

Within this perspective, the content of curricular proposals are cultural knowledge in a sense near to that of cultural anthropology: concepts, explanations, skills, languages, essential values, attitudes, interests, rules of conduct, among others. The assimilation of this selection of cultural knowledge (the content) is seen as essential for appropriate development and socialization of students to occur, according to the frameworks of society of which they are a part. Only that knowledge and those cultural forms the assimilation of which require specific aid should be included as teaching and learning content of curricular proposals.

In conclusion, the learning of specific content fulfills its function to the extent to which the process of construction of meaning and the attribution of meaning is attained. Thus, this content contribute to the personal development of students and foster their socialization. On the other hand, this same content assures the survival and strengthening of the consolidated social values of a culture.

A CONCLUSION of sorts

The discussion of development policies, especially those referring to education, has given special emphasis to the subject of the school curriculum. Representatives of academia, of national and international entities, and education professionals are dedicating time and effort to analyzing the most appropriate procedures for defining the purposes of education with a view toward development. This confirms the social importance of school-based education as well as the need to plan, execute, and evaluate proposals that clearly define that which is seen to be essential for students to learn during their school careers.

When we consider the social meaning of schooling, and especially *the school curriculum*, questions arise regarding the tension between quality and equity, and between inclusion and segregation (Ainscow et al. 2001 and Terwel, 2005). Equity involves guaranteeing all students the opportunity to learn in school that which is indispensable for assuring their future as free and productive citizens. But this is only possible through quality education. On the other hand, very extensive curricular proposals that include an excess of content, rather than guaranteeing the inclusion of those who are socially and economically underprivileged, tend to foster segregation, since the learning conditions of these students make them unable to assimilate all that is proposed.

Personal development should be understood as a process through which students make their own the knowledge and cultural forms of the social group to which they belong.

It must also be made clear to planners that not all learning takes place at school. Many other social institutions have a defined role in the developmental process and in citizen socialization and training. For this reason, decisions regarding what should be taught and what should be learned involve a process of selection. Besides identifying knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that people need to acquire in order to develop within the societies in which they live, this process should also differentiate, as far as possible, the kinds of learning the carrying out of which is to be the basic responsibility of schools. This discussion becomes even more important at times such as the present when the economic, political, and cultural scenario, the development of technology and information, the knowledge-based economy, confront the world with new challenges and require of late-developing countries extensive efforts in order to accompany development.

Moreover, in regard the selectivity that should precede education planning, it should be remembered that the curriculum represents a way to establish rules and to control; but it cannot be a straight jacket that negates respect for regional or local conditions, limits the creativity of teachers, and determines how teaching should take place. The curriculum should provide a direction and orientation, but should not exclude contents that may have special meaning for a population. Neither should it dictate how teachers should teach, or provide the means through which all skills may be developed. Providing direction is not the same as imposing a path to be followed.

The reflection that this article seeks to foster should aim to call attention of education policy management specialists to the need to turn their eyes to the social meaning of the school curriculum and, rather than assuming the planning task alone, to adopt a procedure that involves as much as possible the recipients of their proposals. By so doing, they can avoid legitimating education intentions unlinked to the ideals of the population to whom their proposals are aimed.

Decisions regarding what should be taught and what should be learned involve a process of selection.

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The fragility of State policies:

REFLECTIONS ON THE BOLIVIAN DEBATE

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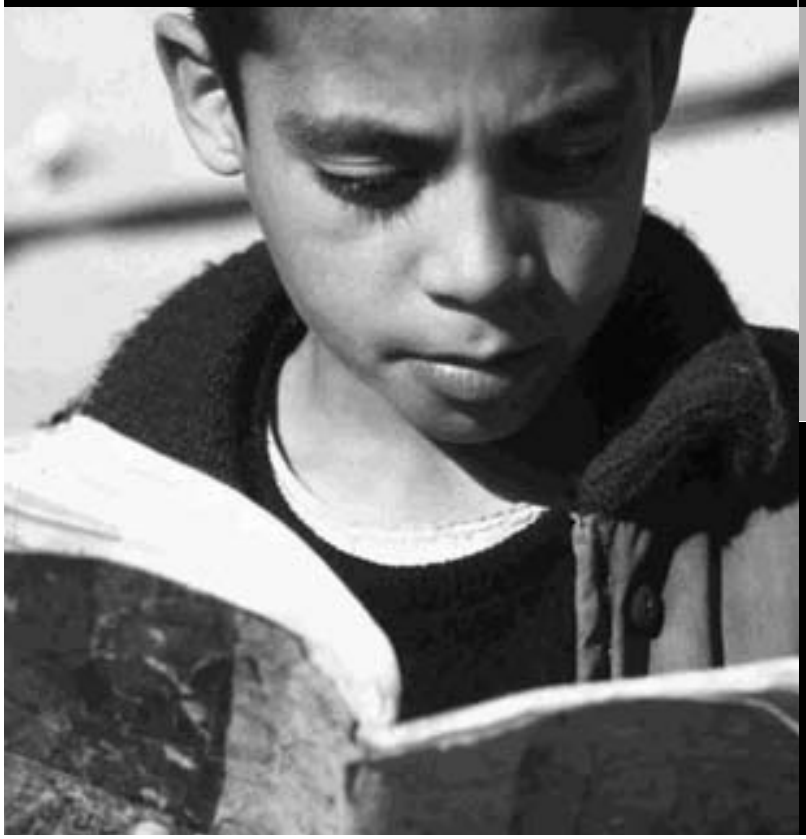

INTRODUCTION

The curriculum is not merely a technical matter, nor should it be. It is one of the central elements of education policy in many countries that have invested great effort and resources during recent years with the desire to thus improve the quality of their educational services. A particular curriculum proposal and how it is constructed in a large measure reflect the essence of government policy. The curriculum may be the result of a process of negotiation, and may also include a broad effort to reach social consensus, but may exclude such a process as well. It may represent the efforts of many or of few. It may integrate what has been learned from experiences carried out in the place where it is to be applied, or be based on theoretical frameworks far from the context of its target context. The curriculum may be a dynamic area into which converge –or do not– people, ideas, theories, powers, past histories, as well as utopian futures. The presentation of a curricular proposal touches sensitive political chords, ideological positions, and important power conflicts (Freire 1996; Apple 1982; Young et. al. 1971).

Within this framework, I would like to review a supposedly technical discussion and reveal its quite political essence in order, from the specific example taken from Bolivia, to demonstrate the risks implicit in the curricular dimension. Part of the interest in working on this subject and in doing so in this manner lies in the fact that I see how ephemeral the victories of academic discussion can be when confronted by profoundly political arguments; or worse still, when political motives lie behind technical discourse. Although based on a particular context –the current situation in Bolivia– I believe that the discussion deserves analysis in the regional context, since it is possible that other countries that are passing through similar processes may have consequences that result in significant damage to work that has been carried out for several decades in the education sector.

In education, it seems as if each incoming government wants to take an eraser to the past and to appear as if it has the great answers to all existing problems.

The current polemic surrounding education in Bolivia –that of lay education vs. Catholic; religion vs. religiosity; ethical education vs. religious education– proves that history repeats itself and that often, educators neither learn from the past nor construct knowledge, and that it may be said that even we can sometimes behave as if we were the famous *tabula rasa* that we so long attempted (and still attempt) to eliminate from the field of education. In education, it seems as if each incoming government wants to take an eraser to the past and to appear as if it has the great answers to all existing problems. Note that in the background there is a symbolic, or political-symbolic and overly ideologized struggle linked to demagogic attitudes and a lack of technical support.

In spite of the fact that ideological discussion are necessary and enriching, especially in order to achieve major changes in theoretical paradigms and in concepts that are demonstrably out-dated for the changes proposed, I believe that we also need to learn to recognize –and to respectfully and professionally accept– when these discussions become unnecessary and empty because in reality there are neither disagreements nor divergent views.

When we attempt to assure that a change of government does not mean a change of education policy we appeal to State policies which we understand to be achievements of and for the State and not of a particular government administration. If we wish to defend State policies, particularly in order to achieve mid and long-term objectives, we cannot ignore these false discussions that can gain force and become threats that destroy, often in months, that which it took years to build.

PROGRESS at risk

No one can deny that in Latin America serious challenges remain in order to improve education at all of its levels and areas. Marginalization and school drop-out rates are still high in various countries. Public schools have serious, all too apparent needs, producing a Pygmalion effect that makes us imagine what will be the future of those studying in them. The preparation that most teachers have received to work in the classroom also leaves much to be desired. To these problems we may add the fact that urban schools are over-crowded. No one listens to anyone, there aren't enough chairs and tables, etc. How can one expect a teacher not to give more attention to his or her difficulties in managing the class –problems of "discipline"– than in studying the theory of multiple intelligence?

In rural schools, the problems are of a different sort. For example, there is a teacher-principal with 15 students between 5 and 11 years of age, all in the same room. There are no books ("we have them locked up so they won't be lost"); girls leave school after three years in order to help in household chores; etc. We could dedicate an entire article merely to naming the problems that we continue to face; another to analyze their origin; and other to propose possible solutions.

Curricular designs that are up-to-date and well-planned in terms of their flexibility and richness (or density) as Cecilia Braslavsky (1999) would say, are under these conditions difficult to implement and in general are for us still utopias that we wish to reach.

At this time I believe that it is important to concentrate on another perspective linked to the curriculum, but one from outside the everyday work of the classroom. Let us look at the political dimension in order to emphasize our need to fortify our education policies, so that technical efforts can truly achieve their ends, so that academic discussions really lead to concrete results; in a word, in order that students receive the best possible education. And I believe that this applies not only to Bolivia. We are quickly approaching the moment when we must account for what we have and have not done in regard to the Millenium Goals. We need to take advantage of the fact that this is a historically interesting time for our area throughout the world. Let us place on the table a technical discussion seen from a political perspective.

For years (or is it perhaps constantly?[1] many educators have worked to improve the conditions under which public education takes place. We have participated in the famous education reforms of the 1990s and in their curricular innovations –above all in primary education and teacher training[2]. We have done so because we have recognized how critical is the situation of our education systems and have had various opportunities to approach the crisis. Various governments of the region, some prior to others, decided that it was time to face this reality, and achieved the political will to do so. The regional movement generated interesting processes of exchange and support among countries. This occurred, for example, with the theme of intercultural-bilingual education that was strengthened in Peru, Bolivia, Ecuador, Guatemala, and Mexico, and also extending to places such as Chile, Colombia, and Argentina in spite of the fact that these countries have smaller indigenous populations (López y Küper 2002; Nucinkis 2006).

Various assessments carried out during the decade following the beginning of the reform process in Bolivia showed that much effort was made, that investments were made as never before in resources and time, and that there were fundamental improvements in public education (Minedu 2004; Albó and Anaya 2003; Contreras and Talavera 2003), both in the quality of the curriculum and in schools. But today all of this is at the risk of being lost. The fact is that the Ministry of Education, for various reasons, was not able assure that all that was done was adequately institutionalized, sufficiently known, and assumed as a challenge and result of collective effort. Consequently, the result of the work of thousands of teachers, technical staff, native and non-native people, academics, and many others during recent years is under threat and has been weakened. For many, the Education Reform has become a "bad word", and defending it has become politically incorrect. However, I wish to show through the analysis of a concrete example that, behind the generalized criticism there lies a lack of foundation and unfortunate deformations of reality that need to be questioned.

1 See Beatrice Ávalos in this same publication.

2 The author worked in the Ministry of Education of Bolivia from 1993 to 2003 as part of a curricular team that planned and carried out the Education Reform Program. Its major task in recent years was to coordinate and supervise the development of new curricular designs.

I believe that it is important to concentrate on another perspective linked to the curriculum, but one from outside the everyday work of the classroom. Let us look at the political dimension.

It is my hope that the discussion presented here will contribute to reflection on the importance of seeking mechanisms that aid in institutionalizing our education policies. I recognize that the search for answers may be long and complex. Perhaps my comments along these lines will be seen by some as simplistic. However, perhaps their main value will be in encouraging others to think of different and better answers. That in itself would be an achievement.

The major question is: what can we do so that a change in government does not always involve a complete demolition of previous policies that requires in its turn long, expensive, and futile reconstruction? To this end, rather than writing directly about the curriculum and its characteristics, etc., I will treat the more general level of State policies in order to analyze their fragility.

A FICTITIOUS debate

Summarizing the analysis that follows, three points stand out:

1. The Bolivian Education Reform Law established in 1994 that the subject dealing with the Catholic religion is optional;

2. A few weeks ago, the current Minister of Education, Felix Patzi, raised for discussion (as a result of which he hopes to have a new law to replace the former one) the "proposal" that education should be lay in nature. After meeting with authorities of the Catholic Church he has changed his position slightly and suggested that the subject of religion in schools should be optional.

3. What is being "proposed" is something that has existed in a law current for the last 12 years, but this is neither recognized nor mentioned.

The discussion was raised in regard to the question of teaching the Catholic religion in Bolivian schools. Fervent discussion raged for weeks. There were even public marches of Catholics protesting against the Minister of Education. They demanded his resignation because he had said that he wanted public education to be lay education, i.e., because he defended freedom of religion and wished to apply this constitutional right into education policy.

What is happening can be understood or analyzed as part of a process directed at *complying with or strengthening* that which is stipulated in current education policy. This has been pointed out by some journalists (*La Razón*, July – August, 2006). The following facts are clear:

1. The Education Reform Law states in its Article 2, Section 3, "Fostering the practice of human values and the *universally-recognized ethical norms, as well as those belonging to our own cultures*, fostering responsibility in personal decision-making, the development of critical thought, respect for human rights ...". Article 57 establishes the optional character of Catholic religious instruction when it states that, "... (a student) *not in agreement with the religion* imparted in the school *may request the substitution of the subject of religion* by that of ethical or moral training which may be offered by any teacher of the school trained to do so".

2. The curricular design for the primary level defines the characteristics of the options within the area called religion, ethics, and morals and states: "*The Catholic religion, ethics, and morals* is an education option guided by the moral and doctrinal traditions of Catholic Christianity by which one seeks to strengthen the central values of living together and to help children better understand the meaning of being a Christian; (while the option) *Ethical and Moral Training* is not aligned with any specific religious tradition. Its purpose it to help students understand the moral values that are central for living together and the lives of citizens (...) and for them to critically understand the diversity of the moral life of persons and communities. (...) However, it is important to consider the possibility of inter-relating both areas (...) This will give them clear examples of pluralism, mutual respect, and the values shared among people of different beliefs." (Minedu, 2003a: p. 124-125).

If one assumes this as the official point of departure of the discussion, the proposal of the new minister can be interpreted as an attempt to *move forward* on the path of an education with greater respect for diversity and that seeks to strengthen the response capacity of the education system in regard to religious diversity.

This would suppose, in terms of technical efforts, that the current ministerial team –a new one that has been in place for only a few months– would review what has been done by previous administrations –at least since 1994– in order to be familiar with what has been accomplished in terms of teacher training in regard to the curricular proposal developed in order to make viable the option for one or another way of teaching the subject (in order to see how that which was established by law was translated), as well as to know what was done with parents and social organizations in order to explain to them the reasons for this new way of treating the subject matter. It is very likely that this team would have discovered more good intentions than results, and more limitations than strengths in the implementation of the above-mentioned norms.

In terms of curricular development, they would have been able to identify untreated specific needs and then presented proposals; building on what has been done, amplifying it, strengthening it, and correcting it. For example, given the lack of teachers trained to offer instruction in the area of ethical and moral training, one would have to consider how and where to train them; think about greater diversification of this area from a local perspective (given the strong cultural component of this option), perhaps proposing pilot diversification experiences; concentrate efforts in the production of teaching materials on the various world religions; etc. In other words, there would be much to do because, many years after the beginning of discussion and design of the area in its new conception, only recently has the application of theoretical principles begun. Such limitations and lack of results would have been a fertile area for taking action.

However, the new government not only did not begin discussion from here; rather it has practically denied its existence, disregarding the value of efforts that have taken place –I would say since 1983 after the return to democracy when this struggle began– to achieve the education policy in question, as well as the work carried out since approval of the law. The irony is that, besides ignoring progress, the new administration takes it up as its banner. Put in another way, it proposes that Catholic Education be an option in schools, claims that this is its commitment and struggle, and denies both in discourse and proposals that such a possibility has already existed for the last 12 years.

The fact that most of the communication media[3], religious authorities, and the government actively participate in this discussion is, in my opinion, a clear example of the weakness of State policies. This should be the subject of a critical analysis from at least two perspectives: from that of the nature of the debate, and from that of its consequences. In regard which I would say that it is fictitious as well as damaging.

In the debate we see a clearly demagogic handling of information.

In the debate we see a clearly demagogic handling of information. Anti-authoritarian policies that question particular institutions such as the Catholic Church –although it enjoys the highest levels of confidence within the Bolivian population (Seligson, 2006)– tend to receive militant approval and support from various sectors in countries with histories such as ours, marked by profound discrimination and asymmetries. From a personal perspective, I have often agreed with this approval to the extent that the arguments were solid. Thus, together with so many others, I agree with the pillars that those from the education sector currently defend (fostering diversity, religious freedom, etc), and for this reason I supported the work initiated by the Education Reform Law. What I cannot agree with is the silence that suddenly places these efforts in shadow, resulting in political motivation and the above-mentioned militant support being blind and uncritical.

An analysis of the guidelines and content proposed for the area of *Religion, Ethics, and Morals* (in its two options) within the framework of the Education Reform serves to demonstrate the fictional nature of the struggle of the current government. Besides considering the legal framework, suffice it to review some examples of the "Plan and Program for the Second Level of Primary Level" (Minedu 2003b), in which concrete aspects of the curriculum are established.

[3] There has been little mention of the fact that the Education Reform already proposed what the current minister argues for (e.g.: *La Razón*, 30/7/2006); most of the media concentrated on declaring that "finally" in the sector someone has dared to question the Catholic tradition in public education. Clearly, the misinformation and lack of willingness of the media to do research did nothing to aid the quality of the discussion.

For the ethical and moral training option:

- An assessment indicator says: Identify situations that present moral dilemmas and recognize the values and interests that enter into conflict in them.
- Some of the suggestion contents are: Identification of different beliefs, feelings, values, and interests among people and groups who are part of a conflict; non-ethical behaviors and the analysis of their causes; values such as honesty and respect; tolerance and non-discrimination; (Op. Cit.: p. 84-90).

Moreover, in **the catholic religion, ethics, and morals option** –in spite of adhesion to this faith –carried out in coordination with the Episcopal Education Commission– was stated in a more open manner compared to older plans, while incorporating the cultural diversity dimension.

- The description of the area states "… religion is an essential and significant area of human experience and culture (...) considered to be an object of knowledge and study that contributes to the development of critical and objective thought in children".
- One of the indicators of this subject says, "Identify some religious ceremonies linked to the culture of your society".
- Some suggested content are: knowledge of other religions: the lives of outstanding figures of the major religions; familiarity with some texts of the major religions; respect for the rights of others, (Op cit.: p. 91-97).

As can be seen, the discourse of the new administration of the education sector, regarding the 'importance of opening the area of ethical training to other religions of the world' in order to be 'more coherent with the inter-cultural approach' respecting diversity and thus achieving 'de-colonization of the people', denies the existence of all of the progress cited above. The fact is that what they proclaim as necessary is precisely that which was being carried out in practice during the last decade. Whether such progress was good, bad, or insufficient is another, absolutely valid matter. In my opinion, the demagogic character of the motivation generated this fictitious discourse.

As far as consequences are concerned, it should be noted that, as an effect of the discourse in question, there may have been a substantial loss of technical progress. By ignoring the achievements of the Education Reform Law –as has happened in the case of the discussion here analyzed– and wishing to start anew, in a sense one opens once again a discussion with the Church that had already taken place and resulted in the possibility of providing options within the curriculum. In 1995, sectors of the Catholic Church demanded the resignation of the manager of the reform, the then National Secretary of Education, Amalia Anaya, for reasons that were much more political and administrative than technical or curricular. It was at this time that the above-mentioned agreements were reached. It is not difficult to imagine the complexity of the discussion and all that it cost. Why then open up new wounds of the Catholic Church, especially when one is facing the power, prestige, and credibility of one of the most powerful institutions of Latin America? This seems to me to be potentially risky.

A clear signal that one has touched on a very sensitive point is that the President of the Republic was obliged to step in and meet with Catholic Church authorities after the announcement that education would be lay in nature. The president explained to the public that he is also a very Catholic person, adding that his religion shares the syncretism that characterizes Bolivia, due to its multi-cultural and predominantly indigenous base in which veneration of the Virgin Mary and Pachamama –the Earth Mother– exist together without contradictions.[4]

Finally, another consequence of such damaging discourse by the authorities is that it denies the work of thousands of people and makes little of the commitment and efforts of teachers, technical staff, church representatives, social and indigenous organizations, and many others who for years participated in the construction of an innovative and conciliatory proposal coming from positions that were difficult to reconcile. All of this, in turn, can easily result in the following: in the face of so much rejection and criticism of what has been accomplished, the tendency of teachers may be to return to what they had done previously –to that which they know and with which they feel secure; in other words, back to tradition and to all that this implies.

[4] Note that this characteristic is precisely part of the argument of the current Minister in regard to the need for a "new" proposal for education in this area, making it "more open to religious diversity". This argument also involves the negation of important steps already taken in this direction and expressed in the documents cited, specifically in the new content defined for the area.

THE BOLIVIAN EDUCATION REFORM was a fragile State policy

For those who at some moment thought that Bolivia, with the Education Reform Law –supported by five consecutive governments and which incorporated the demands of grass-root social movements– had finally established a State policy or something similar to one (Albó 2002; López 2002; Nucinkis 2006), the described discussion is a clear example that, in spite of such continuity and of other conditions that granted it a supposed solidity[5], –it was on the contrary a fragile policy. This is so much the case that currently, work is being done on a legislative measure to replace it. This also indicates that unfortunately, the institutionalization of our policies continues to be subject to the whims of particular governments. Perhaps we need to reflect upon our ability to propose and to carry forward *State policies*.

Educators themselves at times contribute to this. Some, being always against something coming from the State, in spite of the fact that this is a position the origin of which is not difficult to identify in the histories of our countries, nevertheless it is not justified. This attitude adopted, for example, by the leaders of the urban teachers' union when it withdrew from the National Education Congress called under the previous government (which had to postpone the even on various occasions between 2004 and 2005) as well as the present one (July, 2006). In both cases the organization alluded to "government impositions" whether they be neo-liberal, socialist, indigenist, or I suppose, any other. This attitude, moreover, is extremely taxing since it requires always creating (or perhaps better said, "inventing") a contrary proposal even when in fact one has none. As a result of this well-known attitude, criticism of teacher union leaders, often has been and still is silenced when referring to unions.

Some others do not review with professional and political honesty the ideas, programs, and policies carried out by people, groups, or government administrations. Surely if they did so review them, they would find some things to criticize and others to praise. By not making this effort, which obviously requires time, effort, and an open mind, they lose and underestimate many advances and lessons learned. What seems to be behind this is that the people or governments with to place their personal seal on whatever they do, cost what it may, and without being concerned about putting their seal on something as there own when in fact it is not.

As a result of the above, policies are revised, changed, destabilized, and people become unmotivated to work within conceptual frameworks that take years to build. One of the most serious risks, as I mentioned above, is the return to tradition as the easiest alternative when all that is new and innovative is so unstable, discussed, criticized, etc. In this sense I am shocked by the weight of tradition and its effect on education policies in the broadest sense of overcoming that which is formal, rigid, structured, unquestioned, controlled, and controller in face of that which is new, relative, and open with the weaknesses mentioned.

In our area, a tendency such as this can result in the problems involved in the pedagogy of homogenization, traditional and vertically-organized schools, and where it is argued that if we all do the same thing under the same rules, criteria, contents, languages, objectives, etc., no one can be discontent nor complain. As we know, this supposedly equity argument can conceal inequitable and discriminatory realities in which reigns the classic confusion between equality and lowest denominator leveling. Homogeneous and homogenizing answers (coherent with authoritarian postures), in the face of heterogeneous realities and asymmetric relations, and under the mantle of the mentioned disguise, are highly dangerous.

5 Various conditions may be mentioned in this regard: for its approval, the Reform Law received the support of all major political parties in 1992; its major features (intercultural bi-lingual education and popular participation) came from grass-roots organizations such as the Federation of Rural Workers– CONMERB- and the Education Committee of the Confederaction of Rural Workers CSUTCB - (Ministerio de Educación 2003); five different governments maintained the law and implemented the Education Reform Program; it also received significant support from international organizations (Nucinkis 2006).

THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN education policies

From the analysis presented, it would seem that, in spite of the fact that the new Bolivian government underestimates and/or denies the link to the Education Reform Law and what was developed under it, it will end up arriving at the same point. In this analysis, the theme of religious education itself was a kind of excuse in order to arrive at another broader concern: high education costs and the fragility of our policies, as highlighted by the example offered.

The clearest evidence is that the cited law is in the process of derogation. But even more serious than derogating the law formally (after all, another can be written that says similar things – which will probably occur in the present case), is the danger of the loss of the costly technical, curricular, pedagogical, and institutional steps that have already been taken to improve education during various years, due to the complete rejection of work accomplished, or innovative methodologies, of new materials created, of contents that change, etc. And this, as we mentioned above, can easily cause the return to things "as they were before"; to traditional routines in schools, structured plans and programs, and authoritarian pedagogy. And the fact is that some Bolivian teachers, after hearing the current criticisms of the Education Reform Law (which, like any profound change or demand, caused them much work and study), have announced their intention to return to this option: to stop using learning modules[6], go back to old texts, to lecturing to a silent classroom, and leaving behind "all this playing and chatting in class" (the author's personal communication with a group of primary school teachers, La Paz, 2006).

The important thing is to take care in measuring the consequences of ruptures in State policies, due to the processes, persons, efforts, and difficult achievements that are behind them.

This being said, it by no means signifies that once a State policy is instituted, we lose a necessary healthy critical attitude in its regard. For obviously one can always improve what has been done, very much as happened with the law in question, which contained various areas that required modification and improvement. The important thing is to take care in measuring the consequences of ruptures in State policies, due to the processes, persons, efforts, and difficult achievements that are behind them. But this is not merely a case of ethics; it has pedagogical, political, social, and even economic implications.

Certainly, those who suffer the concrete consequences and effects of demagogical discourse are the children and young people who attend schools where teachers no longer make an effort to introduce innovations in the activities or materials used; nor to change their way of relating with the community and making it more interactive and permeable to the characteristics of the local environment. Thinking of this, we need to encounter mechanisms for recognizing the value of the work of teachers and to be able to integrate well-founded criticisms through truly constructive and gradual processes supported by various structures, in the sense presented by Mercer (1994) in the construction of learning, and thus to progress toward the improvement of education.

6 Student textbooks created under the reform, replacing the old school texts. The modules were produced in three native languages as well as Spanish, and with their texts contextualized by region. They were judged to be one of the most innovative materials for children in an assessment carried out by a team of Latin American specialists in educational materials of the Andrés Bello Agreement (personal communication with the author from a SECAB technical staff member SECAB, 2006). Other assessmenta also consider the materials to be pedagogically very advanced (MECyD 2001).

Some lessons that we can learn from the case analyzed here, or questions that we can pose, in order to work on strengthening our State policies are the following:

1. ***Revise the mechanisms for constructing policies.*** The arguments in favor of participation, democratization, and decentralization do not appear to be sufficiently reflected in concrete accomplishments. Due to the academic tradition, as well as the centralized and quite paternalistic management by the State, typical of what we find in Latin America, there is a hesitation to delegate responsibilities, tasks, and to recognize the right to voice and vote in the construction of State policies. In order to make the construction of the curriculum and the elaboration of policy more democratic, we should be open in fact, and not merely symbolically, to greater participation. This involves a series of processes that in discourse sound very well, but in practice are very difficult to achieve for different reasons linked to people, the fiefdoms of power involved, the fears generated, the work demanded, the limitations we encounter, etc. Moreover, they are costly processes in terms of time, the training of human resources, and even may be a bit more expensive. However, I believe that the legitimacy gained and the level of understanding achieved from a policy developed in this way would make these investments worthwhile. Some examples of decentralized projects or activities carried out with appropriate support and follow-up can serve as examples.

   One of the actions that the new government intends to preserve is that of Education Projects. In Bolivia[7] there were three types: those for a *nucleus of* a network of 5 to 10 schools; those developed for *groups of* urban schools; and those for *indigenous districts*. These projects were based on curricular, institutional, and infrastructure diagnoses carried out by locally-managed teams made up of teachers, school principals, parents, grass-roots organization leaders, and other community members. The proposals for what to do, when, how, etc., were also developed by them with occasional technical assistance and within the framework of particular norms, focuses, and technical guidelines established nationally. Thus, these projects were incorporated into Municipal Education Programs, being co-financed by the central level and local governments.

   The projects received the personal touch of those working in the transformation of schools. The people, members of the community, duly identified by name, involved themselves in analysis and in real decisions regarding the school, and with the projects they could see the fruit (good or bad) of their proposals. The variety of technical proposals was very great, and follow-up quite complex. Control was not always efficient. There were failures and serious criticism of the outcomes of these projects.

   Nevertheless, to date the projects are perhaps one components most-valued and defended by the population. The real transfer of power to the local level, also regarding curricular decisions (including discussions of content), as well as the integration of local projects into integrated and coherent development plans at a management level closer to the locale, being the municipality are, I believe the two substantial factors needed for greater sustainability of policies or changes that we seek to generate in our education systems. We must stop defining everything from above, and with this type of power transfer demonstrate that we trust and are able to support those who work at the local level. These kinds of efforts are less massive and more gradual, but experience shows that are those that generate the most acceptance of ownership of challenges, commitment, continuity, and the possibility of achieving expected outcomes.

[7] The projects were carried out in many countries. In Chile, there were Education Improvement Projects; in Peru and Colombia they were called School Projects; in Spain they had a similar name. In some provinces in Argentina there were Education Innovation Projects, etc. It would be interesting to have a comparative study of the results of these experiences.

2. ***Give more importance to the dissemination and continuing follow-up of education policies.*** They must be placed on the agenda, maintained under discussion, while assuring that the communication media are better informed before beginning. In a better-informed society, it is more difficult for demagogic discourse to take hold. Moreover, in disseminating the work done in education, the process becomes more transparent, creating the possibility of greater feedback from the grass-roots (opinions of teachers, parents, and others about what one does), and exchanges can be developed between schools, teachers, students, etc. Moreover, by involving society in the change process in a more direct manner, it is more difficult to deny its existence or hinder it.

When informing the population, it is necessary to do so while being aware of what the changes being introduced into classrooms mean.

An aspect related to this is the importance that dissemination be instructive. When informing the population, it is necessary to do so while being aware of what the changes being introduced into classrooms mean. It is not enough to show what one does; one must seek an understanding of the difference between what had been done before and what one is doing now, and why all of this change is taking place. A historical awareness of the objectives and achievements of a reform process can aid the population in better judging what the reform implies and what it seeks.

3. ***Be aware that many criticisms of education policies as we have note here, in fact refer to the implementation of norms and not to what the norms say*** –and this should be stated and denounced as such. Translating theory into practice is perhaps the greatest challenge that we face when planning changes or reforms. This does not remove the value or need for solid legal frameworks with broad mid and long-term objectives. This must be clarified and openly discussed in order to focus efforts where they need to be focused. If due to obstacles and difficulties that exist in putting into practice what a norm dictates, one criticizes the norm, we are surely mistaken in our identification of the problem.

It is possible that something similar is occurring in other countries of the region where many criticize education laws due to the limitations that persist in the quality of work carried out in education systems. Taking the example of the Bolivian experience, and due to the efforts made in each country by thousands of people, I would propose the hypothesis that perhaps the political side of the discussion is casting shadows on clearly useful technical developments. Proper research and qualitative assessments of work in the classroom, the school –that is, on the local level– and conversations with people in the community surely would shed new light for review the criticism and perhaps for dampening some.

The historic tale of the struggle for power between the Church and the State in the area of education still has many chapters in its future.

4. ***As for the specific theme treated, recognizing that in Latin America the historic tale of the struggle for power between the Church and the State in the area of education still has many chapters in its future.*** Due to the traditions of both institutions, it is difficult to think that the participation of the grass-roots in this debate might be an important factor in tipping decisions one way or the other. But if we want to democratize education, this debate is of interest to the grass-roots, to communities, parents, and to children. Freedom of religion, the freedom to choose a particular form of spiritual and religious life, are values that generate profound discussions. There are national and international norms that can help in guiding the discussions that have achieved broad consensus and which are the result of much discussion, processes of conflict resolution, etc. It is perhaps based on these that one must engage in greater dialogue with society in order to help it participate or intervene in some way in this struggle over the role of the education system in religious training.

5. ***The importance of identifying potential networks.*** Using international institutions, and taking advantage of the fact of the increasing exchange between countries, one must identify potential networks that are appearing (such as those being fostered by UNESCO; virtual networks and forums on education via the internet; etc.), seeking mechanisms to support the continuity of policies that incorporate agreed-upon responses at different places and times. If among the objectives of such networks and institutions are those of contributing to the search for better education, constructing shared visions, building technical and policy skills, and generating intra and inter-regional cooperation (OIE 2005: Universidad Peruana Cayetano Heredia 2006), we should dare to involve ourselves in the political dimension and accept the appearance of conflicts and diverging opinions. Perhaps with this the possibility will open of helping governments to carry out a more appropriate analysis of policies the continuity of which is so necessary. The more distant, external view, enriched by international experience and perceived as more neutral and disinterested, may be much more valid and have greater impact than views from within.

6. ***Foster solidarity among all of the actors involved in education change processes.*** It serves little for only the people who have fostered the reform process from positions of direct responsibility such as a ministry of education to enter into debates in regard to what was done or if it should have been done. For example, the international cooperation agencies that supports projects in our countries provides technical assistance, carries out missions that assist and perform follow-up of the donations or loans, also have an historic responsibility that we tend to forget, especially when internal questions appear about the work done. Besides teachers' unions, NGOs that develop educational processes, and even ministries of education of countries that have fostered more or less similar reforms as has been the case in recent years (Rojas 2006), actors also include those who we wish to involve more. Fostering a sense of solidarity and of teamwork, at least in terms of broad common goals among these sectors could contribute to decreasing our ability for destruction, while perhaps strengthening our ability to hold up, always with a solid foundation, the edifices that we erect with such cost in the area of human development.

IN CLOSING and for continued thought

A doubt that occurs to me from what I observe in Bolivia regards the extent to which the well-disseminated criticisms of curricular reforms in Latin America are supported technically, pedagogically, linguistically, culturally, etc. In many places, one already hears generalized references to "the failed reforms of the 1990s" Who knows if in 2015, when we measure the state of progress of the Millenium Goals, we will define the current decade as the "War of Education Against Itself". At least it would be a creative label.

I think that a dose of skepticism is healthy when we are presented with criticisms that disqualify in a general manner processes that have been years in building when the criticisms do not touch on any material, conceptual, or political aspect in particular. We know that all processes contain errors. But there are also successes, improvements, and changes, especially when it comes to social and educational processes in which we are constantly learning and as occurs when we design new curricula or innovative didactic materials.

Perhaps what we need to be able to do is the same thing that we ask our teachers to do in the classroom: *revalue that which is constructed* (whether previous knowledge, maternal language, pilot experiences, theoretical proposals, curricular designs, the education policies of previous governments, other governments, etc.), in order to not begin from zero, and thus to take advantage of and integrate the efforts as well as the achievement and learning of hundreds of thousands of people –teachers, technical staff, researchers, politicians, etc.– who have participated in these constructions in search of paths toward improving existing proposals for the education of future generations.

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Changing the secondary school curriculum
WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT?

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The move away from specialization in the first years of secondary instruction.

The *curriculum* tends to be among the components that require change in order to achieve significant improvements in secondary schooling. The changes needed should aim toward increasing the possibility of including new publics and improving the cultural and social relevance of a level of education that is increasingly the subject of questioning.

Beginning in the 1980s, and within the context of a long and complex process of a return to democracy, national education authorities in Latin America carried out large-scale changes in secondary school curricula. These changes were especially important during the 1990s, a decade during which education reforms carried out in various countries placed secondary schools at the center of attention. One of the trends noted in curricular reforms of the decade was the move away from specialization in the first years of secondary instruction. This trend may be understood as reflecting the need to broaden the shared cultural base of the population through the extension of regular schooling and as an attempt to soften the transition between primary and secondary education and to eliminate schemes that established early limits for defining the schooling tracks of adolescents and young people.

Having passed through this phase of curricular reform, it is not possible to determine the impact of changes in terms of improving critical aspects of the secondary school curriculum. Existing retention and achievement data, however, are not positive. The dissatisfaction of school administrators is generalized. Nor do families and students note improvements.

The purpose of the present study is to offer explanations for why, in spite of the expectations regarding the potential of curricular change for improving education at the secondary level, such changes have been disappointing. We thus hope to call attention to the difficulties faced by reform policies and to warn education administrators so that they may avoid well-intentioned but naive initiatives that have little probability of success.

THREE OBSTACLES to improving the organization of secondary education

Currently, the organization of different levels of Western school systems have assumed specific characteristics at each level. Secondary schools have become structured around three characteristics so intertwined as to constitute obstacles. These are: the classification of curricula, the principle of teacher recruitment by specialty, and the organization of teacher tasks according to in-class hours. These three characteristics have converged at different paces in different countries. But they have come to make up the typical organizational pattern of secondary schools that has become the target of much of the criticism of this level.

Available analyses of the historical development of the curriculum of Western educational systems show that the classification of knowledge is a major organization principle of systems, and one that tends to gain force as one advances toward higher levels. Although countries vary considerably in terms of the themes treated in school subjects, the basic categories used to organize the knowledge offered to children and young people are notorious in their similarity (Benavot and others, 1991; Benavot, 2002; Goodson, 2000; Kamens and Cha, 1999). Organization of the disciplinary base and universal promotion of a group of basic subjects appear in most of the official curricula, and has remained relatively stable during the XX century. Even when we consider curricula that, due to their training purposes, include fields of knowledge different from the traditional ones (as in the case of technical training) one notes that they do so while still respecting the traditional classification of knowledge and that they have generated in a few years a pattern of curricular stability that makes the change process complex indeed.

What does it mean to say that a curriculum is rigidly classified? It means that its content is clearly established in such a way that most of it may be transmitted in curricular units (academic subjects) with clearly established limits between them (Bernstein, 1988). According to Goodsen, school subjects are the embodiment of the division and fragmentation of knowledge in our societies (Goodson, 2000). From my perspective, one should not forget that the division and fragmentation of learning represented by school subjects corresponds to the decimononic organization of knowledge; this means that to the problems of fragmentation are added those of anachronism –with the linkage of the school curriculum to a tradition of knowledge belonging to the end of the XIX century and frankly unsuitable for the beginning of the XXI century.

It is not necessary for a classified curriculum to demand specialized teachers. The case of the primary level is an example of a curriculum in which the limits between subjects are also clearly established and that are transmitted by teachers who are trained as generalists. In the case of secondary school, the correspondence between classified curricula and specialized teachers was established early through the principle of recruiting teachers by specialization. While in primary school, and later in early childhood education, the figure of the generalist teacher became the norm, on the secondary level the norm has been that of the specialized teacher. The teacher training system, therefore, was structured according to the same logic. It has produced for slightly more than a century teachers trained in clearly defined specialties, in disciplines the academic reference of which is, as we have said above, the specialized knowledge related to the end of the XIX century.

Classified teacher training and the reference to the decimononic tradition are disturbing and difficult to change. This helps explain some of the difficulties faced by initiatives for curricular reform that seek to break with curricular classification and to offer more comprehensive training. However much we would like teachers to deliver more integrated content, are they trained to do so? We would more modern approaches to be integrated into the curriculum, but do we have specialized human resources able to carry out this kind of teaching? A key factor to carrying out such changes is to understand the consequences of the close relation between classified curricula and specialized teacher training.

Added to the principle of teacher recruitment by specialty and classification by knowledge is another factor that typifies secondary education: the organization of teaching around class hours. While the nature of the early childhood and primary

The various levels of the school system present important differences, and thus vary in terms of their susceptibility to curricular change.

school levels is teacher-centered, at the secondary level the logic of the curricular mosaic has prevailed and has been the guiding factor, with teachers being assigned according to class hours worked. This is even more the case in large schools where many classes are given simultaneously and the same teacher may accumulate various class hours. Structuring the teaching task (basically a collection of class hours) impedes institutional concentration, since the designating unit is not the school teaching post, but rather the curricular unit and excludes from the job description other institutional tasks outside the classroom. An exception to this situation occurs in technical schools which early on incorporated the figure of the teacher based on the logic of the task rather than being based on a number of hours.

There have been significant attempts to change this job description of teachers, such as those that base contracts on teaching tasks. But these initiatives have not been common. Currently, the individuals with greater institutional emphasis at the secondary level are not teachers, but rather assistants or others with indirect links to teaching. The work regimen of teachers is documented in various works as one of the major problems of secondary schools (for example, Aristimuño and Lasida, 2003; Barolli et al, 2003; Jacinto and Freytes Frey, 2004), and as a source of other equally serious problems such as teacher absenteeism and staff rotation (Jacinto and Terigi, 2006).

THE RESULTING CURRICULUM and barriers to its modification

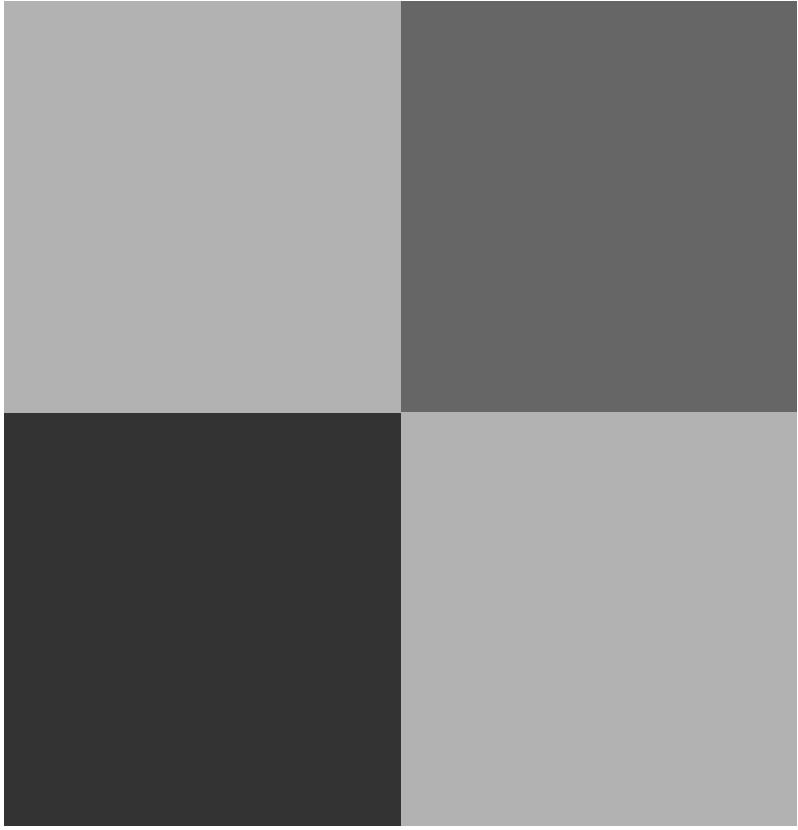
Currently, there is a broad consensus of criticism of some features of the secondary curriculum. Fragmentation into various subject areas (always more than ten), the lack of alternatives for individual choice, relegation of the interests of adolescents and of the problems of the contemporary world, a encyclopedic approach, and the absence of one based on intellectual skills and basic practices are some of the critical points (Quiroz Estrada and Weiss, 2005). Comparisons between different secondary school modalities add to the list of problems caused by a rigid curricular structure divided horizontally into modalities –some directed at job training and others at university entry (Jacinto and Freytes Frey, 2004).

As long as the secondary level embraced only the middle sectors of the population, this encyclopedic curriculum was viewed as legitimate. If many students were unable to successfully complete it, this was not seen as a problem of the curriculum, but rather it was felt that secondary school was not "for everyone". However, with the increasing universalization of secondary schooling, these assumptions became unsustainable. The compulsory nature of secondary school (Braslavsky, 1999) placed into question the purposes of this kind of training as attempts were made to extend it to a greater number of adolescents and young adults.

Many analyses note that alternatives appear to increasingly include more integrated curricula, including a de-emphasis on specialization during the initial years of post-primary education and the break with an encyclopedic approach, and the incorporation of elective subjects without this limiting the post-school option decisions of students.

While curricular changes have always faced great difficulties, these are even greater when they deal with the curricular structure, teaching tasks, and the teacher training system. In this regard, the various levels of the school system present important differences, and thus vary in terms of their susceptibility to curricular change. In secondary schools we see –as we have mentioned– a correspondence between the units that comprise the curriculum (subject matter, workshops, etc), teaching posts, and teacher training curricula. Within the framework of a strongly classificatory curriculum, this correspondence results in a series of teacher posts assigned to teachers according to different specialties and with a little chance for teacher mobility between curricular units precisely due to their specialization.

At the very center of curricular features that are most criticized we encounter the three seemingly unchangeable secondary school features cited above: the classification of curricula, recruitment of teachers by specialty, and organization of the teaching task by class hours. Therefore, these three very same features are the targets of proposed alternatives. It is time that they receive due attention and that policies are designed that are more centered on a complete reformulation of how secondary schools are organized.



DEGREES OF POSSIBLE CHANGE in curricular reforms

Given the conditions that we have described, almost any change in the composition of the secondary school curriculum has an impact on the work of large groups of teachers, both in secondary schools and in the teacher training system. This question involves education administrators with union conflicts not only when curricular changes actually come about, but even much before, when one analyzes the possibilities for change. The regulations that control the work of teachers add normative restrictions. But the situation is in itself quite rigid.

This predicament is worsened when we note that it is the countries that have made the earliest efforts to incorporate the adolescent population into secondary education that face the greatest difficulties of carrying out needed curricular changes. These countries must improve their secondary schools within a context in which the sub-system will not expand. Therefore, new teaching jobs will not be created that would make possible the relocation of personnel if one relieves the burden of overcrowded curricula. Countries with greater secondary education coverage rates have less freedom of action for curricular reorganization than those countries that have not yet fostered such expansion. While the former are confronted with the pressure of a large number of teachers and an already structured teacher training system, the latter can generate completely new curricular and organizational models, given the fact that they are expanding the number of teaching posts.

At the same time, the reforms of the 1990s demonstrated the inefficacy of policies that threaten teacher jobs and are not able to link changes with individual and collective improvements of teachers or with progress in their professional careers. Thus, the so-called "increased work flexibility", besides being resisted, has generally been ineffective. It is clear, therefore, that there is a need to find mechanisms that, while respecting the rights of teachers, provide them with some mobility during difficult times of curricular change and that are part processes that can recognize their contributions not only in improving their work, but in assuring the education rights of adolescents and young adults.

It appears that education administrators have perceived the difficulties associated with achieving substantive curricular changes and that they agree about the need for another kind of approach. A series of studies carried out recently in four countries show that curricular projects developed in a period after to the mass restructuring of the 1990s have resulted in approaches that are better directed at the problem. For example, the Schools for All Program in Chile did not propose new curricular changes. The curricular component of the program is outlined in its Restituitive Leveling Plan. Besides this, the plan does not introduce changes in the curricular structure, nor the incorporation of novel curricular additions (Marshall Infante, 2003). In the case of Argentina (the area analyzed was the city of Buenos Aires, since Argentina has a federal educational structure), policies analyzed do not include curricular changes imposed by central agencies. Only one of the initiatives studied –the secondary curriculum in Brazil– formally includes the possibility of offering options which in any case, in the concrete options offered by schools are limited to those which these require in addition, rather than those among which students may choose (Barolli et al, 2003). Except for Uruguay (Aristimuño and Lasida, 2003), in none of the cases analyzed do school administrators carry out large-scale changes.

Given the difficulties of carrying out dramatic curriculum restructuring, it is well to ask about what changes can be fostered without substantially changing curricular organization, and which may contribute to resolving some of the critical points pointed out in the analysis. In plane words, what relevant changes support the current curricular structure with submitting it to major changes?

It is time to take as the major focus of policies for the secondary level a set of initiatives that improve the structure of teaching posts.

The response coming out of the studies analyzed is clear: it is possible to introduce new components into the curriculum that make it possible to incorporate subjects that are absent from current study plans and that open up some options for student training. The cases studied show that what the curriculum can withstand better than massive restructuring are projects that schools themselves define when they have the opportunity to introduce new proposals that guide in an important manner complements to the curriculum in subjects that the schools themselves judge to be novel (Jacinto and Terigi, 2006).

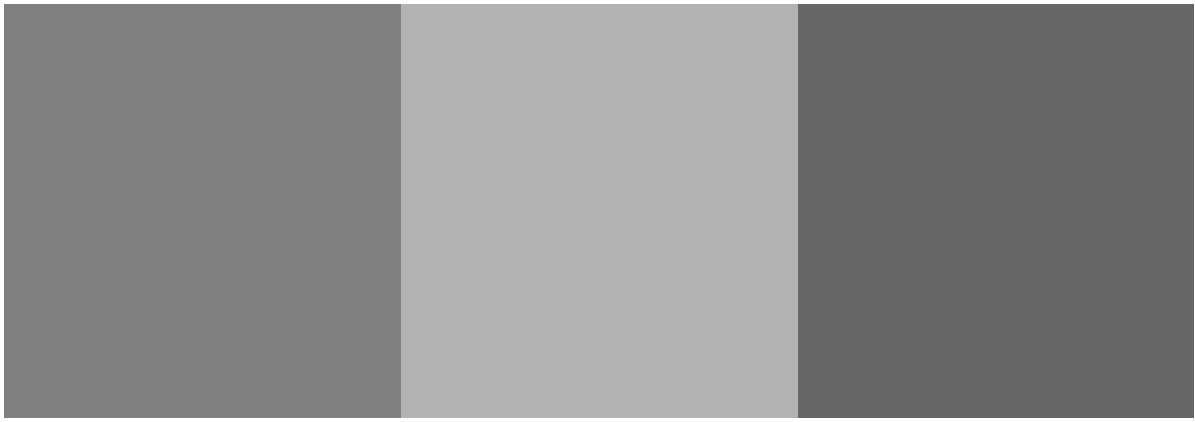
The question of changes that support the current structure of the curriculum opens up a second line of analysis: that of discussing the relevance of curriculum content while remaining within the framework of the current structure. One might well ask what changes can be introduced in treating content while still being within the discrete character of the curricular units that are the responsibilities of teachers. What is important to know in each subject area? What other referents may be offered for content selection beyond the discipline that has been the traditional referent? What key learning should schools foster and assure for all, and what are those that can be proposed for different groups of adolescents and young adults without this involving reductions in the substantive core training to which they have a right?" (Jacinto and Terigi, 2006:33).

CONCLUSION

A conclusion that we would hope comes from the analysis presented in this study is that the kind of curricular change needed in secondary education involves a profound transformation in the instruction agendas at this level, and that this kind of transformation is extremely difficult; so much so that it has rarely occurred in the history of general education (Terigi, 2004). This explains why, in the midst of a wave of curricular change, the reforms that have taken place in many of our countries have left us with a somewhat bitter feeling of having changed much and nevertheless find everything in the same place.

The truth is that, if we do not simultaneously treat the three problems –the classification of curricula, recruitment of teachers by specialty, and organization of the teaching task by class hours– we find ourselves facing a surprising stability of the school curriculum. But this simultaneous approach cannot be carried forward without a careful process of planning. Thus, for example, what we today define as novel for the secondary school curriculum will, with luck, have teachers trained for its teaching in five or six years. Disregarding this restriction, like the others that we have attempted to point out here, means again placing ourselves at the will of the vagaries of fortune.

It is time to take as the major focus of policies for the secondary level a set of initiatives that improve the structure of teaching posts, that foster new training specialties in order to incorporate training levels currently unavailable to adolescents, and to revise existing training so that, without losing the disciplinary base that is its identifying characteristic, such training produces human resources with broader epistemological perspectives and concrete possibilities for working in less classified curricula.



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II INTERGOVERNMENTAL MEETING OF THE
REGIONAL EDUCATION PROJECT FOR
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN – PRELAC
May 2006

The curriculum in the spotlight

SUMMARY OF MAJOR CHALLENGES REGARDING THE CURRICULUM

The final session of the II Intergovernmental Meeting of PRELAC (May 13, 2006) was dedicated to summarizing the central themes of the discussion. To this purpose, a commission identified six major challenges that had been placed on the table for discussion and using the following criteria: relevance and priority for the region; existence of diverging opinions that merited explanation; and the persistence of confusing points that required clarification. Although these inter-related points do not exhaust all possible discussion, they do represent collective challenges that demand further consideration in order for us to construct a future agenda on the theme of the curriculum. Due to their importance, we summarize them here.

Discussion of these central themes was structured based on reflections guided by César Coll and Elena Martín –invited specialists at the meeting– and nourished by the commentaries of various participants. We present below a summary of the thrust of these challenges.

It is vital to respond correctly to questions regarding what and for what purpose in teaching. This is a fundamental step but not the only one.

THE TENSION between curricular design and development

The first finding is the urgent need to treat curricular design, due to the fact that it is vital to respond correctly to questions regarding what and for what purpose in teaching. This is a fundamental step but not the only one.

It is important to remember that curricular design is dynamic and requires feedback from curricular development, from expressions and adaptations at various levels (local, the school, the classroom). In order to achieve this aim, schools must possess adequate instruments for this feedback process and not wait for large reforms. Reforms cannot be curricular only. It is time to prevent a kind of "curricularization" of reforms and overestimation of the curriculum. The problem is having suspended the effort and contribution of curricular development.

One no longer speaks today of great curricular reforms. The need lies in gradual changes. It is not necessary to the curriculum be re-invented every time that it requires a modification. One must build on what one has. All proposals should include an up-dating mechanism as part of a systematic and normalized process. It is time to make this a routine question in curricular design and development, with up-dates being coordinated with teachers.

Admittedly, it is not possible for human beings to consider that everything that they do is planned. In any case, the characteristic of school-based education, compared to other processes, is that there are explicit intentions that are planned in order to be systematic in their application. It is important, however, to recognize that things happen in schools and unplanned learning takes place. The circularity about which we should reflect on and become aware of what is happening, and instead of just letting it happen, look upon it as something to include in planning is key to achieving greater control over the educational process.

The concept of competencies includes the integration of knowledge, its mobilization, and its application.

However, design should take account of curricula implementation and development. It should set objectives and establish mechanisms for implementation and provide follow-up for it. Not doing so the final assessment of results can lead to unfounded inferences. This assumes considering whether there are levels structured to assess the system, to create curricula, and to train teachers. With these three levels in place, one must know to what extent they are articulated. They must be so in order to re-read assessment data and convert them in to curricular design and training changes.

From the point of view of reforms, it is important to emphasize that although they have emphasis on aspects such as management or financing, one cannot forgo the questions of what to teach and to what purpose. We cannot abandon the curricular aspect of any reform.

Two additional elements should be considered. The first is the high cost of curricular development. For this reason, political will and viability studies are important. The second is the support for curricular contributions as expressed in texts and materials. In order to maintain coherence it is necessary to work in an innovative fashion with publishers and to foster research by experienced teaching teams.

BASIC LEARNING AND DEFINITIONS: Content? Competencies? Standards?

There is certain confusion involved in the use of these terms. Clarifying them is of particular importance from the perspective of policy options and due to the implications this has regarding learning results as well as certain risks. When we speak of competencies, content, and standards we refer to learning results. In the case of standards, we also refer to "achievement levels". The concept of competencies includes the integration of knowledge, its mobilization, and its application.

In this regard, one should be careful of what it means to establish a curriculum by competencies that can possibly be empty of content. Establishing for competencies the different types of contents for their acquisition and mastery is the most coherent solution. Not doing so is to fragment the curriculum, and therefore the education intentions of the social and cultural context.

Standards and curricula are not in opposition. Standards are an instrument for curriculum improvement, but cannot replace the curriculum. Standards have a key role in curriculum review and improvement but are not an alternative to the curriculum. In the case of competencies, it is vital to integrate knowledge as well as to visualize necessary ethical dimensions.

It is also important to think about content (conceptual, procedural, and attitudinal) in the broadest sense and to use categories necessary for curricular design as tools for reflection, without transforming them into a classificatory demand for teachers and schools. We should remember as well that the curriculum, standards, and competencies are formats that "conceal" content, that sometimes make them difficult for teachers to see, and who then left to discover what to teach on their own.

Finally, a curricular agenda should take into account the areas of competence that current Latin American and Caribbean societies require: written, inter-cultural, scientific, and technological literacy, social awareness, and exercise of citizenship.

CRITERIA FOR MOVING forward in defining basic learning

It is necessary to have detailed knowledge of current curricular content or of any new proposal in order to differentiate what is basic in general and what is basic for each school level, clarifying in what sense they are basic for each level of training. There are undoubtedly many ways of understanding the meaning of "basic".

It is important here to avoid identifying basic education with initial education. It is more appropriate to use the expression basic, life-long education and to reflect about what is basic for every phase of life. Experience shows that the truly basic and indispensable is quite a bit less.

Moreover, it is necessary to differentiate between the essential basic and the desirable basic. This makes it possible to avoid the superfluous content of current curricula, which are in general overloaded. The essential basic is that which if not achieved, determines an unequal distribution of knowledge, which evolves into a tool for social exclusion and the restriction of rights. The desirable basic refers to prerequisites aimed at a post-obligatory level of education and if not achieve, it has no negative impact on the exercise of full citizenship. Both are essential, their weights and range change according to context and moment.

This differentiation affects many technical aspects and the assessment among them. It would be interesting in terms of accountability to distinguish to what extent the system is able to achieve the objectives of essential basic and desirable basic learning. These elements have a very different meaning in the social function of education, in a society's project, and in what people expect.

In this field, a central question has to do with context, and with the possibility of having a homogeneous curricular design in societies with as much inequality as those of Latin America. In the region, the great problems are in primary and lower secondary education, basically in reading and writing, ethics, the sciences, the teaching of values. This is the case for all sectors –even for the elites. In each site, groups must try to respond to these questions. Public policies are called upon to guarantee above all basic essential learning. Democracies make it possible to create opportunities for discussion about that which is desirable basic learning, without placing at risk what is essentially basic. The fact that education is a social process does not mean that everything is a matter for opinion of non-specialists. Social participation, as in political life and the area of curriculum specialists is necessary; but not at all times because this can generate proposals that remain on paper because they are impossible to apply.

It is also important, in regard to basic learning, to avoid some risks of assessments that measure excellence. Efforts to create national or international assessment agencies are worthy of praise; but these activities should be complemented by levels able to read the results and convert them into curricular development policies. And each country needs to seek inter-relations among its structures of curriculum, teacher training, and instruction.

RELATIONS BETWEEN quality, equity, and excellence

The major problem of Latin America and the Caribbean is that of inequality. Equity, then, is an essential concern that cannot be balanced against quality. On the contrary; quality should posit in itself both equity and excellence. It is necessary to meet the needs of diversity and not give them up it in the name of excellence. The theme of diversity deserves the most urgent of responses.

If we understand that the concept of excellence includes all types of abilities, it is necessary to revise its indicators –the same ones that today are focused in only one area. And the only way that this can be understood and applied comprehensively is by having inclusive schools that value and serve what is different without exacerbating it, giving to each what is needed for learning. On the other hand, this respect does not imply leaving aside common curricula and that which makes us similar. And it is the State that should place this demand for that which is common to all into the curriculum. That is the key. Teaching beyond cognitive capacities. Teaching an axiological system. These decisions, as with many others in education, go beyond technical questions toward those which are political and ethical.

It is necessary to recognize in any case that schools by themselves cannot eliminate inequality. Rather, education is one more strategy at the service of this great objective –accompanied by a broad ideological discussion about the value of that which is public as part of the cohesion and governability of society. But it is important to consider the urgency of the theme. There is evidence that in many places, for example, greater importance is being given to individual than to social rights. Doubts are raised regarding the value of that which is public; the importance of social cohesion is questioned.

On the other hand, it should be understood that the question of equity cannot be resolved without schools, above all when their behavior counteracts the search for equity. Teachers need to be fully engaged in the search for equity. For this reason, content that limited to the technical is not sufficient for moving toward an agenda that fosters equity.

A point related to this theme is the identification of schools as units of analysis and of innovation. They are units of quality and therefore of innovation. A good system is one that allows schools to have these characteristics. It is also necessary to grant differentiated treatment to schools. Just as it is important to treat diversity in schools, it is also just to recognize the differences of schools. Not all schools require the same kinds of support. Therefore, they should have differentiated treatment as well as information about all changes. It is vital that States make efforts for their successive up-dating of curricula and materials reach the poorest and most isolated schools. Countries should assume responsibility that these principles are properly communicated. A good information system helps schools be units of adaptation and innovation.

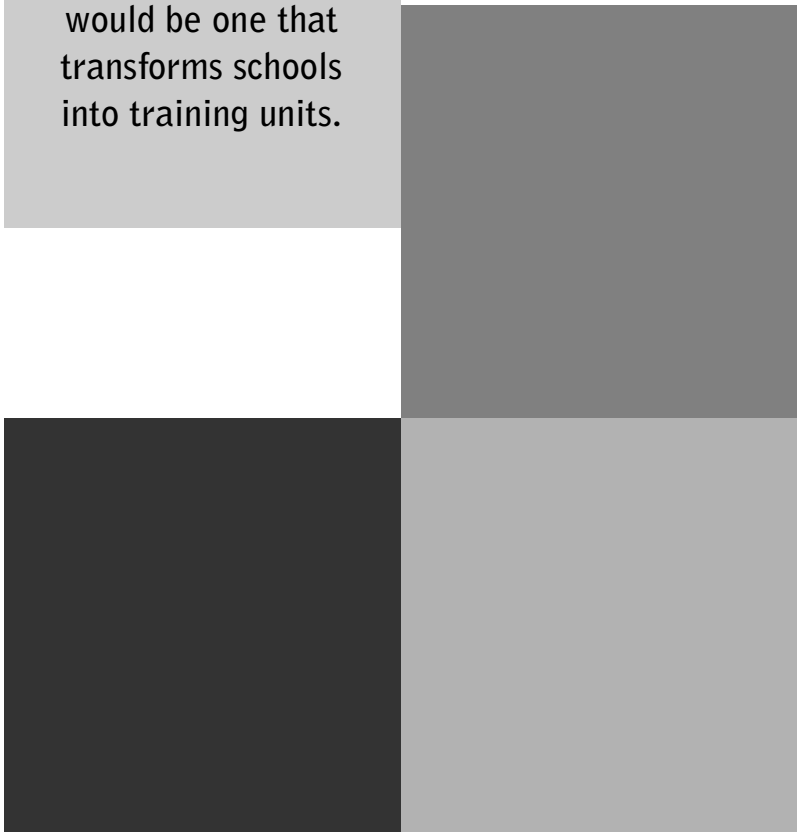
SUGGESTIONS ABOUT TEACHER TRAINING within curriculum implementation processes

In order to focus properly on this problem, one must decide what model of professional development and teacher profile is necessary. The question is, then, what does it mean today to be a "good teacher"? The answer, whatever it may be, should be explained in order from it to produce ideas about training.

Although there are various good teacher models, the center of the discussion here posits a reflexive professional profile: not a mere executor, but rather someone able to assume and carry forward a strategic decision-making process. More than closed answers, this teacher needs resources in order to reflect on that which is most relevant in various situations. In the face of these changes, it is not easy to reach agreement about how to assess a good teacher.

It appears that there is consensus regarding the need to go from the concept of the individual teacher to the teaching team. For this to be possible, labor conditions are necessary such as good salaries, physical space, time, and leadership for these teams. The creation of one or various teams per school does not involve eliminating supervisory levels nor of creating many intermediary figures who assume leadership. The most coherent training model would be one that transforms schools into training units. This is more complex, though not necessarily more expensive than the current system and involves seeking external support. Thus, all sector resources in education should be at the service of schools, and their planning directed toward transforming them into teacher support units. This is more than training; it providing teachers with resources so they may be empowered.

The most coherent training model would be one that transforms schools into training units.



In fact, on the contrary, and considering the criticism of the quality of teachers' performance, in some countries two things are occurring: the de-professionalization of teachers with the arrival in schools of professionals from different career backgrounds who, in spite of their expertise within their discipline, are not necessarily successful as teachers of their subjects; and on the other hand, the existence of non-trained external support belonging to recently-created and inexperienced institutions, with theoretical knowledge of education, but no practical instructional experience.

In regard to competencies, it is vital to provide teachers with tools for working with them, recognizing that categories, competencies and standards are not exclusionary and that often competencies conceal content. The risk is that when content are concealed, learning processes become more difficult for teachers.

The curriculum is a prescription. In this sense, there are two ways to implement it: tell people what to do, or give them the tools to enable them to make the decisions needed in each context. Prescriptions are weak, and it is difficult for people to follow them precisely. They have, moreover, very high costs. Teacher participation is fundamental, and it is important to identify the key moments of participation of the various actors. A key element is supporting teachers in the construction of systems, in the harmonious disposition of all resources they receive and can create: designs, curricular assessment, training policies, textbook production policy, and institutional development. When these elements are separated, it is the school that loses most.

Finally, one must take into consideration another theme that remains current: the growing politization of teacher unions that presents new situations and challenges.

USE OF ACHIEVEMENT TESTS in curriculum improvement processes.

RELATIONS BETWEEN ASSESSMENT, STANDARDS, AND THE CURRICULUM.

Since there are two completely distinct concepts of standards, the agenda should include the need to clarify what is understood by each. One thing is conceiving them as substitutes for the curriculum; another is to see them as an element of the curriculum that makes it possible to assess their application and quality in order to obtain useful information for their adaptation and improvement. It is not a case, then, of introducing standards *per se*; but rather of explaining why they are included because, although in the two cases it is correct to speak of standards, each one of these conceptions differs from the point of view of education policies and produces totally different consequences.

From the perspective of education intentions, there would seem to be agreement in introducing content and competencies that go beyond the cognitive linguistic; that is, those related to emotions, feelings, social participation, and that which is axiological. But these aspects should not exist only in the area of content. Rather, they should also be in processes of assessment. It this is not the case, one produces an asymmetry that leads to teaching emphasizing the cognitive-linguistic over the other aspects.

It is important to review assessment policies, since they do not take into consideration curricula. The piece missing from this process is that of curriculum assessment –which is not the same as results assessment, nor is it exhausted by designs. Similarly, it would be worth while to open up the discussion about competencies, not as a counterweight to content, but rather as an integration of knowledge and standards within different types of contents.

On the other hand, although there have been successful experiences of territorialized comprehensive education plans, this theme has not been completely explored. Perhaps one should think about imagining not macro policies, that depend on central control (states or municipalities) and that produce great frustration and little change; but rather in territorial policies that bring together all resources, whether municipal, state, or national, as well as other ministries –because we speak not of instruction, but rather of education– to transform them into plans with concrete objectives in concrete territories with concrete actors.

The results of the I and II Intergovernmental Meetings of Vice-Ministers of Education will serve as input in Buenos Aires in March 2007 for the meeting of Ministers of Education of the entire region with assessment of the progress of the priorities defined in PRELAC.