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## THE CURRICULUM: ORIGIN, EVOLUTION AND TRENDS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

### EL CURRÍCULO: ORIGEN, EVOLUCIÓN Y TENDENCIAS EN EL SIGLO XXI

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#### ABSTRACT

The article analyzes the origin and conceptualization of the curriculum, as well as contemporary trends and its approach in new social agents. It also includes elements that characterize the construction of curricula in indigenous people and communities in Latin America and Mexico, which in their struggle for self-determination pose an educational model of political and economic resistance, which marks distance from the West and distant from being institutionalized by the State. With referents of the curricular theory, a bold approach is made to this model that struggles with a decolonization of knowledge from the West.

#### Keywords:

Curriculum, discipline, origin, positions, tendencies.

#### RESUMEN

En el artículo se analiza el origen y conceptualización del currículo, así como las tendencias contemporáneas y su planteamiento en nuevos agentes sociales. Se incluye, además, elementos que caracterizan la construcción de currículo en pueblos y comunidades indígenas en América Latina y México, que en su lucha por su autodeterminación plantean un modelo educativo, de resistencia política y económica, que marca distancia de los términos de occidente y distante de ser institucionalizado por el Estado. Con referentes de la teoría curricular, se hace un osado acercamiento a este modelo que pugna con una decolonización de saberes de occidente.

#### Palabras clave:

Currículo, disciplina, origen, posturas, tendencias.

## INTRODUCTION

To approach the development of the curriculum as a discipline, it is first necessary to clarify what a discipline is. Coicaud (2003), points out a discipline as a domain of study; a theoretical construction or organized system of knowledge that allows to reconstruct and analyze reality.

A fundamental element to define a discipline is the object of study that can be studied from different perspectives and referential framework. Its practical application occurs in different levels of professional field. Being a product that occurs over time, it is in constant transition due to external pressures (Pérez & Bolaños, 2014). The curriculum as a discipline is recognized with a *“set of concepts, explanatory theories and discourse that legitimizes teaching and curricular practices, as well as, at the same time, a structure and instrument for rationalizing one’s practice”* (Bolívar, 1999)

In relation to the curriculum as a discipline, it finds its background in didactics of the seventeenth century and emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century as a result of the regulation of education in a formal and mass system, in the development of experimental psychology, of pragmatism right in the beginning of the industrial era as well as other aspects related to a change in the social dynamics of that time (Díaz, 2003; Soto, 2003).

The scope of the curriculum emerged with two trends; one promoted by Dewey in 1902 with a vision centered on the student, on his learning experience; and another one raised by Bobbit and reinforced by Charter, focused on the institutions and the need to establish the contents from which the teaching issues are derived, that is, in the formal definition of teaching.

Later, at the end of the Second World War, Tyler’s position arose, focused on equating the curriculum with plans and programs of study; Tyler’s vision managed to overcome the discussions around the visions of Dewey and Bobbit, and prevailed during the next two decades, and became international in the late 1960s.

The positions presented and the debates derived from their analysis were the guideline to give origin to the curricular theory, whose purpose was to attend to the institutional needs of the educational system (Díaz, 2003), it could be said at the beginning of the 70s.

The discipline of the curriculum as a curricular theory is a “discourse” that creates this object of study -the curriculum-, at the same time that connotes it conceptually and installs it in reality with the meanings and attributes it assigns (Soto, 2003). Based on this argument, it is that different classifications of curricular theories are indicated

as a reflection of their evolution, not without first enunciating the position of Casarini (2013), who affirms that there are not and will not be theories of the complex totality of the curriculum, to which he adds very punctually that the functionality of a curricular theory lies in detecting to what extent it serves to understand and explain a reality and according to the resolution of practical problems in the development of the curriculum.

Now, Soto (2003), argues that the historical development of the curriculum has allowed the creation and practice of different theoretical sets, which are grouped into theoretical positions. Each position responds to the historical-political, social and cultural context based on the demands of society. In this sense, the questions posed to the curriculum should correspond to its epistemological construction: Who should be trained? Why form? How to form? What is taught? who teaches? And how do you learn? What problems of reality are solved? What is the end of education? These are some questions that society has made to define and delimit the curriculum, therefore, the epistemological positions of the curriculum at its origin are located in a sociohistorical context of the past, present or in construction without it meaning their disappearance or modification.

**Positivist posture of the curriculum.** Located in the 20th century under the influence of the positivist movement, with a selection of knowledge of universal character and possibility of applying in all and any circumstance; the experiences of the school that are transferable beyond existing psycho-sociocultural diversities, with the limitations imposed by individual differences; they are also based on psychological theories of “intradermal” or cognitive learning, which means not considering the social or cultural contexts of the students.

**Critical posture of the curriculum.** It arises in the decade of the 1960s to overcome the positivist paradigm. Conceives the curriculum as a social practice influenced by power, political, economic and cultural decisions, imbued with ideology, finding its foundation in the sociocultural support that establishes a fundamental relationship between cultural selection that legitimizes the school, its transmission and evaluation, decisions of power and control that regulate socio-economic and cultural contexts; and the positioning in them of the students that enter it.

This theory maintains that one lives in unequal societies and that the school preferentially attends to certain sectors and, according to these, it entrusts the school with the task of reproducing the hegemonic model. It raises the overcoming of the false consciousness of ideologies through reflection applied to a growing process of

awareness that is achieved through dialogue and communicative action.

**Decolonial posture of the curriculum.** At the end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century, new voices emerge that emerge from social movements in Latin America. The indigenous movements organized from their cosmo vision arise to overcome the dismal colonization that has proposed compensatory educational models that do not contemplate cultural aspects and forms of social and political organization of the peoples. The assimilationist policies of Latin America struggled to overcome the backwardness represented by the poverty of indigenous peoples from a model, at the beginning of a bicultural and subsequently intercultural approach from the State. Against this backdrop, new voices rise up against the colonization of the West that has responded to interests in global power and global order. Its demand towards self-management and emancipation poses new scenarios and educational agents. Specifically, in Mexico with the Zapatista National Liberation Movement emerges with demands for land ownership, freedom, justice, health and education independence. The “discourse” of the Zapatistas in education, declare true education. The faceless, seek the denied future and the insurgent dignity towards autonomy and self-determination. The Zapatistas, the “faceless” lack a relationship with the state and therefore the legitimacy and institutionalization. Although the curriculum meets the institutional needs of the education system. The Zapatista model lacks legitimacy before the state itself, however the discourse of the object of study and the right of Indigenous Peoples contained in ILO Convention 169 allows them legitimacy ways. The substantive function of the curriculum is to meet the institutional needs of the education system. In this sense, the curriculum of the Zapatistas is not legitimized by the State nor is it institutionalized. However, in self-determination it is for the social group, the true education. Their curricula and programs are aimed at education for work, economic self-sufficiency for self-determination. What are the theoretical foundations? They are under construction by the agents and agents of the Caracoles, Los Marez .... We would only add that the curricular theory will have the purpose of understanding and transforming reality by solving the practical problems in the development of the curriculum (Casarini 2013) and the voices are heard revealing the power exercised by Occidene and the ideological resistance to the hegemony of the state.

## DEVELOPMENT

According to Casarini (2013), the curriculum is a historical and social product in constant change, so its definition is

complex, varies with time and the circumstances in which it circumscribes. It is polysemic because from positioning, ends, dynamics, and streams it is possible to conceptualize it.

Etymologically *“the word curriculum is a Latin voice that derives from the verb curro and that means race... that is, something that progresses, that advances”* (Casarini, 2013, p.4); a career that students go through to achieve an educational goal. Rather its conceptualization lies in the position assumed in a context and educational purposes.

It is not possible to reduce the curriculum to the aspect of teaching contents, methods and practices; Currently the school curriculum is conceived as a cultural practice and at the same time a practice of meaning construction by all those involved in education (Van Dijk, 2006).

loom (2006), presents a basic typology of the curriculum: the explicit or formal curriculum, which is expressed in official documents and plans that are aligned with the historical definitions of the curriculum; the implicit or hidden curriculum, named by Phillip W. Jackson, which includes the assumptions about schooling and learning implicit in educational practice; and finally the null curriculum, which according to Eisner (1994), refers to the curriculum that is not taught and includes those contents or ideas that are repressed by the authorities and are left out of regular education.

The previous line of thought coincides with that planned by Braslavsky (2003), the curriculum refers to the existing contract between society, the State and education professionals to define the educational experiences that students must go through during a specific stage of their lives; This same author points out that for most authors and experts in the curricular field, the curriculum defines the why, how, what, when, where and with whom to learn, that is, defines the foundations and educational contents, the characteristics of the educational institutions, the characteristics of the learning experiences, and in particular from the point of view of the methods to be implemented, the resources for learning and teaching, the evaluation and even the teaching profiles. We can affirm that the curricular field, like other educational disciplines, is a field in constant debate and resignification that corresponds to the current historical and social evolution.

On the other hand, Casarini (2013). states four lines of thought and action identified in the evolution of curricular theories to which we would add a fifth line of action thinking: emergence of a curriculum that emerges from the hidden, faceless and denied voices historically. The self-determination of the Zapatista indigenous peoples in Chiapas who are in the process of building their

educational model in the process of deconstruction and decoloniality of sabers. The curriculum as a sum of academic requirements or organized structure of knowledge.

They emphasize the academic part considering it the axis of the curricular organization, focusing on the intrinsic value for the revision of knowledge of education for the formation of people; from this line, the curriculum is a planning of true, permanent and essential knowledge that the school must transmit to the student and thus develop their intelligence.

#### **a. Curriculum as a basis for learning experiences.**

It considers the learning experiences as the core of the curricular construction, based on the physical, cognitive, emotional, moral and social development of the learner from the first years of formal schooling as well as being a reaction to the first line of the curriculum.

#### **b. Curriculum as a production technology system.**

Conceives the school as a production system where the efficiency and quality of the results that are visible in the behavior of the students, constitutes the best evaluative parameter of the curriculum.

#### **c. The curriculum as a reconstruction of knowledge and action proposal: the bridge between theory and practice.**

This last line is located in the reality of the educational institution, it is intended that the curriculum allows a link between theoretical knowledge and practice, this curricular theoretical line was developed in the decade of the seventies.

#### **d. Curriculum in postmodern condition.**

The postmodern curriculum, the legitimization of knowledge is presented in terms different from those established since the story has lost credibility, and the speculation is to assume the group of positive rules, which must be admitted in order to play the speculative game. The crisis of scientific knowledge is also in the crisis of education. Who now asks the institutions fit in the gear to force the skills and not the ideas, from students in initial levels to higher: doctors, engineers, etc. They will not have as their mission emancipation, a substantive function of education; instead, it will train the elite to pragmatically ensure the needs of the institutions or the institutional machinery.

#### **e. Curriculum for resistance and self-determination**

In the eagerness to name the Zapatista movement in relation to true education, we boldly allow ourselves to be named from the Western referents, that is to say, with colonial terms, but in the end, an approach from our referents. In the discourse of the Zapatistas, true education

emerges as a seed that is growing, its historical construction emphasizes otherness, otherness and commitment to the other and the relationship with Mother Earth.

In the line of thought and action from the cosmo vision and construct of the Zapatista peoples, autonomy is understood as a liberation struggle of the hegemonic model of nation-state increasingly blurred by international policies dictated mainly by the Inter-American Development Bank, IDB, OECD, World Bank, WB and UNESCO, which prescribe the policies of attention to the diversity of Nation States, with an intercultural approach that deals with diversity from compensatory models.

The thought, the boldly called "curricular" discourse is in the economic, cultural and educational resistance before the forces of the state. His action, his action, is in the transmission of culture, respect for sacred places, and wisdom of the elderly. If we can dare to interpret the curriculum, one purpose of it is the economic self-sufficiency of production, collective work and the construction of oneself in a community.

We can conclude this section, based on Bolaños & Molina (2007), that the curriculum since the 70s was recognized as a discipline or area of knowledge, having an object of study, a body of scientific methods and procedures, and a theoretical body, the latter understood as a basis to explain reality, the way it works and the strategies for its application; these authors state that the object of study are the teaching and learning processes, and the content of those processes; and its applicability as a discipline becomes concrete when "*scientific principles are applied to the design, approach and evaluation of teaching and learning processes*." (p.23)

The tendencies, are movements that gain strength, predominate in a determined time and moment; emerge, generate synergies from the problems and needs faced. The trends in the curricular area in the 90s is identified by Díaz (2010), in the curricular field was emphasized in the role of the teacher and the role of innovations as an approach to improve the curriculum in its different stages, affirming that the models that propose innovation to the curriculum occur not only in the national context but can be said to be part of a relatively global perspective that accompanies the curricular reforms of the last 20 years.

The reform processes sustained in the innovation discourse of the educational and curricular models, where the specialists' concern was focused on the direction, sustenance and sense of the innovations. In this time, innovations are positioned as a result of the incorporation of educational innovations of the moment, primarily to:



- Address the demands of an increasingly globalized society, the so-called knowledge society, and
- Respond to various policies issued by national and international organizations.

Resulting from them some approaches labeled as innovative, for example, competency-based education, flexible curriculum, tutorials, problem- and case-based learning, on-the-job training, the curriculum focused on student learning and others, that they brought consequences, one, to undertake the task of undertaking the monitoring and evaluation of the processes of educational change linked to the appropriation, development and implementation of these innovative models; and two, it is determined that in these models the professor appears to be ultimately responsible for the eventual success of the innovations, even when the innovations have been developed without taking it into account, the innovations being: strategic planning, institutional analysis, or research approaches. Total quality and organizational excellence applied to the development and evaluation of the curriculum in school and university contexts; of proposals that come from the field of didactics and psychology, such as the experiential approach, psycho pedagogical constructivism, cognitive and socio-cultural psychology; or, innovations that come from areas of knowledge and disparate interests.

Now, on the other hand, Díaz & Lugo (2003), identify trends on educational research in the curricular field:

**Competency-based education:** The concept of competence, as it is understood in education, results from the new theories of cognition and basically means knowledge of execution. The model by competences transited from the economic to the educational sphere. Since every process of “knowing” translates into “knowing”, then it is possible to say that they are reciprocal competence and know: know how to think, know how to play, know how to interpret, know how to act in different scenarios, from each other and for others (inside of a specific context) (Argudín, 2001).

**The flexible curriculum:** It is a form of organization of university studies that allows maximum adaptation of this to the skills and interests of students, by selecting nuances of specialization within a general context, the flexibility of the curriculum is understood in several senses, flexibility in time, in structure, in accent or area of emphasis, for rectification, adaptability to new students (Obaya & Martínez, 2002).

**The curriculum based on psycho pedagogical constructivism and specific approaches of cognitive and sociocultural psychology:** in this approach both constructivism and the sociocultural paradigm are included,

the first is one of the psychological currents that has generated great expectations for the reform of educational systems in the world. Its origins date back to the 1930s, particularly in some of the works of Jean Piaget, who is recognized as his most important representative and who questions the way in which the individual constructs knowledge, particularly the scientist, and how it passes from one state of knowledge to a superior one (Ángeles, 2003).

**The meta-curricular formation oriented to the development of cognitive, thought, academic, social, communicative or specific skills of certain disciplinary domains:** This proposal arises from diverse researchers of the cognitive current postulate the convenience of establishing a metacurriculum, as an alternative to the formation of students in study and thinking skills (Weinstein & Underwood, 1985; Aguilar & Díaz Barriga, 1988). Among its central purposes would be to promote the intellectual development of the student, promote the acquisition of scientific attitudes and favorable attitudes towards knowledge, etc. Then, meta curriculum is understood as, those deliberate and systematically planned educational actions aimed at providing students with skills and strategies that allow them to learn to learn significantly in each school year and in connection with content areas or specific conceptual domains (Díaz, 1994).

**Design of the curriculum focused on the integration of practical theory and professional training through practice, service and teaching located or experimental in real scenarios:** here are approaches such as the need for training focused on practical experiences and real scenarios, as well as the possibility of achieving meaningful learning not only the acquisition of declarative knowledge (Díaz, 2005).

**The teaching and design of curricular programs focused on the approaches of problem solving or problem-based learning and case analysis, mainly in disciplines such as mathematics, medicine, architecture and physics:** problem solving is conceived as an educational strategy, which has as its axis the student, and covers both the curricular design as well as the instruction or teaching. It focuses on developing critical judgment and reasoning, the ability to apply knowledge in a real situation, the habit of independent study and, even, teamwork through active and meaningful learning (Díaz & Lugo 2003).

**Incorporation of new themes** or areas of knowledge to the development of curricular projects, in particular, the so-called themes or cross-cutting themes, with topics such as environmental education, human rights, values, civics and ethics; education and gender, internationalization of

the curriculum and new technologies: According to Palos (2000), in Díaz, 2005), the cross-cutting issues present central questions to the curriculum and teaching, as a manifestation of the most relevant problems and conflicts that it faces today in day our society. In these cross-cutting issues are considered values, attitudes and behaviors, both students and other groups belonging to contemporary society.

Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary training: According to the UN-CEPAL (2003), modern problems must be studied from various disciplines and forming teams, to obtain comprehensive solutions, since no discipline, separately, can give results; Added to this is that the disciplinary integration is a fundamental part of the curricular flexibility, particularly curricula, in order to train more universal professionals, able to face the rapid changes in skills and knowledge (Carvajal, 2010).

The administrative approaches of strategic planning, institutional analysis or total quality and excellence applied to the development and evaluation of the curriculum: The incorporation or resignification of methodological approaches such as systemic, design by competencies, require strategic planning and various qualitative methodologies to the field of design, curricular development (Díaz & Lugo, 2003).

Finally Permeates the worldview of the original peoples, which rescues ancestral knowledge about the land, water, sacred places, traditional medicine. The liberation, alterity and commitment are aimed at revealing the power exercised in the West and colonization of knowledge. A curricular model is proposed that implies a process of colonial deconstruction of the community in its economic, social, political and cultural project that is outside the institutionalization of intercultural and democratic education.

## CONCLUSIONS

The curriculum as a discipline focuses on the legitimation of teaching and curricular practices for learning; its origin comes from the ideas put forward by Dewey and Bobbit that together take into account elements such as the student and institutional needs respectively. From this origin, the curricular positions range from positivism to a decolonial vision and its lines of action have also been extended over time to reach a curriculum in a postmodern condition and the curriculum for resistance and self-determination, being the latter focuses on alterity and commitment to the other in relation to their roots to Mother Earth. Finally, this line agrees with the trends reviewed, as we appreciate that there is a greater focus on the topics of innovative approaches in the curriculum, for example competency-based

education, curricular flexibility, problem-based education, among others; and that the reflections in educational research have tended to the analysis of curricular development and evaluation, neglecting aspects of curricular design. According to the approach, the objective and vision pursued by education can take up definitions, lines of action and trends of the curriculum.

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